

Towards a Learning Revolution in Australia

A Consultation Paper on Future Directions for Lifelong Learning

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Preface

Adult Learning Australia's (ALA) Mission is to advance a learning society. To this end Adult Learning Australia seeks to generate productive debate and discussion around the broad issue of lifelong learning in our society.

This consultative paper is part of the process of providing a futures oriented position for lifelong learning in Australia through to 2010 and beyond, to assist in better positioning our nation to proactively embrace the opportunities and challenges of a global knowledge society and economy.

ALA is aware that lifelong learning, now and into the future, will have different meanings to the many constituencies that we hope will choose to contribute to this discussion.

As this consultative paper highlights, there are many drivers operating that link lifelong learning to the social, cultural and economic capital of this country.

ALA wish to explore these linkages with those who are both the present and future stakeholders in this nation's growth and prosperity, by providing an opportunity to contribute a perspective to the central issue of where and how learning throughout life will enhance the benefits of a learning society for all citizens.

I hope that this consultation process will bring forward a large range of options and insights which will advance the scenarios set out in this paper.

It is important that the discussion of lifelong learning should be futures oriented and responsive to the key social and economic challenges and opportunities facing Australia in the context of constant change.

We believe that by establishing the four scenarios framework, contributors will feel comfortable discussing their own, or their organisations, view of lifelong learning within the context of one or more of the scenarios identified in the paper.

A number of consultative meetings have been planned that will allow those of you who can attend to make a contribution, however, these meetings are only one of the ways you can contribute.

The ALA website is accessible at www.ala.asn.au and from January 2005 contributions to the consultative paper and questions can be made this way.

Alternatively, written submissions at anytime can be addressed to Mr Peter Kearns, ALA Visiting Research Fellow, at GPO Box 260, Canberra City ACT 2601 AUSTRALIA.

Ron Anderson
Executive Director

Foreword

This paper reflects my experience with lifelong learning initiatives across Australia since 1998. As such, it is a personal and impressionistic statement which reflects the things I know. During this time I have been involved in learning community initiatives in every State of Australia and have observed much that can be achieved where there is vision and leadership.

At the same time, there is a seeming paradox in the compelling case for lifelong learning for all, as a necessary response to the conditions and imperatives of a global knowledge society and economy, and the limited progress that has been made nationally in recognising, and giving effect in systemic and holistic policy, to the wider benefits of learning in this context for individuals, families, enterprises and communities. While there are many jewels, Cinderella has not yet come to the ball. Australia is not yet a learning society and we lag leading OECD countries in strategic action taken in response to this challenge.

The seeds of this paper go back to discussions that my colleagues and I had in 1998, while working on a report on the implications of lifelong learning for the VET sector, on the question of whether a learning revolution could be achieved that would make Australia an inclusive and innovative learning society. My view at that time was a cautious yes, with the rider that this would need to be achieved community by community through grassroots action. This view is reflected in scenarios 1 and 2 of this paper.

The questions my colleagues and I discussed in 1998 are now more sharply defined and imperative for Australia's future, and merit serious discussions. Choices are set out in the four scenarios of this paper. The do nothing "business as usual" option is not a real choice for Australia, and has not been included.

I am grateful to Adult Learning Australia for the initiative they have taken with this timely national conversation, and I am grateful to be part of this process of discussion. Few things are more important than providing opportunities for people to learn and grow through life in this "continuous process of forming whole human beings".¹ For learning is both the treasure within, and the treasure without in successful and cohesive Australian communities.

Peter Kearns

¹ Unesco 1996, *Learning: The Treasure Within*, p.21.

Part I: BACKGROUND

1. INTRODUCTION

The imperative need for lifelong learning opportunities for all in the 21st century context of the global knowledge society and economy has received general international recognition. Whether Australia has responded sufficiently to this challenge is a question that merits widespread discussion in the community.

In this context, Adult Learning Australia has commissioned a paper on Future Directions for Lifelong Learning Australia in order to stimulate community discussion of this vital question. In order to allow for community contributions to this process, this discussion paper has been prepared as an initial step to focus community attention on key issues which need to be addressed.

There is a seeming paradox in the gap between the general recognition that lifelong learning receives, and the limited strategic action taken to give effect to this concept in social, economic, educational, and cultural policy.² Why this is so merits extensive discussion.

The present era has been termed “the learning age”,³ and it is evident that in a knowledge society and economy, few things are more important than learning processes and systems which enable knowledge to be generated, transferred, and applied for economic, social, and cultural purposes. The power and reach of technology now offers new ways of learning throughout life and in many contexts, yet it is doubtful if the great potential of technology for learning purposes has yet been seized.

While the emergence of the global knowledge society affords major opportunities for commercial, social, and cultural advances, there are also threats of exclusion for those left behind and unable to cope with the new opportunities and conditions. There is a razor’s edge of opportunity and threat in this situation, and the danger of a “two-thirds society” is a real one. Traditional approaches and paradigms are inadequate to address this situation, for new times demand new habits and ways.

Perhaps above all, the challenge of this situation requires vision and leadership, and the good practice examples given in this paper show cases where vision coupled with leadership has led to the extension of learning opportunities throughout life.

² There are exceptions to this situation which are discussed in this paper, with some examples given in attachments.

³ UK Secretary for Education and Employment 1998, *The Learning Age: a Renaissance for a New Britain*, DfEE, London.

In order to encourage a forward-looking discussion of the issues raised in this paper, a futures scenarios approach has been adopted, with four scenarios given to focus discussion on ways in which the great objective of Australian as an inclusive and innovative learning society might be progressed.

While these scenarios set a framework for discussion, suggestions for additional scenarios are most welcome and it is hoped that this paper will encourage new ideas on how best to progress lifelong learning in Australia so as to enable all Australians to benefit.

The British Government's Green Paper on The Learning Age summed up the issues at stake in the following statement:

*Learning is the key to prosperity - for each of us individuals as well as for the nation as a whole. Investment in human capital will be the foundation for success in the knowledge-based global economy of the twenty-first century.*⁴

Australia faces the same challenge.

⁴ UK Secretary of State for Education and Employment, op. cit., p.??

2. THE IMPERATIVE NEED FOR LIFELONG LEARNING FOR ALL

Learning serves a range of purposes in contemporary society, takes a number of forms, and occurs in many contexts. Learning is both lifelong and lifewide.

While traditionally learning has been linked with the sectors of the formal education system, learning occurs in many contexts such as the workplace, home and family, clubs and societies, and the sporting field. Success in these contexts often depends to a considerable extent on the quality of learning that occurs.

In this broad social context, informal and tacit forms of learning are being recognised as increasingly important. Effective learning in these contexts is a necessary underpinning of a learning and knowledge society.

The global knowledge society is marked by an exponential pace of change, the blurring of traditional boundaries, and the overturning of traditional paradigms. In this context, skills frequently become obsolete, and to maintain employability individuals need to keep learning and skilling throughout life. The motivation and capacity to do this is now an essential attribute for all.

As well as individuals, families and communities face the challenge of change and at times the viability of communities is threatened by economic and social change. Examples exist across Australia. Learning how to adapt to change, and to achieve sustainability in a world of constant change, is as much a challenge for communities as it is for individuals.

There is recognition of this imperative in the growing number of learning community and creative community initiatives across Australia. Learning communities are creative communities in forging partnerships to find new ways to adapt to the challenge of change and to provide learning opportunities throughout life for all.

A central issue for communities, and for Australians overall, lies in the danger of exclusion for those unable to adapt to the imperatives of 21st century conditions and to keep learning throughout life. School failure, early leaving, and a range of social problems fuel this situation with the danger of a divided “two-thirds society” a real one. There is a need to find innovative ways to promote inclusion through new forms of partnership action.

While the social imperatives for lifelong learning are central, lifelong learning also serves fundamental economic objectives in the context of the global knowledge economy with its exponential pace of change, converging technologies, and blurring of traditional boundaries. The links between learning, innovation, generating and using new knowledge, and adapting to change are intimate and

critical for success, as leading OECD countries have recognised.⁵ Building and maintaining human capital in the knowledge era requires a lifelong learning approach.

In this context, business will benefit from a motivated workforce able to continue learning and skilling throughout life, with a capacity to adapt to change, and with a capability to be creative and innovative in seizing new opportunities. Ongoing learning throughout working life underpins all these attributes.

Business organisations in Australia and overseas have recognised these realities of the learning and knowledge age, with the consequent requirement to broaden the concept of innovation beyond science based research and development aspect to include people aspects of innovation which are critically important in developing a good idea into a commercially viable product or service, and maintaining a competitive position through on-going innovation. The Business Council of Australia's Innovation Study Commission in its 1993 report on *Managing the Innovating Enterprise* recognised this reality:

...innovation in Australia in the 1990's is about people and enterprises not about science and technology.

Building a people and enterprise first approach to innovation, built around an entrepreneurial learning culture, remains a challenge confronting business and industry in the context of the global knowledge economy. Business is a key stakeholder in the great enterprise of achieving a learning revolution in Australia and building Australia as an innovative and competitive learning society.

Question 1: *To what extent is the imperative need for lifelong learning for all understood and accepted in your organisation or community? If not fully accepted, what are the barriers and what could be done?*

The Wider Benefits of Learning

While consideration of lifelong learning has often focused on an education and training perspective, there is now greater recognition of the wider benefits of learning which can be achieved in a range of sectors such as health, welfare, community building, regional development, cultural development, and the overall quality of life.

⁵ See OECD 1996, 2001b, G8 1998, European Commission 2001. The first objective in the five-point Action Plan for the Canadian National Innovation Strategy is to build Canada as a learning society "where learning and upgrading becomes continuous."

The wider benefits of learning across such sectors have been examined by the Centre for Research on the Wider Benefits of Learning at London University which was established in 1999 with funding from the Department for Education and Employment.⁶

The research of the Centre has shown that:

- education and learning helps people to adapt to change;
- the sustaining effect of education on personal lives and the social fabric of communities is important;
- education increases self-awareness and self-understanding and enhances communication in communities;
- family learning helps sustain families and can lead to better parenting;
- education and learning can have a beneficial impact on mental health and can support psychological health in ways that benefits individuals, families, and communities;
- learning enables people to maintain their employability throughout life in a world of constant change;
- learning strengthens social networks and social capital in communities, organisations, and firms and fosters social cohesion;
- learning enables people, enterprises and communities to be creative and innovative.⁷

The work of the Centre has shown the sustaining and transforming effects of learning in a wide range of contexts. These effects are especially significant in transition points in people's lives in sustaining people in making transitions.⁸

As well as these benefits, large costs are often incurred where learning is absent. For example, poor physical and psychological health, malfunctioning families, and communities lacking in social glue with high crime levels are all at least partial consequences of inadequate education and learning throughout life.⁹

In addition to the benefits cited above, learning throughout life adds to the quality of life of individuals and communities, so that learning becomes intrinsic "as a

⁶ For work of the Centre see www.learningbenefits.net.

⁷ Schuller T et al 2002.

⁸ Schuller et al 2004.

⁹ Ibid, p.142.

way of being” and as “an authentic way of living and working, thinking and feeling in the world of permanent white water”¹⁰

The wider benefits of learning for individuals and communities were recognised in the consultation paper *Adult Learning in Australia* released by the Department of Education, Science and Training in 2003.¹¹ However, there has not yet been a follow up on this consultation and any possible outcomes are not yet known.

Most research on lifelong learning in Australia has focused on the interests of particular sectors without frameworks to pull together research evidence across these sectors. The fragmented nature of this research means that an accessible knowledge base does not exist to encourage and support comprehensive policies and strategies that cross a range of sectors in synergistic ways. Building such a comprehensive knowledge base will be a necessary aspect of the task of achieving awareness and understanding of the imperative need for learning throughout life for all.

¹⁰ Vaill 1996, p.42.

¹¹ DEST 2003.

3. WHAT IS THE LIFELONG LEARNING APPROACH?

A number of international agencies, including OECD, Unesco, and the European Commission has been active in articulating and elaborating the nature of lifelong learning and its implications for societies.

This effort accelerated around the mid 1990s as the ramifications of the global knowledge society and economy became clearer. The OECD report *Lifelong Learning for All*¹² of 1996 and the report of the Unesco International Commission on Education for the Twenty-first Century of 1996, *Learning: the Treasure Within*,¹³ provide cogent statements of the case for lifelong learning for all.

These statements have been elaborated since 1996 in the work of OECD and the European Commission, with a comprehensive European Union policy set out by the Commission in 2001 titled *Making a European Area of Lifelong Learning a Reality*.¹⁴ The G8 countries in June 1999 adopted the *Cologne Charter on Aims and Ambitions for Lifelong Learning*.¹⁵ OECD in a 2003 report on adult learning saw some progress in member countries towards a more holistic approach to adult learning in a lifelong learning perspective.¹⁶ At a national level, the British Government's 1998 Green Paper *The Learning Age: a Renaissance for a New Britain*¹⁷ provides a useful national perspective on lifelong learning objectives in building a learning society to underpin a national "renaissance". Canada provides an example of a country where learning and innovation have been closely linked with the objective of making Canada a learning society "where learning and upgrading become continuous". This is the first objective in the five-point National Action Plan for Canada's Innovation Strategy.¹⁸ In Australia, the Tasmanian reports discussed in Attachment E provide an Australian addition to this growing literature.

The European Union's 2001 policy statement provides some useful perspectives on the objectives of a lifelong learning strategy.

¹² OECD 1996.

¹³ Unesco 1996.

¹⁴ European Commission 2001.

¹⁵ G8 1999.

¹⁶ OECD 2003.

¹⁷ Secretary of State for Education and Employment 1998.

¹⁸ Government of Canada 2002. The Canadian Government's commitment to this Action Plan followed a National Summit on Innovation and Learning held in November 2002 and an extensive consultative process across Canada.

*The objectives of a European area of lifelong learning must be both to empower citizens to meet the challenges of the knowledge-based society, moving freely between learning settings, jobs, regions and countries in pursuit of learning; and to meet the goals and ambitions of the candidate countries to be more prosperous, inclusive, and democratic.*¹⁹

Lifelong learning is then defined in the following terms:

*All learning activity undertaken throughout life, with the aim of improving knowledge, skills and competencies within a personal, civic, social and/or employment related perspective.*²⁰

Question 2: *How would you state the concept and objectives of lifelong learning in 21st century Australia?*

OECD in 2001 made a statement on the features of the lifelong learning approach in the following terms:

- i it offers a systemic view of learning in a connected system covering the whole lifecycle and comprising all forms of formal and informal learning;
- ii the learner is central with a shift in focus from the supply of learning to the demand side;
- iii this approach emphasises the motivation to learn, and draws attention to self-paced and self-directed learning;
- iv it takes a balanced view of the multiple objectives of education policy relating to economic, social and cultural outcomes, personal development, citizenship and other objectives.²¹

OECD added that the systemic view of learning was the feature that most distinguished lifelong learning from other approaches.²² This means that each stage of learning has to be connected in seamless pathways, and all learning settings (both formal and informal) have to be linked to enable individuals to make transitions and progress through various learning stages. How to achieve this is perhaps the central challenge in progressing a lifelong learning approach.

¹⁹ European Commission 2001, p.8.

²⁰ Ibid, p.9.

²¹ OECD 2001, p.11.

²² Ibid, p.11.

Question 3: *What do you see as the main features of an Australian lifelong learning approach?*

Question 4: *What are the main issues and barriers to be addressed in progressing a systemic approach to lifelong learning which connects the settings and stages of learning? How might this objective be progressed in Australia?*

4. WHAT HAS BEEN ACHIEVED?

While there are some splendid examples of local initiatives taken across Australia (some with government support), the overall scene is a mixed one and Australia lags leading OECD countries in strategic action taken to extend lifelong learning opportunities for all. There is limited recognition of the wider benefits of learning in sectors such as health, welfare, community building, youth and ageing policy, and it is difficult to identify comprehensive holistic strategies adopted by governments that integrate learning strategies across broad areas of social, economic, and cultural policy. Few jurisdictions would pass the OECD test that “the systemic approach is the key underpinning.”

Various initiatives taken by governments, at both State and Commonwealth levels, can be seen as contributing to lifelong learning opportunities for particular groups and communities, but it is doubtful if such initiatives can be seen as comprising coherent and comprehensive strategies for lifelong learning, and for building Australia as a learning society. The synergies that might be achieved through concerted holistic strategies across sectors are rarely achieved. Australian jurisdictions are at various stages in progressing towards such a situation, and a national commitment to build Australia as an inclusive learning society, such as exists in Britain and Canada, does not exist. The absence of such a vision inevitably exacerbates fragmentation of effort.

OECD in 2001 attempted to make a systemic assessment of where Member countries stood in implementing strategies for lifelong learning.²³ Countries were placed in four categories on the following basis:

1. The Nordic countries - Sweden, Finland, Denmark, Norway.
2. Canada, Czech Republic, Germany, Netherlands.
3. Australia, Switzerland, United Kingdom, United States.
4. Ireland, Hungary, Portugal, Poland.²⁴

While various examples of progress in Australia since 2001 can be cited, it is doubtful whether Australia’s mediocre performance overall has changed significantly since 2001. In the field of education, for example, policy continues generally to be made on a sectoral basis and few examples exist of systemic perspectives that link all sectors of education in concerted action.

²³ OECD 2001a, pp. 65-67.

²⁴ OECD 2001b, pp. 65-66.

Nevertheless, there are various indications that this situation could change in the next few years with a number of States and Territories developing comprehensive frameworks influenced by whole-of-government objectives. The implications of demographic change, with the ageing of the population, is receiving more attention and particular issues such as older workers and skill shortages in various industries are being recognised as priorities. There is a growing interest across Australia in the question of engaging and sustaining communities with increased prominence to aspects such as building and measuring social capital. Sustainability is a priority in most government agendas in various forms, and the knowledge economy is receiving attention across Australia.

Assessment of the implications of key policy issues such as these will inevitably lead in the direction of better understanding of the essential nature of lifelong learning as an underpinning for effective policy across these key areas of government and community action. How to speed up this process is a central issue for dialogue involving many stakeholders.

While the overall scene is one of mixed progress, there are also splendid examples across Australia of local initiatives, and some examples of general government policies for lifelong learning.

These include:

- local initiatives such as the Hume Global Learning Village, Marion City Council initiatives, Newcastle Lifelong Learning Network;
- government supported programs such as the Victorian Learning Towns and Western Australian Creative Communities;
- initiatives to harness the potential of information and communication technology for learning such as Capricornia Online;
- action taken in school system to build the necessary foundations in students for lifelong learning;
- policies adopted in Tasmania to make Tasmania *A State of Learning* with developed links between lifelong learning strategies and overall strategies for the development of the State;
- promotion of lifelong learning through initiatives such as Adult Learners Week;
- the development of some public libraries as community learning centres;
- the growth of the University of the Third Age (U3A) and U3A Online.

Some examples of these initiatives are given in the attachments to this paper.

While a wide range of stakeholders have supported initiatives such as these, a feature with promise for the future resides in the initiatives taken by some local government councils such as Hume Shire Council and Marian City Council to promote lifelong learning to underpin their social, cultural, and economic policies. There is great potential with adequate resourcing to expand the role of councils in encouraging and supporting learning throughout life for their citizens and families.

While the current situation reveals a mixed picture, the seeds of future development lie in the key drivers which are discussed in Part II, and which could lead to the scenarios for progress discussed in Part II.

Question 5: *Do you agree with the assessment of the state of lifelong learning in Australia given in this paper? What do you see as the main achievements and barriers?*

Part II: Scenarios for the Future

Part II sets out four alternative scenarios for the possible future development of lifelong learning in Australia as a basis for discussion of future directions for lifelong learning in Australia. The scenarios may be combined in various ways and varied. A framework of key contextual drivers is provided to enable the scenarios to be assessed in relation to key challenges confronting Australian society. Major themes present in the scenarios are identified.

5. DRIVERS

Scenarios for the future development of lifelong learning in Australia need to be responsive to the major social, economic, and cultural challenges confronting Australian society. A set of key drivers is set out below to provide a framework for discussion of the scenarios that follow.

- **Globalisation** Australia must adapt to the forces and influences of a more interconnected, interdependent and globalised world which poses both opportunities and threats for Australian society.
- **Knowledge economy** Economic and technological change is driving the knowledge economy with growing imperatives for learning, creativity, and innovation in the generation, management, and use of knowledge.
- **Demography** The ageing of the population and workforce poses a particular challenge for Australian society with major implications for learning throughout life and meeting skill needs.
- **Technology** In a context of dynamic technological change, new learning strategies are required including innovative uses of information and communication technologies to sustain and transform the way we learn. Shifting skill requirements easily lead to skill shortages.
- **Work and labour market** There are major changes in the organisation and management of work and labour markets and in the roles and responsibilities of individuals and firms. New attributes and skills are required to maintain employability throughout life.
- **Communities** Many communities are subject to the impact of these changes with a growing

challenge to sustain cohesive and inclusive communities and avoid exclusion of those left behind by these changes.

Other key drivers that will impact on the demand for lifelong learning may be suggested in this consultation. The impact of these driving forces on Australians and their communities is producing major challenges that require innovative responses in a learning society able to adapt to an environment of constant change, challenge, and opportunity.

While the role of learning throughout life is relevant to all these 21st century drivers, the release of the recent Productivity Commission draft report on *The Economic Implications of a Ageing Australia* has focussed attention on the likely consequences of demographic change with the ageing of Australia's population in such areas as rising health and welfare costs, and meeting the skill needs of industry in a context where participation rates are projected to fall.²⁵

While a package of policy responses to this challenge will be required, there is a compelling case that strategies for learning throughout life should be an essential component in such a package, both in respect of maintaining workforce participation by older workers where this is desired, and ensuring that the wider benefits of learning, as discussed above, are an integral component in holistic social and economic policy responses to the challenge of an ageing Australia..

Question 6: *Do you agree with the set of key drivers that are likely to influence future directions for lifelong learning in Australia? What, if anything, would you add to this list?*

²⁵ Productivity Commission 2004

6. KEY THEMES

The scenarios set out below illustrate a number of major themes that are likely to be expressed in these scenarios.

These include:

- new forms of partnership including new forms of public/private partnership which support and sustain local initiatives and civil society;
- progress towards more comprehensive and holistic responses to the 21st century drivers listed above which will build synergies and value added outcomes across social, economic, and cultural sectors;
- a broader and more significant role for local government in local initiatives;
- greater attention to the cultural underpinnings of social and economic progress with policies that enhance creativity, innovation, and learning in the life of communities;
- major innovations in the role of information and communication technology;
- the expansion of networks across Australia which link people in new ways for social, cultural, educational, and economic purposes, and which provide a growing web of international linkages;
- a more significant role for civil society in the development and sustainability of community with new relationships between government, market, and civil society;
- the progressive harmonisation and integration of the sectors of education in a more seamless and holistic approach to learning in many contexts.

Question 7: *Do you agree with the list of key themes that are likely to be expressed in a future scenario for lifelong learning in Australia? Are there important themes that should be added to this list?*

7. THE SCENARIOS

Four scenarios for the possible future development of lifelong learning in Australia are set out below as a basis for discussion. The scenarios are seen as responsive to the key 21st century drivers listed above in varying ways, while they also give expression to the key themes set out above. While some scenarios may be seen as subsuming others in the list, the future of lifelong learning in Australia may also be seen in terms of one or two of the scenarios.

The scenarios involve varying roles for government, market, and civil society in progressing lifelong learning in Australia within the fabric of the Australian federal system. They pose the critical question as to how a necessary learning revolution can best be achieved in Australia in adapting Australia to the imperatives and challenges of the global knowledge society and economy. This is a question that will require vision and leadership. Section 8 then takes up the question of what can be achieved by 2010 and by 2020.

The scenarios:

1. **Civil society and local government in the driving seat**

The emphasis is on local initiatives and grass roots action with a myriad of local partnerships. A distinctive feature is a larger role for local government with lifelong learning integrated in council social, cultural, and economic policies.

2. **Government support for selected local and regional initiatives**

The scenario gives a larger role to State/Territory and Commonwealth government support for selected local and regional initiatives.

3. **Comprehensive and integrated State and Territory initiatives**

Lifelong learning policies and strategies are integrated across all sectors in a comprehensive whole-of-government approach.

4. **Development of a national framework to build Australia as an inclusive and innovative learning society**

This is the most comprehensive and integrated of the scenarios with a national framework developed to foster partnership and collaboration in a more strategic national effort.

1. Civil Society and Local Government in the Driving Seat

This scenario emphasises local initiatives and grassroots action with the development of local partnerships a key features. All education sectors are increasingly active with adult and community education, schools, VET, and universities collaborating and contributing. Learning brokers are active in building partnership and collaboration with a steady growth of social capital in communities.

While this scenario continues, and extends, the present pattern of development, the distinctive feature is the larger role of local government as local government authorities recognise the wider benefits for communities of learning opportunities for all throughout life. This results in learning strategies being integrated with the social, cultural, and economic policies of councils.

Civil society turns on community action and active citizenship and involves the role of non-profit organisations. It has been defined in the following terms:

Civil society is citizenship that is engaged, informed, and involved with each other through voluntary community organisations or professional associations that meet regularly and work to achieve goals that serve their respective communities or common interests.²⁶

Effective learning communities depend on active citizens and an engaged civil society, while learning strategies can sustain and give direction to civil society. Building and linking networks in communities enhances social capital in communities and so contributes to the sustainability and cohesion of communities.

This scenario turns on the interaction of market forces and civil society, and so is likely to lead to variable outcomes across Australia, although the active engagement of local government will be a strength.

Current initiatives across Australia, such as the Hume Shire Global Learning Village (Attachment B), Marion City Council initiatives, and the Newcastle Lifelong Learning Network, illustrate what can be achieved with this scenario where there is vision and leadership.

This scenario will lead to significant roles for libraries, museums, art galleries, and telecentres as community learning centres, and with the whole community regarded as a learning resource, including local history and heritage. This comprehensive “whole of community” learning strategy and network building will

²⁶ Questia Media America 2004.

also strengthen creativity and the capacity for innovation as new ideas emerge “at the intersection of ideas, concepts, and cultures” under the so called Medici effect.²⁷

A further central feature of this scenario will be the growing significance of information and communication technology (ICT) in extending learning opportunities for all throughout life, building social and human capital, and linking social, cultural, and economic development in communities. Telecentres and Community Technology Centres will evolve further as community learning centres. This will benefit rural and remote areas in particular.

Current wired community initiatives, such as Capricornia Online (Attachment C) where the Rockhampton City Council and Central Queensland University have collaborated in partnership action to develop online communities, will become more common across Australia with learning opportunities in local communities enriched by a growing web of online communities. The interaction of virtual and place communities will lead to many more examples of the Medici effect in spawning creative ideas and innovations.

Civil society and local government will drive this scenario, with active citizenship a key feature, and with a growing range of non-profit organisations supporting learning activities and partnerships. ALA members and the education sectors will have key roles as learning brokers in building a rich diversity of learning partnerships. This scenario builds bonding and bridging forms of social capital in communities²⁸ with benefits for human capital, the sustainability of communities, and economic outcomes.

Initiatives taken under this scenario will lead to a greater recognition of the need for local infrastructure to build collaboration and partnership, and forge a shared vision of the desired future.²⁹ This will lead to an increase in partnership frameworks such as learning communities, creative communities, and healthy communities with greater awareness that these strategies have much in common, and are directed at similar objectives.

²⁷ Johansson 2004.

²⁸ For social capital see Kearns 2004.

²⁹ Kearns and Papadopoulos 2000.

2. Government Support for Selected Local and Regional Initiatives

While this scenario has the characteristics of scenario 1, a distinguishing feature is the stronger State, Territory and Commonwealth government support for selected aspects of local initiatives. This goes along with incentives to build local initiatives into regional strategies with close links to regional economic development. Learning strategies will become more significant in regional development with this scenario.

Although this scenario continues much of the current pattern of development, it will lead to a greater recognition in government policy of the value of learning strategies in underpinning much social, economic, and cultural policy, and so may be seen as an intermediate phase towards scenarios 3 and 4.

State and Territory governments are likely to be the most active in this scenario because of their proximity to local and regional circumstances and initiatives. However, Commonwealth agencies will also be involved in local initiatives in furthering national objectives related to such priorities as older workers, responses to demographic change, addressing skill shortages, inclusion and equity, and healthy communities.

Although this scenario continues initiatives taken by some State Government, such as Victoria in supporting Learning Towns across the State, a feature of this scenario will be the evolution of closer ties between local initiatives and a range of State and Territory government objectives including community building, health, regional development, and welfare objectives. This will lead to progress in recognising the wider benefits of learning.

This scenario is also likely to lead over time to greater collaboration and partnership between State and Commonwealth government agencies across traditional sectoral and political boundaries, and so will encourage innovation in addressing local and regional needs. Innovations such as regional skill ecosystem strategies are likely to become more common.

A growing interest in linking local learning initiatives in regional development frameworks will lead to support for innovations such as Learning and Innovation Regions where learning strategies are used to drive regional social, economic, and cultural development.³⁰ This orientation will lead to innovations in the broader regional development role of telecentres and community technology centres as

³⁰ Such an initiative in a metropolitan context exists with the Western Melbourne Learning and Innovation Region, an initiative of Victoria University now titled Learning and Innovation West. See Kearns 2003.

community learning centres supporting a range of regional development objectives.

3. Comprehensive and Integrated State and Territory Strategies

This scenario progresses beyond scenario 2 in the development of comprehensive State and Territory strategies which integrate lifelong learning strategies for the social, economic, cultural, and civic development of the State or Territory. States and Territories are at various stages in moving towards this objective.

While whole-of-government strategies are widely proclaimed in State and Territory policies in such areas as fostering innovation in economic development, these are often not comprehensive in addressing the learning and cultural underpinnings of whole-of-government strategies. This scenario is based on a more complete understanding of the wider benefits of learning in a range of social, economic, and cultural sectors, and the value in building learning strategies into policies across sectors such as health, welfare, community building, regional development, and small business development.

Progress towards this objective will open up ways in which synergies can be achieved across social, economic, and cultural sectors leading to value added outcomes.

Tasmania provides an example of a State that has progressed towards this goal with lifelong learning objectives set out in several reports (Learning Together 2000; Tasmania: A State of Learning 2003) which are then linked to the overall strategy for Tasmania's development (Tasmania Together). Attachment E provides a brief overview of the Tasmanian approach.

The development of comprehensive State or Territory frameworks for lifelong learning will lead to a strengthening of scenario 1 initiatives in building active citizenship and civil society. However, maintaining a proper balance between empowering and sustaining local initiatives and civic responsibility, and achieving strategic State development will require ongoing scrutiny.

Tasmania's development of their Tasmania Together strategic framework, in concert with the action taken to build frameworks for lifelong learning across all sectors of education and training, provides an interesting example of this approach. Tasmania Together was developed as a 20-year social, environmental and economic plan and as a community-owned vision for the State built up through a two year development process. There are 212 benchmarks built into the plan, including lifelong learning benchmarks, with progress monitored by an independent statutory authority, the Tasmania Together Progress Board.³¹

³¹ <http://www.tasmaniatgether.tas.gov.au>.

4. Development of a National Framework to Build Australia as an Inclusive and Innovative Learning Society

This scenario involves the most comprehensive and integrated of the scenarios with a national framework to build Australia as an inclusive and innovative learning society serving to foster partnership and collaboration at the national, State/Territory, local and regional levels. The scenario subsumes scenarios 1-3 and involves the most comprehensive and strategic response to the drivers and focal issues identified in this paper.

A key aspect of this scenario is the forging of a process to build a shared vision of Australia as an inclusive learning society supported by all sectors of Australian society. As the most ambitious and complex of the scenarios, this will also be the most difficult to achieve.

The National Framework involves harnessing lifelong learning to underpin strategic development across a broad spectrum of social, economic, and cultural sectors, including health, education, welfare, community and regional development, skill strategies, and small business development. There is general recognition of the wider benefits of learning across these sectors, and of the links between learning, creativity, and innovation in a dynamic knowledge society and economy. Active measures are therefore taken to promote these attributes in a range of social, economic and cultural contexts.

A National Summit on *Learning and Innovation: Australia as a Learning Society* is held preceded by an extensive program of consultations across Australia to enable community views to be taken into account in this process of building community support for a shared vision. The National Summit leads to an agreed Action Plan with phase one targets to be achieved by 2010 and the broader vision by 2020.

The existence of the agreed National Framework and priorities enables fragmentation of effort to be combated with improved linkages between local, regional, State/Territory, and national action, and with resources used more efficiently and effectively. Synergies are sought and achieved between initiatives across sectors such as health, education, welfare, community building, and small business development. This enables substantial progress to be made in addressing the demographic challenge of an ageing population. The potential of technology to transform the way we learn is able to be realised, aligned with progress in cognitive science on how people learn, through this national collaborative effort, so that learning opportunities are much more widely available to individuals and groups previously disadvantaged in access to education.

- Communities benefit from incentives and support given to local initiatives through more comprehensive and holistic strategies.
- Business and industry benefits from a more motivated and creative workforce able to continue learning throughout life and adapt to changing requirements and conditions.
- Society benefits as a whole from strengthened interactions between government, market, and civil society.

The existence of the National Framework, and the progressive building of a learning culture throughout society, facilitates speed and agility in response to shifting economic conditions and opportunities, so that knowledge is generated and transferred more effectively. Learning and skill strategies are integrated in a broader approach to human resource development, with benefits to business, the workforce, and communities. This comprehensive National Framework provides a better fit between the inexorable advance of science and technology and human responses in a wider range of social and economic contexts.

The existence of an agreed National Framework to build Australia as an inclusive and innovative learning society also provides incentives for corporate sponsorship of selected initiatives. Corporate support for initiatives such as the Hume Global Learning Village will become much more common with benefits to all partners.

8. CHOICES

The scenarios set out above illustrate critical choices confronting Australia on the path to becoming an inclusive learning society.

The key questions raised in this consultation are:

1. which of the above scenarios is the most responsive to the 21st century drivers and imperatives discussed in this paper, and the most feasible under Australian conditions; and
2. how progress towards this desired scenario might best be made.

The impact of the 21st century drivers outlined in this paper means that whether Australia is to become a committed learning society is not a choice, the only choice is the path to be followed, and the pace of change.

A learning society is one where learning is valued and expressed in a myriad of forms and contexts. In such a society, learning is intrinsic to social, cultural, civic and economic activity. A knowledge society is, by its nature, a learning society where innovation is continuous and embedded in the culture. The great themes of a successful 21st century society will be learning, knowledge, creativity, innovation, and community.

Australia cannot afford to fall behind competitors in addressing the razor's edge of opportunity and threat posed by 21st century conditions. Leading OECD countries such as Britain, Canada, Germany, the Scandinavian countries, and the European Union overall have active policies to build a learning society. Australia at present lacks a national framework and shared vision to progress this journey.

The scenarios set out in this paper illustrate choices confronting all stakeholders.

- Scenarios 1 and 2 provide for incremental progress over a substantial timescale with likely uneven outcomes across Australia.
- Scenarios 3 and 4 provide for a more strategic and accelerated progress.
- While scenario 4 may be regarded as utopian, it provides the most complete response to the 21st century imperatives discussed in this paper. Whether the scenario is achievable is a critical choice, and a critical test of vision and leadership.

The case examples given in the attachments to this paper illustrate things that can be achieved where vision and leadership exists. Many more examples across Australia could be given. However, a learning society is more than the sum of

some good practice cases, and the cultural barriers and obsolete paradigms that impede progress will need to be addressed in a systemic way.

It is suggested that the scenarios in this paper might be discussed in terms of:

- a. what could be achieved by 2010; and
- b. what should be the objectives to be achieved by 2020.

Some concrete objectives for (a), for example, might be that by 2010 every local government council will have lifelong learning objectives and strategies to underpin its social, cultural, and economic policies, and all governments were committed to building Australia as an inclusive learning society.

Question 8: *Which of the scenarios set out in this paper do you regard as the most feasible and desirable in progressing lifelong learning for all in Australia and responding to the 21st century drivers identified in this paper?*

Question 9: *Do you regard scenario 4 as feasible and achievable?*

Question 10: *What do you see as the role and contribution of business and industry in achieving a learning revolution in Australian society and building Australia as an inclusive learning society? What will be the main benefits to business and industry?*

Question 11: *What action would you like to see taken to progress the scenario (or scenarios) you favour?*

Question 12: *What do you see as the main roles of the following education sectors in building Australia as an inclusive learning society?*

- (a) universities;
- (b) vocational education & training;
- (c) schools.

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List of Questions

1. To what extent is the imperative need for lifelong learning for all understood and accepted in your organisation or community? If not fully accepted, what are the barriers and what could be done?
2. How would you state the concept and objectives of lifelong learning in 21st century Australia?
3. What do you see as the main features of an Australian lifelong learning approach?
4. What are the main issues and barriers to be addressed in progressing a systemic approach to lifelong learning which connects the settings and stages of learning? How might this objective be progressed in Australia?
5. Do you agree with the assessment of the state of lifelong learning in Australia given in this paper? What do you see as the main achievements and barriers?
6. Do you agree with the set of key drivers that are likely to influence future directions for lifelong learning in Australia? What, if anything, would you add to this list?
7. Do you agree with the list of key themes that are likely to be expressed in a future scenario for lifelong learning in Australia? Are there important themes that should be added to this list?
8. Which of the scenarios set out in this paper do you regard as the most feasible and desirable in progressing lifelong learning for all in Australia and responding to the 21st century drivers identified in this paper?
9. Do you regard scenario 4 as feasible and achievable?
10. What do you see as the role and contribution of business and industry in achieving a learning revolution in Australian society and building Australia as an inclusive learning society? What will be the main benefits to business and industry?
11. What action would you like to see taken to progress the scenario (or scenarios) you favour?

12. What do you see as the main roles of the following education sectors in building Australia as an inclusive learning society?
- (a) universities;
 - (b) vocational education & training;
 - (c) schools.

Hume Global Learning Village

Hume Global Learning Village illustrates innovative action taken by a Council to extend learning opportunities throughout life in a diverse community through action integrated around the concept of a Global Learning Village.

Hume City is home to more than 150,000 people and spans vast rural and metropolitan areas. It is a young, culturally diverse community with low levels of literacy, school completion, employment and community engagement particularly within the southern region of the City.

Hume City Council has a Social Justice Charter that underpins its vision for Hume as a Learning Community. From this, Hume City Council has supported the development of the Hume Global Learning Village and has created built infrastructure to support learning in the City.

The Hume Global Learning Centre, opened in May 2003, and is a state of the art learning facility incorporating The Age Public Library, training rooms, computer learning facilities, AV equipment, internet access and a café. Funded by the Hume City Council with contributions from the Victorian State Government, The Age, Ford Motor Company and The Pratt Foundation, the Hume Global Learning Centre is the iconic centrepiece to the Learning Community Program. The centre provides access to informal, formal and community learning providers to deliver programs to the Hume community. More than 2800 student training hours is delivered per week in the centre.

The Visy Cares Learning Centre is a community learning and community services facility in Meadow Heights. Funded by Council with support from VisyCares and the Victorian State Government, this community managed centre provides community learning programs as well as maternal and child health services and occasional child care.

Council is also facilitating the development of a Koori Learning Centre and the Craigieburn Learning Centre, as additional learning infrastructure for Hume's large and diverse municipality.

The Hume Global Learning Village (HGLV)

The HGLV is a unique and wide ranging collaboration of learning providers in Hume City, comprising approximately 200 individuals, groups and organisations which form the Village. Members of the Village share Hume City Council's vision

for a Learning Community in Hume and have assumed responsibility for making this a reality.

The Hume Global Learning Village is a connected network of formal (schools, universities, TAFEs), informal (tutors, coaches, community groups), non-formal (neighbourhood houses) and other learning providers, partnering to address the learning needs of the community. The Hume Global Learning Village members meet regularly, develop project and other partnerships, have a newsletter and website, advocate on behalf of the community and share expertise. Members receive support from Hume City Council in the form of staff acting as executive support to the Village. The Village is self determining, with representation from across the membership managing the activities of the Village.

The Hume Global Learning Village committee comprises of 15 people nominated from the membership. The Village also has the benefit of a 25 person Hume Global Learning Village Advisory Board. The Board represents senior people in the education, academia, business, research and community sectors. It is chaired by former Premier of Victoria, Hon John Cain. The Board provides unprecedented access to information, research, people and programs for the Village.

Learning Together Strategy

The Hume Global Learning Village members have collaborated with the community to develop their *Learning Together Strategy*. The Strategy is a practical program of initiatives and projects for 2004 – 2008, building on the activities of the Hume Global Learning Village and its constituent members. Hume City Council has resolved to undertake some of the 56 projects in Learning Together with other members – including universities, Kangan Batman TAFE, Greenvale Primary School and Gladstone Park Secondary College.

The *Learning Together Strategy* is designed to change perceptions of the community about learning and to foster their participation in learning in its broadest definition. Better integrated, learner-centric learning opportunities are made available through the relationships established and supported through the Village. The Village also offers other external partners, such as Government departments and philanthropic organisations, a stable, integrated and cohesive partnership with which to work.

Volunteering is a key learning strategy that the Hume Global Learning Village has adopted and this too is auspiced on behalf of the Village, by Hume City Council.

Hume City Council's role

Learning is considered the strategic initiative to address social and economic disadvantage in Hume and is embedded throughout Council's policy, budget and structures. Council has established a Learning Community Department, incorporating its library services and community learning development roles.

Council has identified that they have many staff already working in the learning agenda, including maternal and child health nurses, kindergarten teachers, librarians etc. Hume City Council has commenced engaging with these staff members to better leverage learning outcomes from these trusted professionals in the community.

As key advocates for the local community, Hume City Council has embraced the role of facilitator of the Hume Global Learning Village. As the local representatives of the community, Council has been able to broker the initiation of the Hume Global Learning Village, without perceived agendas.

For further information about the Hume Global Learning Village please visit the Hume Global Learning Village website at www.humegloballearning.vic.gov.au

Capricornia Online

Capricornia Online, a community online partnership initiative of Rockhampton City Council and Central Queensland University, illustrates the potential of the internet in building online learning communities to extend learning opportunities throughout the community.

This initiative has developed in several stages. The initial stage of the project, known as COIN (Communities on the Internet) was funded by the Department of Family and Community Services with a focus on addressing the digital divide through training in ICT skills provided through the COIN Academy. The extension of digital literacy through the community then provided the basis to build online learning communities through the Capricornia Online project.

Capricornia Online gives effect to a social appropriation of technology philosophy which emphasises the need to progress beyond access objectives to appropriating technology for social and community purposes. This philosophy, which drives this initiative, has much in common with the learning community concept. Community groups and individuals are enabled to sign up as members of Capricornia Online.

This has led to a range of online communities where people share ideas and experience and learn together. Typical online communities are Multicultural Corner, Voices, Living History, and Fishing the Fitzroy. Each community has its own characteristics depending on the interests and background of members. Communities meet face to face as well as online. A community of particular interest is Voices which provides for the expression of community views in a similar way to talk-back radio.

While Capricornia Online is still at a relatively early stage of development, a number of useful lessons are already evidence from this experience. These include the value of a local council/education partnership, such as underpins this initiative, the key role of guiding vision and philosophy, the value of ICT in building social capital in communities, and the need to progress beyond access objectives in harnessing the potential of technology for learning and community development. Online communities are growing up around Australia and will contribute much to building Australia as an inclusive learning society.

Learning Towns – the Victorian Experience

The Victorian program of Learning Towns provides an example of action taken by a State Government to support local initiatives to promote lifelong learning opportunities in communities. Nine Learning Towns have been funded since 1999 with this program linked to the Government's overall development strategy set out in *Growing Victoria Together*³².

This state government funding was provided on the basis that it was seed funding rather than recurrent expenditure, and Learning Towns would work towards becoming self sustaining. Support has been provided to the Learning Towns to assist them in this objective, such as developing skills in fund raising and tender preparation.

The Learning Towns have achieved considerable successes. One key achievement has been the development of a performance measures framework which provides indicators to evaluate the impact on the community of learning programs. This framework has been piloted by the Learning Towns themselves and has been customised for small and large Adult Community Education organisations. The performance measures framework offers community-based organisations a framework for improving management decision making by providing qualitative and quantitative data on community reach and impact.

The Learning Towns have demonstrated the value of strong partnerships and an inclusive approach to community building. For example, the Buloke Learning Town tackled the Buloke Shire's environmental challenges by bringing together Landcare groups, land holders, businesses, schools and state land management authorities. Three field trips were organised so people could see the environmental challenges and some potential solutions. This project resulted in increased environmental knowledge and skills in the Shire, improved environmental management and increased community leadership and interaction.

In her Ministerial Statement, *Future Directions for Adult Community Education in Victoria*, (June 2004) Lynne Kosky, Minister for Education & Training, has built on this experience in developing the Community Learning Partnership principle.

Community Learning Partnerships are a new way of doing business between the Government and communities. They are the working arrangements between organisations that bring together people and organisations with an interest in

³² An additional Learning Town was funded in 2002.

learning outcomes for adults. Any eligible Adult Community Education organisation can auspice a Community Learning Partnership.

Community Learning Partnerships will broaden the role of adult and community education. Where there was an emphasis on delivery to individual learners, there will now also be a focus on the learning outcomes for communities.

Community Learning Partnerships will contribute directly to community-strengthening activities. They will be projects generated out of specific local needs (such as employment or industry, environment or a range of health or welfare concerns). Funding for Community Learning Partnerships by the ACFE Board will be for up to three years. All partner organisations are expected to demonstrate their commitment through participating in resourcing the project.

Future Directions for Adult Community Education in Victoria indicates that Learning Town funding will be refocused in the period 2005-2007 to support Community Learning Partnerships. They offer a way to leverage the funding provided to Learning Towns in the past.

The outcomes of Community Learning Partnerships are expected to be:

- stronger communities, through increased partnerships between community organisations
- a contribution to the implementation of locally delivered whole-of-government service provision
- increased skills of adults and communities.

Tasmania: A State of Learning

Tasmania provides an example of a State that has developed comprehensive strategies to progress lifelong learning for all aligned with overall planning for the development of the State. The centrepiece of this integrated approach to the development of the State is the *Tasmania Together* plan which was prepared through a community-oriented process, and which led to subsequent planning for lifelong learning.

Tasmania Together was prepared by a Community Leaders group so that there was a strong community input and orientation from the beginning. The document resulting from this process includes a vision for the development of the State with 24 goals and 212 benchmarks to assess progress, reflecting the subjects that were of most concern to people during more than two and a half years of community consultation. The vision, goals, and benchmarks relate to our community, our culture, our democracy, our economy, our environment, and reflect a strong underpinning of community values.

The need for lifelong learning in such a context is explicitly recognised in the fourth goal of the plan.

4. Create a culture that encourages people to learn and develop new skills, including life skills, throughout their lives.

Lifelong learning is also recognised as underpinning other community goals in the plan.

The commitment to lifelong learning and community building enunciated in *Tasmania Together* was then carried over to two follow up education planning documents which set out a framework for the achievement of these objectives. These documents were *Learning Together* released in December 2000, and the subsequent *Tasmania : A State of Learning* which set out a strategy for post-Year 10 education and training in Tasmania.

Learning Together set out a vision for the development of education and training in Tasmania which is seen as a “bridge from a first-class to a world-class education system”. A key aspect is that the strategies are interlinked so that Tasmania has moved towards a systemic approach to lifelong learning, one of the key features of the lifelong learning approach identified by OECD. There is a strong emphasis on values in the document in a people-first approach with personal fulfilment, creativity, self-confidence and innovation seen as essential outcomes of learning in a community underpinned by a world-class education.

The third pillar in the comprehensive Tasmanian approach was the *Tasmania : A State of Learning* the state's first strategy for post-Year 10 education and training. Released in December 2003, this innovative blueprint is built around four key elements : guaranteeing futures, ensuring essential literacies, enhancing adult learning, and building learning communities.

The Tasmanian Government has committed more than \$20 million to fund the implementation of *State of Learning*, beginning with \$3.6 million in 2004-05 and increasing to \$7.9 million in 2007-08.

Overall, Tasmania illustrates a comprehensive approach to fostering lifelong learning opportunities with clear linkages to overall planning for development of the State. It also illustrates key features of the lifelong learning approach identified by OECD. As this system evolves and matures, the community is likely to gain in value added outcomes from the wider benefits of learning for individuals, enterprises, and communities.