

# Submission

to

Senate Employment, Workplace Relations and Education  
References Committee

## **Inquiry into the progress and future direction of life-long learning**

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# **Submission to Senate Employment Workplace Relations and Education References Committee**

## **The Progress and Future Direction of Lifelong Learning**

A submission from Museum Victoria, supported by the Council of Australian Museum Directors

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### **1 Foreword from Dr Patrick Greene, CEO Museum Victoria**

Museums have been a part of life in Australia for nearly 180 years. Their enduring popularity has as its foundations the very essence of what their nineteenth-century founders intended – to be accessible places where people from all backgrounds could learn about the natural and man-made world in an entertaining way.

Australia's museums have continuously reinvented themselves to respond to the changing needs of the people of Australia, and those who visit us, eager to learn about this remarkable continent. The Council of Australian Museum Directors (CAMD) has in its membership the Chief Executives of all the major museums in Australia. Whilst this submission to the Senate Enquiry on the Progress and Future Direction of Lifelong Learning has been prepared by Museum Victoria, it illustrates the commitment by all CAMD museums to life-long learning as fundamental to their purpose. The popularity of museums allows them to reach an enormous number of people for whom other forms of life-long learning would be unattractive. There are great opportunities to capitalise further on the universal appeal of museums.

## **2 Museums and Lifelong Learning, an overview**

Museums are public learning spaces. Museum Victoria's research indicates there is a perception amongst the population that learning is inherent in a museum visit. Through their collections, research, publications, exhibitions and programs, museums both support the formal learning structures in the community, and provide many opportunities for informal and non-formal learning.

The interpretive styles of museums include displays, lectures, forums, conferences, tours, demonstrations, theatrical performances, family craft activities, community events, public research facilities, websites and outreach programs. They are therefore well-placed to provide opportunities for both social and independent learning.

There is a growing trend in museums, in the light of government curriculum reforms and advances in pedagogical understanding, to employ and train experts in early learning, schools' education, adult learning, family/inter-generational learning and leisure learning. In many museums and allied professional bodies, 'museum learning' is a research subject. This is extended through the tertiary sector by the provision of opportunities for work experience and student placements. Other members of the community participate through vibrant volunteer training programs.

Audience research and evaluation are at the core of program development in many museums, and highlight the centrality of the learner.

Typically, museums are responsive to their community and work in partnership with many bodies, including government departments (state and federal), local government, professional organisations, health and welfare organisations, environmental groups, culturally and linguistically diverse groups and the Indigenous community. In partnership with such groups, museums co-present a wide variety of programs for learners at all stages of life. There is a strong emphasis on social inclusion, with many museums providing access for learners with disabilities, and culturally and linguistically diverse audiences.

Museums are well-placed to participate in the following aspects of a community lifelong (and life-wide) learning approach:

- Learning and change throughout the whole life-cycle
- Learning across a range of settings and experiences, including formal, informal and non-formal contexts
- Leisure learning
- Family/intergenerational learning
- Learning to learn – becoming an independent learner
- Community capacity – sharing the resources, knowledge and skills of the community, and providing facilities for public debate
- Centrality of the learner
- Preservation of cultural memory
- Social inclusion

Research into Victorian arts audiences commissioned by Arts Victoria and the Arts Marketing Taskforce shows that 38% of Victorians aged 14 and over, or 1,388,000 people, visited a museum at least once in the 12 months to February 1997. Over that period 15% of Victorians visited a regional museum, and 11% attended a specialist museum.

The research, conducted by Roy Morgan Research, showed that people who visited museums made an average of 2.8 visits each in the 12 month period, for a total of 3.9 million visits.

In Europe, the following visitation figures apply:

Finland	37%	Norway	45%
France	23%	Portugal	16%
Germany	33%	Spain	22%
Latvia	59%	Sweden	52%
Luxembourg	32%	UK	42%
Netherlands	33%		

*Visits to museums at least once a year, % of population 15 years and older*

Source: Eurobarometer Survey 2001

### **3 Responses to the terms of reference**

(Except where otherwise indicated, specific examples are taken from the experiences of Museum Victoria. They are indicative of the initiatives of most major museums in Australia)

*Policies and strategies aimed at addressing the lifelong learning needs of an ageing population*

In addition to the extensive program of curriculum support for pre-school and school education, Museum Victoria supports the Victorian adult education sectors (TAFE, Tertiary, and Adult Community Education) by providing materials, lectures, forums and professional development related to curriculum.

Museum Victoria also recognises the importance of looking beyond the formal education system, to provide opportunities for independent learners and social learners. In the area of informal learning, our offerings include exhibitions, independent research facilities, lecture programs, family learning activities, public forums and short courses.

To facilitate community learning, Museum Victoria links with existing community infrastructures (eg U3A, Probus, cultural groups, Indigenous groups, professional groups) to jointly provide learning programs for their members, based on the museum's collections, research and exhibitions.

*The ways in which technological developments, particularly the Internet, have affected the nature and delivery of lifelong learning since 1997*

Museum Victoria's website makes the research and collections of the State of Victoria available to users in an accessible and layered format. Most users enter the site via a topic search, and they are provided with authoritative content at a variety of levels. Many users avail themselves of the school education materials and online interactives which are comprehensive and easily understood. If they wish to delve more deeply into a topic, they are able to access the more scholarly writings of the curatorial staff. A well-qualified multi-media staff ensures that programs take full advantage of the most relevant technology to ensure broad audience reach..

The Museum Victoria website adheres to Government accessibility guidelines, and provides low band width for regional users. It is used very much like a library, with the most accessed subject areas being Natural Sciences, Genealogy and Indigenous Cultures.

The museum is well-placed to make use of technology in formats which complement internet delivery. We can provide forums in the theatre for live audience, with off-site interactive delivery via radio, along with an email chat line. In December 2002 in conjunction with ABC Local Radio (metropolitan and regional) we presented a week-long series of programs on the topic of Population. On each day of that week, there was an opinion poll/focus group conducted at Melbourne Museum, with a group of 70-80 people each day responding to research questions about population. This process used the technological capacities of The Age Theatre and the museum's IT staff, and the expertise of the Research and Evaluation team. As data was gathered from the live audience, it was fed immediately into the ABC's programming. At the end of each day, top line research findings were published on-line, both by the ABC and the museum. We found this to be a very effective way of enabling large numbers of people to participate in public debates with key speakers.

In addition, a series of topical forums held on-site with international speakers have been recorded and transcribed for the web, so they provide an on-going resource for learners. In these ways, the museum provides an interface between web users and physical visitors.

*Technological barriers to participation in lifelong learning and adult community education and ways and means by which these might be overcome*

Museum Victoria complies with government guidelines on accessibility, and also uses a variety of means to enhance visitor access. For example, we work with the Victorian Council for the Deaf to ensure that our facilities are available to Deaf and hearing-impaired people by a combination of technology, staff training and relevant community partnerships.

The museum is an integral part of the community, and is involved in partnerships to create events for programs such as Seniors Week, Deaf Community Days, Cultural Festivals, Community Collections and Adult Learners Week. By partnering with existing organisations and government departments, the museum can access the relevant infrastructures to target and engage the appropriate audiences.

To access some groups (e.g. nursing homes, kindergartens), it is important to bypass the technology and provide a physical visit by museum staff, along with objects for handling and discussion. The museum's Outreach program provides such a service for

people who are unable to visit our venues, and also participates in local community and cultural festivals.

*The extent to which the training, professional development and role of adult educators has kept pace with or been influenced by technical and online developments since 1997*

Along with dedicated Adult Education officers, a large proportion of museum staff also work, in their various capacities, as adult educators. While all staff members are supported by the museum to be competent users of technology, it is also necessary for them to be aware of the wide variety of preferred learning styles amongst our audiences. For museum educators, the priority is to ensure that programs are accessible in a multiplicity of formats.

Museum staff from Visitor Programs, Education and Market Research are appointed to exhibition teams as audience advocates to ensure that exhibitions cater for the learning styles of the targeted audience.

*Retraining strategies as an element in lifelong learning, especially for those living in rural and regional areas*

Museums can support TAFEs, tertiary institutions and ACE providers in retraining programs, but they have the ability to educate beyond the vocational focus. As facilitators of informal learning opportunities, museums emphasise learning to learn, and becoming an independent learner in all aspects of life: leisure, work, study. Museums and government should actively encourage the population to see museums as their own resources for learning, and ensure that people know how to use them. In regional and rural communities, museums should be supported in their initiatives to integrate more fully into community. Where ACE Learning Communities exist, they should incorporate the local museum.

An increase in staff exchanges between rural, regional and metropolitan museums could assist in the development of mutual understanding and joint professional development.

#### **4 Some international examples of LLL/museums initiatives**

U.S.A. Adult Museum Programs, Designing Meaningful Experiences: Bonnie Sachatello-Sawyer et al, California 2002 – a research study and set of recommendations funded by the U.S. Department of Post-secondary Education. Field Initiated Studies Program

Europe Socrates: Adult Education and the Museum: A project funded by the Commission of the European Union. This project researched the existing ways in which European museums provide adult education, and recommended strategies for further synergies for the period 2000 – 2006 (<http://dns1.mhie.ac.uk/>)

U.K. Engaging young people in learning and culture  
The Campaign for Learning is working on this new project, funded by the government from the Heritage Lottery Fund. It will marry the need to engage young people (16 – 24 year olds) in learning and culture in the South West with a highly successful model for doing so, trialled in the 'Museum Fever' project in Salford (and in similar projects in Birmingham and Bedford).

U.K. The Department of Culture, Media and Sport works with the Department of Education and Skills to promote and strengthen the role of education within museums.

Past funding programmes have included the Museums and Galleries Education Challenge Fund, which focussed on building capacity in local and regional museums.

The Department has recently awarded £2.5million to National Museums to develop education projects with museums in the regions as part of the Renaissance in the Regions programme.

U.K. Mapping the Territory

A study of the ability of museums, archives and libraries to contribute to the Government's targets for adult basic skills in England. National Literacy Trust, 2003

U.K. A Common Wealth, Museums and Learning in the United Kingdom

A Government-commissioned audit of the ways in which museums provide learning opportunities for the community, 1997

U.K. The Learning Power of Museums

A Government document (Department of Culture, Media and Sport and Department of Education and Employment) setting out the vision for the part that museums and other cultural bodies can play in contributing to the learning society.

## **5 Recommendation**

That the Senate Employment, Workplace Relations and Education Committee recognise the museum sector as an essential component of lifelong and life-wide learning in Australia, and establish a formal communication mechanism with the Council of Australian Museum Directors to plan an effective framework and strategy for building on existing museum networks to support lifelong learning initiatives.

Museum Victoria and the Council of Australian Museum Directors offer our assistance to the Australian Government in helping to develop a life-wide and lifelong learning culture for all Australians.