

B-HERT Position Paper No. 4



The Critical Importance of Lifelong Learning

A Policy Statement

February 2001

THE CRITICAL IMPORTANCE OF LIFELONG LEARNING

A Position Paper of The B-HERT Taskforce on Lifelong Learning

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Purpose: This position paper aims to establish the significance of lifelong learning in the Australian context. Drawing on analyses of lifelong learning policies and practices in Australia and other OECD countries the paper seeks to identify a number of policy priorities for government, particularly in the areas of lifelong learning, business and higher education.

Policy Priorities: The following priorities should be considered. They attempt to provide a starting point for policy orientated discussion and should be considered by all stakeholders, including federal and state governments, business, universities, and other providers of education. Policy must also address the fundamental, political and social issues that underpin these priorities.

- The adoption of a multi-faceted approach to policy development –to address the complex interplay of the three major aims of lifelong learning:
 - i) lifelong learning for a more highly skilled workforce
 - ii) lifelong learning for a stronger democracy and more inclusive society
 - iii) lifelong learning for a more personally rewarding life.
- The acceptance of the concept of co-investment –to ensure that the separate, complementary and mutually supportive contributions of the wide range of providers and beneficiaries of lifelong learning are recognized.
- The development and extension of articulated pathways and partnerships – to achieve better integration of effort and balance among universities, enterprises and other providers of learning in the design and delivery of learning programs, the cross appointment of academic and professional staff, the transfer of credit.
- The promotion of the idea of the learning workforce – to respond to the reality that changing forms of paid employment and changes in skills and competences required to perform in it will necessitate a commitment to continual periods of updating of existing knowledge, redirecting old skills and learning new ones.
- The re-assessment of the role of universities in the provision of lifelong learning –to reconsider funding arrangements so as to facilitate opportunities for those returning to study after periods in the workforce or after fulfilling other important roles in society.
- The consideration of the demand and supply of lifelong learning – to include its implications for funding equity and participation.
- The development of infrastructures for learning –to respond to recent developments in our understanding of the learning process, the conditions needed for successful learning, and advances in the technologies of learning, which are creating the potential for a new kind of learner and new kinds of learning that transcend traditional constraints of age, time and

place.

THE CRITICAL IMPORTANCE OF LIFELONG LEARNING

B-HERT Taskforce on Lifelong Learning

1 THE INTERNATIONAL CONTEXT

The topic of Lifelong Learning has assumed immense importance in the policies and practices of a number of international agencies, national governments and institutions of learning in recent years. An increasing number of governments, policy makers and decision-makers has concluded that a lifelong approach to learning should be instituted and deployed as one of the main lines of attack on some of the major economic and social problems needing to be addressed as we approach the twenty-first century. The deliberations of OECD, UNESCO, the European Parliament, the Nordic Council of Ministers, the Japanese Parliament, APEC and the Australian Commonwealth Government reveal a commitment to the institution and extension of policies of learning across the lifespan.

A number of themes run through the deliberations of these agencies:

- the emergence of an awareness of the importance of the notions of the knowledge economy and the learning society and the consequent educational imperatives
- an acceptance of the need for a new philosophy of education and training, with institutions of all kinds -formal and informal, traditional and alternative, public and private - having new roles and responsibilities for learning
- the necessity of ensuring that the foundations for lifelong learning are set in place for all citizens during the compulsory years of schooling
- the need to promote a multiple and coherent set of links, pathways and articulations between schooling, work, further education and other agencies offering opportunities for learning across the lifespan
- the importance of governments providing incentives for individuals, educational providers, employers, and the range of social partners with a commitment to learning, to invest in lifelong learning
- the need to ensure that emphasis upon lifelong learning does not re-inforce existing patterns of privilege and widen the existing gap between the advantaged and the disadvantaged, simply on the basis of access to education.

Continued access to education and training for all a country's citizens is seen as an investment in the future, a pre-condition for economic advance, democracy, social cohesion, and personal growth (Chapman and Aspin, 1997).

2. THE NEED FOR A MULTI-FACETED APPROACH TO POLICY DEVELOPMENT

Analyses of the economic context, such as the OECD Jobs Study (1994), have provided a

powerful rationale and justification for the realisation of the idea of lifelong learning. That justification is linked directly to the economic policies and performance of countries and to the concomitant need for the continuing availability of a high-quality, skilled and knowledgeable work force. Lifelong learning provision is essential for both the survival and profitability of business and industry as we enter the twenty-first century.

But this is only one of the goals of lifelong learning. The other goals as agreed by OECD Ministers (1996) - social inclusiveness, democratic engagement, and personal fulfilment - are as important as economic goals, if lifelong learning is to be achieved.

It has been argued (Chapman and Aspin, 1997) that, in setting the agenda for education in the twenty-first century, a comprehensive analysis of the various dimensions and features of the nature, aims and purposes of policies for lifelong learning for all will have to be tackled, and a wide-ranging set of justifications addressing the differences in those aims and purposes provided.

In this way policies and practices pertaining to lifelong learning endeavours are more likely to be developed and articulated in a way that re-inforces a society's appreciation of the need for a multiplicity of initiatives to increase social justice, equality, and the participation of all citizens in its various political arrangements, economic initiatives, social institutions, community and cultural activities.

In recent years policies and practices in the United Kingdom, countries in Europe, and Japan have been particularly effective in achieving lifelong learning goals.

3. POLICY AND PROGRAM CONSIDERATIONS IN AUSTRALIA

In the evolution of policies and programs for lifelong learning, these are early days for Australia, though there is a number of interesting and important developments which are occurring. There is in fact a great deal going on in the way of promoting, developing and assisting the expansion of opportunities for, and programmes of, lifelong learning, both from an official government point of view, from that of the business, industry and commercial sectors, from the standpoint of the education service, and from community initiatives generally. However, to date, advances have been taking place piece-meal and on a number of different fronts. There has been no single, unitary, coherent, and across the board policy in place. There is no over-arching framework, no comprehensive and overall policy. What we have, rather, is a set of fairly pragmatic approaches and advances on a number of fronts. Nevertheless, what is clearly the case is that many agencies, official and unofficial, formal and informal, formal and alternative, are not only addressing issues in the area of lifelong learning, but are actually getting many things done. (Aspin, Chapman and Collard, 2000)

In particular, through a variety of initiatives the Commonwealth government is currently doing much to build sound foundations for lifelong learning. For example, it is seeking to lay such bases by encouraging the development of increased and augmented credit transfer and articulation arrangements and has set up an Australian Qualifications Framework which provides a comprehensive, nationally consistent yet flexible framework for all qualifications in post-compulsory education and training.

Indeed the DETYA Corporate Plan has identified lifelong learning as one of the Minister's strategic priorities. In State governments (such as Tasmania and Victoria) lifelong learning is part of State Government policy, with a concern to develop the requisite skills and

predispositions for engaging in lifelong learning throughout the lifespan. Governments are keen to see social divisions eliminated or at any rate diminished by lifelong learning schemes, programs and courses. An emphasis on Healthy Ageing is one way of doing this: helping people stay as active citizens, social participants, and personal growers. The Commonwealth government is undertaking research on issues pertaining to groups that might be missing out on lifelong learning opportunities. They have several study projects relating to issues on “Youth Falling through the Cracks”, the performance of indigenous students, issues of learning advance as between boys and girls, the learning needs of people and groups of non-English speaking background, rural dwellers, and so on. Funds for lifelong learning initiatives are also being provided through social income-support systems of various kinds. Youth Allowances, for example, now permit young people (for good reason) to drop in and out of study and come back again as and when they feel able. Similarly, government funds to address Programs for Homelessness; Youth Suicide; Job Placement - are all examples of such social support schemes.

There is a number of issues, however, still needing urgently to be tackled: soundly-based analytical and research work is needed on topics such as (a) the realities and options for government in providing lifelong learning (b) demographic and sociological factors influencing participation in Education and Training (c) the econometric factors influencing provision of entry-level training by employers (d) the factors influencing employers provision of continuing education and training (e) the informal factors influencing lifelong learning and education and training in the work-place (f) the provision of lifelong learning opportunities for an ageing population (g) the provision of lifelong learning opportunities for early retirees from industry.

All the above considerations are needed to contribute to the articulation, development and institution of policies for lifelong learning.

4. POLICY PRIORITIES

4.1 ACCEPTANCE OF THE CONCEPT OF CO-INVESTMENT

The idea of lifelong learning clearly implies that, while education may formally start during a period of activity in a compulsory school setting, it will clearly extend far beyond that, continued, extended and developed by experience and activity in a variety of settings, in a range of other institutions, and following a multiplicity of pathways.

This implies that there will be a number of agencies involved in offering opportunities for lifelong learning, some of them formal, some informal, some fairly traditional, some innovatory. It also implies that the individual will assume part responsibility for his / her learning across the lifespan.

Lifelong learning is a concept of co-investment in which government, educational providers, employers, individuals and a range of other social partners work together for their mutual benefit and the achievement of lifelong learning goals.

There is now a wide range of institutions, organisations and agencies that provide educational services and opportunities in some form or other. In addition to schools there are universities, Technical and Further Education (TAFE) Colleges, tertiary education institutions, professional institutes such as the Australian Institute of Engineers or the Australian Institute of Management, hospitals, neighbourhood houses, Broadcasting Corporations, firms and industrial enterprises, trade unions, local councils, Councils of Adult Education, and the University of the Third Age.

We are now entering a stage where the separate, complementary and mutually supportive contributions of a wide range of providers of lifelong learning opportunities need to be taken into account in policy development and various forms of relationship between them made a matter of educational necessity.

4.2 THE DEVELOPMENT OF ARTICULATED PATHWAYS AND PARTNERSHIPS

In the provision of lifelong learning the relationships subsisting between business, universities, schools, and other formal and informal educating agencies in the community need to be subject to review, particularly with regard to their increasing potential to interact easily and fruitfully and so enhance and multiply opportunities for lifelong learning.

From a lifelong learning perspective, business, the community and the university must combine in a mutuality of benefit for individual cognitive advance, for economic development and for community welfare. These relationships cannot lie inert: they must be organic and dynamic.

One of the vital parts of such relationships will be the acknowledgment of the need for clearly defined and flexibly articulated pathways of interaction and connection between them.

These will make possible the definition and demarcation of a whole network of linkages, not merely operating in the same sector of provision and on the same level but also between different levels and sectors.

A good model here is that of the complex articulations of the climbing-frame, in which people do not simply get to the top by one particular route in one single linear and uninterrupted progression. Instead they might well choose to move across, backwards and down before again proceeding along and upwards towards the top in a different area.

This is why people desirous of making use of education services – those coming to climb the frame – will need much advice and assistance in being shown and led to move on to different stages.

Given this model we can now see that, for policies of lifelong learning to be effective, relationships between the various institutions need to accommodate to the range and complex interplay of possible pathways for learners.

Connections and alliances between educating institutions need to be based on a notion of individuality and difference, yet providing comprehensive and interrelated coverage overall. This implies some complementarity among and between separate providers.

Indeed if lifelong learning policies are to be constructive and productive, there ought at best to be some integration of effort and balance among the enterprises and undertakings of the different agencies. Part of this involves an awareness of the value of better co-ordination and synergy in the provision of educational services. Such provision, and a wide awareness of both its existence and the ease with which people may pass through it,

will enable people to make connections with other groups and individuals with related, even if not necessarily similar, learning needs. That way there will gradually emerge a real community of learners.

4.3 PROMOTING THE IDEA OF A LEARNING WORKFORCE

The need for a new approach to the building of partnerships between educational institutions and the business, industrial and commercial sectors arises from the increasing recognition on the part of both the business and education sectors that education and training is now the critical resource for any kind of growth and development for the economy, society, community and the individual. Business and industry will play an increasing role, not only in training their own staff, but also in funding research and development and advanced professional development at the university level. Increasingly corporate education will play an important part in the “climbing frame” of learning, along with more traditional education providers.

One of the commonplaces of the movement for lifelong learning is that the knowledge and skills of a nation's workforce will be foremost among the chief factors in making a country economically competitive.

It is this realisation and the impact of competition that have forced companies to become more sophisticated in their market strategies and in their approaches to the preparation, appointment and deployment of their workforce. Their future employees will be confronted with an ongoing need to change and adapt, and many of them will find this disturbing, possibly even destabilising.

The workforce is faced with the reality that changing forms of paid employment and changes in the skills and competences required to perform in it will necessitate a commitment to continual periods of up-dating of existing knowledge, re-directing old skills and learning new ones. And they may have to do this five or six times in a working lifetime.

Our community's young will be taking jobs in society that have not yet been created or named. In industry it is necessary to keep re-skilling in the use of the latest tools and equipment and, where a firm's workpeople cannot use the latest tools, they must offer opportunities for re-training, re-skilling and possible career re-direction; in future many of a firm's workpeople will be exposed to training on the job as a requirement. This means that firms must institute their own education and training programs and arrange for them to be delivered on site, where, as and when necessary, so that people might learn while continuing to earn. They will also need to arrange for work release for the upward- and multi-skilling of their workpeople, and for other educational providers, industrial concerns or businesses to come together to provide training courses or centres if these are not available through their current provision.

It is important, however, to observe that the involvement of business in lifelong learning must not result in its being conceived in a narrow vocational way. To start from the premise that lifelong learning is only about technical, vocational and economic goals is to risk simply creating or implementing policies for education and training that are narrow, instrumental and predicated upon the present and the particular. The outcome of such policies might well be the emergence of a population whose concerns for further learning are concentrated purely upon the immediate expediencies of employment

objectives and thus make for a society that is narrow and short-sighted in its vision and inward-looking in its concerns.

Thus there will need to be a whole range of general academic and vocational education opportunities made available to all, with parity of importance and esteem given to each and an emphasis upon the diminution and disappearance of separation and division between one group of educands and another. We need to offer educational opportunities of all kinds to the whole populace, for its members are "all our future".

4.4 REASSESSING THE ROLE OF UNIVERSITIES IN THE PROVISION OF LIFELONG LEARNING

Universities have a particularly strong part to play in acting to promote lifelong learning. The importance of universities as key bodies in laying sound foundations for lifelong learning highlights the consequent need for appropriate levels of government funding for their roles.

In major part the initiatives that universities can take in this enterprise spring from the nature and purpose of universities and their traditional role as educating institutions. But just as schools are changing, in response to changing social and economic circumstances, changes in conceptions of knowledge and styles and technologies of learning, so too universities are having to adapt to similar new challenges confronting them. In the case of the universities, the need for this kind of adaptability and flexibility is re-inforced by two major factors – the globalisation of knowledge and the move to mass higher education.

It is becoming increasingly clear that the kinds of education background that many jobs are now requiring cannot be delivered adequately by any single pathway. In this connection one area for further development is the system of double awards and credit transfers that encourage TAFE and university to work together, in combination, interchange, or in sequence.

In response to the need for lifelong learning continuing professional education and postgraduate coursework programs are likely to converge and become more seamless. Strong partnerships will be increasingly important as employers seek to develop contextualized programs for their staff.

It is clear that we must move towards the development for each individual of a portable portfolio of qualifications and credits which they can carry with them throughout life, to different institutions and places of learning with Australia and overseas. The transportable portfolio of qualifications and credits will be an essential part of any genuine lifelong learning scheme. The security of the databases used to construct and maintain these portfolios, and the validity of the information in them, however, must be well funded, carefully planned, and meticulously managed.

Further consideration also needs to be given to funding arrangements for universities to facilitate opportunities for those returning to study after periods in the workforce or fulfilling other roles in society. A broader set of incentives and greater flexibility in modes of delivery, entry requirements and time taken to complete qualifications are needed to facilitate this.

4.5 CONSIDERATION OF THE DEMAND AND SUPPLY OF LIFELONG LEARNING

Although greater importance is being attached by society as a whole to learning beyond schooling the nature and extent of this demand is often difficult to assess. The learning needs expressed by society or the skill requirements of business, industry and the professions are not automatically translated into manifest demands from individuals.

A variety of factors influence participation in learning beyond the years of compulsory schooling:

- the existence of financial and other incentives
- the modes of delivery
- the context in which learning is provided
- the constraints of time and place
- the recognition of credit transfer from providers not traditionally recognized by universities eg firms and industrial enterprises, trade unions, professional associations.

In addition the diversity of the potential learning groups, with their varied needs, learning objectives and propensities to different learning modes and styles, makes direct quantification of the level of this sometimes latent demand difficult.

The diversity of the demand for higher education clearly needs to be matched by diversity of supply. It is important to look closely at the dynamic of demand and supply. This is particularly important at a time when a new financial framework is evolving and key questions are being asked regarding "who pays?"

At a time when the present and future development of higher education is being considered in the context of shared funding responsibilities, employers and individuals who benefit from an investment in learning are increasingly expected, and in some cases required, to contribute. Joint investment can enhance the effectiveness of learning by giving several partners a stake in the outcomes. But there is the danger that financial arrangements will inhibit participation by some groups in society and hence be socially divisive.

A radical approach to funding might include the establishment of a "lifelong learning account" for every Australian, with redeemable "learning dollars" earned through a range of documented activities in our community- from formal education through employment and volunteer service aligned with citizenship goals of governments lifelong learning focus.

Policy needs to be developed on the issue of supply and demand and the implications for funding, equity and participation.

4.6 THE DEVELOPMENT OF INFRASTRUCTURES FOR LEARNING

New demands for lifelong learning are being generated by new government priorities, the demands of a global, knowledge economy, social changes and by the expansion of and proliferation in the range of knowledge and competencies, which each individual is expected to come to possess throughout their lifespan. Developments in the

understanding of the learning process, the conditions needed for successful learning, and advances in technologies of learning are creating the potential for a new kind of learner and new kinds of learning, transcending traditional constraints of age, time and place. Yet although new epistemologies, theories and technologies of learning are emerging, it would appear that higher education has still not adapted sufficiently to make full use of them (Chapman and Aspin, 1997)

This highlights a number of areas for policy consideration (The Context of the Conference – Learning Beyond Schooling, OECD, Paris, December, 1994:4):

- ❖ There is evidence to suggest that adults are most attracted to learning opportunities which depart from the conventional model of didactic and directive teaching. If this is so then there is a need to ask why is more not being done to support self-directed learning?
- ❖ It is widely acknowledged that learning for work is achieved most effectively in the context of the work itself, and that workers are more likely to apply their new competencies when they have been acquired alongside colleagues. This invites us to consider whether the demand for "on site" learning is being catered for adequately in learning provision.
- ❖ Traditional opening hours of educational institutions do not always suit the convenience and/or the varying needs of learners. While many institutions have attempted to become more flexible to meet these needs, study times may still be a constraint that deters potential students from participating in learning. In this connection we might reasonably ask whether providers are sufficiently flexible in their provision of opportunities and facilities so as to enable study opportunities to be available at times and at places suitable for learning and convenient for learners.
- ❖ With new information technology there is scope for a shift in the relationship between teacher and learner towards a more "open" relationship, with the teacher serving as a guide, facilitator or mentor in conjunction with multimedia learning packages. There is also scope for new relationships among learners in taking advantage of electronic networks. Given this, we may reasonably ask whether information technology is being fully utilised and exploited so as to enable people to participate in lifelong learning, and redefine learning provision and learning relationships, rather than simply as a teaching aid in subordination to existing models of teaching/learning delivery.
- ❖ Future technologies enhance the opportunities for distance education. There are many models of distance education whose development will be influenced by both technical and pedagogical developments. Alternative models of organisation, management and delivery need to be considered to enable learners to become more autonomous and be able to "learn from anywhere".

The creation of a new environment for learning depends on the management of complex and difficult changes in institutional cultures, in securing and training of personnel, in funding regimes, and in the intelligent application of communications technologies for educational purposes. This is made all the more important at a time when Australia is having to meet the challenge, not only of the globalization of knowledge but of the globalization of educational provision and certification.

In creating an infrastructure which removes barriers to the universalising of learning beyond schooling and throughout the human life-cycle, there is a need to consider what kind of infrastructure is needed and the specific changes needed to bring it about.

This requires consideration of the transformation of the learner and of the learning culture at places where learning takes place, the facilitation of learning in different places according to the needs of the learner, the effective integration of activities inside and outside the institution of learning, and the move towards multi mode delivery and distance learning.

Infrastructure needs, especially in relation to telecommunications-based delivery, must be addressed through government policies and investment based on commitment to an affordable, appropriate level of universal telecommunications access for all citizens, regardless of location. Universities and TAFE colleges are investing large amounts in the development of on-line and mixed mode distance learning resources. Currently the limited availability of adequate and affordable bandwidth across Australia has caused many of these institutions to focus more intensively on offshore markets to pay the costs of these developments. The result is programs that strengthen knowledge economies abroad while Australia lags behind.

5. CONCLUSION

While in Australia there has been, on the part of many policy makers, educators and community members, a strong commitment to the idea of lifelong learning, until recently there has been much less clarity about the ways in which the term itself is understood and even less about ways in which it may be and should be applied. Thus, although the concept of "lifelong learning" has been used in a wide variety of contexts in Australia and has a wide currency, its meaning has often been unclear and its operationalization and implementation have not been hitherto widely achieved on anything other than a piecemeal basis.

Part of the problem is conceptual in nature (Aspin and Chapman, 2000). One approach to conceptualising lifelong learning conceives of lifelong learning as concerned with the promotion of skills and competences necessary for the development of general capabilities and specific performance in given tasks. Skills and competences developed through programs of lifelong learning will, on this approach, have a bearing on questions of how workers perform in their tackling of specific job responsibilities and tasks and how well they can adapt their general and specific knowledge and competences to new tasks (OECD Jobs Study, 1994). This approach presents us with a very narrow and limited understanding of the nature, aims and purpose of "lifelong education". Nevertheless it is this "instrumental" view that has hitherto dominated approaches to lifelong learning in the Australian educational arena.

We have seen from the recent work of OECD, UNESCO, The European Parliament and The Nordic Council of Ministers, however, that there are much broader and more multi-faceted ways of approaching the conceptualisation of lifelong learning. Instead of seeing education solely as instrumental to the achievement of an extrinsic goal, education may also be perceived as an intrinsically valuable activity, something that is good in and for itself. From this perspective the aim is to enable those engaging in learning, not merely to arrive at a new place but "to travel with a different view". The point here is that those engaging in educational activities would be enriched by having their view of the world continually expanded and transformed by the increasing varieties of educational experience and cognitive achievements that education would offer them for their illumination and enrichment throughout their lives.

This kind of argument reaches its full flowering in the realisation that, for those engaging in lifelong learning, there is continually being made available and expanded a rich range of additional options, from which people may construct a satisfying and enriching pattern of activities and life-enhancing choices for themselves. Lifelong learning offers people the opportunity to bring up to date their knowledge of and enjoyment in activities which they may have either long since laid aside or always wanted to do but were previously unable to do so; to try their hands at activities and pursuits that they had previously imagined were outside their available time or competence; or to work consciously at extending their intellectual, vocational and personal horizons by seeking to understand and grasp some of the more significant advances of recent times, that have done so much to affect and transform their worlds.

From this viewpoint, the expansion of cognitive repertoire and the increasing of skills and competences is an undertaking that can - and indeed, must - continue throughout one's life, as an ineliminable part of one's growth and development as a human being, as a citizen in a participative democracy, and as a productive and efficiently operating agent in a process of economic change and advance.

In 1996 OECD Ministers argued (OECD, 1996) that none of these aims of lifelong learning can really be separated from the other: all three elements interact and cross-fertilise each other. There is a complex inter-play between all three, that makes education for a more highly skilled work force at the same time an education for a better democracy and an inclusive society and a more rewarding life. For this reason, OECD Ministers argued that the whole notion and value of "lifelong learning for all" has to be seen as a complex and multi-faceted process, that begins in pre-school times, is carried on through basic, compulsory and post-compulsory periods of formal education and training, and is then continued throughout life, through provision of such learning experiences, activities and enjoyment in the work-place, in universities and colleges, and in other educational, social and cultural agencies and institutions - of both a formal and informal kind - within the community.

From this position lifelong learning is seen as fundamental to bringing about a more democratic polity and set of social institutions, in which the principles and ideals of social inclusiveness, justice and equity are present, practised and promoted; an economy which is strong, adaptable and competitive; and a richer range of provision of those activities on which individual members of society are able to choose to spend their time and energy, for the personal rewards and satisfactions that they confer. To bring this about nothing less than a substantial re-appraisal of the provision, resourcing and goals of education and training, and a major re-orientation of its direction towards the concept and value of "the learning society", will be required.

This position paper was prepared on behalf of B-HERT Taskforce on Lifelong Learning:
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