

## Brisbane — Towards a Learning City and a City of Learning Communities

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### Abstract

The momentum behind the Learning Cities and Learning Regions movement in Australia has gathered speed in recent years. The Brisbane Learning City model is quite different to those that have emerged nationally. As with other international approaches, lifelong learning is seen as a key platform in supporting community engagement and community development, the sustainable management of the environment and economic growth through innovation. The Brisbane model however operates within a context of rapid population growth and community transformation.

In 2002–2003, South East Queensland (SEQ) experienced 29.1 per cent of Australia's total population growth. The region is predicted to continue attracting an additional 50,000 people each year until 2026 to reach a population of 3,709,000. Brisbane City accounts for 30 per cent of the SEQ region growth. In 2003 the most significant population change in Queensland was in the 45–64 age group. Brisbane has emerged internationally as a recognised City of Learning where international students alone contribute over \$1.3 billion per annum to the city's economy.

This paper will outline the Brisbane City Council Lifelong Learning Program and how it has evolved since 2002. In particular the paper will outline:

- key challenges of lifelong learning for Brisbane
- key drivers for the future direction of the Brisbane City Council Lifelong Learning program
- the specific components of the program — projects and services
- strategic external partnerships
- results to date.

The paper will outline Brisbane's achievements in supporting a culture of learning and in responding to the lifelong learning needs of its many communities within a diverse regional setting.

### 1. Introduction

The momentum behind the *Learning Cities* and *Learning Regions* movement in Australia has gathered speed in recent years. The Brisbane Learning Communities model is emerging as potentially quite different to others nationally. Whilst other Learning Towns and Learning Regions around Australia have sought to apply lifelong learning enablers to foster growth; in Brisbane's case Lifelong Learning and Learning Communities initiatives have sought to manage growth.

Through a range of initiatives the Brisbane City Council's (BCC) lifelong learning program has sought to contribute towards building strong communities in a context of rapid transformation.

In addition to a broad range of informal learning initiatives, the BCC lifelong learning program has recently involved considerable research of learning city and learning community models, a review of the results of BCC's lifelong learning projects to date and consideration of new indicators to help track the successful achievement of lifelong learning and community learning initiatives.<sup>1</sup> The available findings of this research and evaluation of the results of BCC lifelong learning and community learning initiatives to date are combined in this paper. In particular, this paper aims to:

- outline the basis for BCC's recent involvement in lifelong learning to 30 June 2005
- outline the BCC Lifelong Learning program to 30 June 2005
- summarise recent results of the BCC Lifelong Learning program
- identify key drivers of Lifelong Learning in Brisbane and South East Queensland (SEQ) and point to the potential features of an emerging Brisbane Learning Communities model.

## **2. Basis for BCC involvement in lifelong learning**

### **2.1 Policy framework to 2004–05**

The 2004–2008 Brisbane City Council Corporate Plan recognises the need to encourage lifelong learning using libraries and community partnerships.<sup>2</sup> The Brisbane City Council's Informed Communities Strategy 2003 has five key platforms involving activities such as regional libraries, community events, collaboration between learning providers, and community internet access. Under this strategy, together these platforms aimed to:

- use a diverse range of strategies to support people and their communities to learn, grow, collaborate and contribute to supporting each other, their individual communities, their city and the Brisbane City Council objectives to achieve Vision 2010
- acknowledge that Brisbane comprises a multitude of communities including those based on geography, friendships, family, ethnicity, culture, shared interests, workplaces, sport and recreation
- ensure that Brisbane's communities are well placed to contribute to shaping the direction and development of the city, through ensuring effective information channels and addressing access issues
- implement strategies that may be local, regional or city-wide. They may involve information in written form, public education and events, community programs and meetings, use of council community facilities and online services.

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<sup>1</sup> Cavaye and Brisbane City Council 2004, Draft Lifelong Learning Strategy Discussion Paper (unpublished).

## 2.2 How do we define Lifelong Learning in Brisbane?

The 1996 UNESCO report Learning, the Treasure Within (the Delors Report<sup>3</sup>) lists the following four pillars of education:

- Pillar 1: learning to know
- Pillar 2: learning to do
- Pillar 3: learning to live together
- Pillar 4: learning to be.

Learning for Life or 'lifelong learning' has been defined as a cradle-to-grave process involving all types of learning well beyond formal education.<sup>4</sup> Looking more widely at definitions, lifelong learning opportunities are commonly seen as embracing all forms of learning as the basis of economic development, community vitality and personal wellbeing. This includes formal education and training as well as attitude change, experiences, networks, relationships and challenges for people throughout their lives as they interact as part of a community, and recognition of everyday activities as learning. Lifelong learning is seen as supporting citizens and government to use assets in new ways; knowing how to embrace the opportunities of the emerging knowledge economy; developing new skills for employment, business, recreation and building participation in civic life.<sup>5</sup>

Based on the nature of its close working relationships with communities, local government is in a strong position to understand the lifelong learning needs of its communities. However, as the vast bulk of the funding for learning delivery in Australia remains with state government, local government can potentially play an important role as a partner, key facilitator and networker to leverage the capacity of a wide range of organisations and individuals in a community (Figure 1).

## 2.3 What is a Learning City?

We live in what is termed the Learning Age where few things are more important than processes and systems which enable knowledge to be generated, transferred and applied for economic, social and cultural purposes.<sup>6</sup> Learning Cities are consistently described as those that recognise the importance of learning, create a culture of learning, encourage collaboration, and better utilise existing learning assets. A Learning City has learning experiences that are accessible by people at all stages of life and situations.

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<sup>2</sup> Brisbane City Council Corporate Plan 2004–08, p. 21.

<sup>3</sup> <<http://www.unesco.org/delors/fourpil.htm>>.

<sup>4</sup> Brisbane City Council Informed Communities Strategy 2003, p. 17.

<sup>5</sup> Cavaye and Brisbane City Council 2004, Draft Lifelong Learning Strategy Discussion Paper (unpublished).

<sup>6</sup> Kearns P 2004, *Towards a Learning Revolution in Australia*.

The TELS partners<sup>7</sup> describe a Learning Community as a “City, Town or Region which mobilises all its resources in every sector to develop and enrich all its human potential for the fostering of personal growth, the maintenance of social cohesion, and the creation of prosperity.”

As pointed out by Professor Norman Longworth,<sup>8</sup> the concept of the ‘Learning City’ has been with us for some time and should not be confused with the more technologically oriented idea of the ‘smart city’. He explains that although technology has an important part to play, there are many more facets to the construction of a learning society in cities, towns and regions. The European Round Table of Industrialists, representing the 42 largest European Corporations, remarked:

“The Information Society...must be completed and matched by a Learning Society, if we do not want to fall into an over-informed world and a valueless culture based on ‘zapping’ and ‘patchwork’ superficiality” (ERT/CRE: Moving towards a Learning Society).

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<sup>7</sup> Towards a European Learning Society (TELS), <<http://tels.euproject.org/index.cfm>>.

<sup>8</sup> <[http://www.newhorizons.org/strategies/learning\\_environments/longworth.htm](http://www.newhorizons.org/strategies/learning_environments/longworth.htm)>.

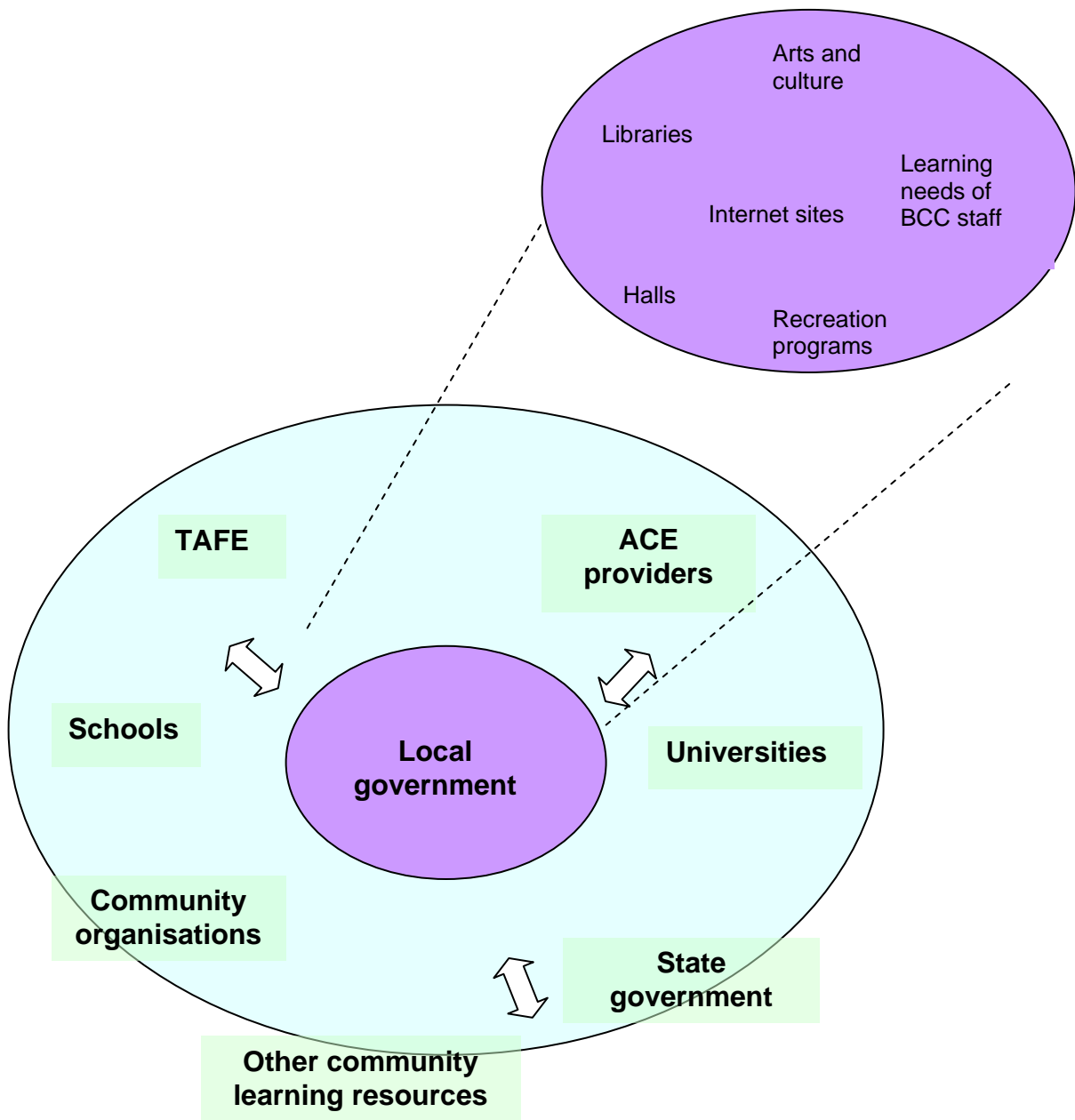


Figure 1. Providers of Lifelong Learning Opportunities<sup>9</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Cavaye and Brisbane City Council 2004, Draft Lifelong Learning Strategy Discussion Paper (unpublished).

## **2.4 What are Learning Communities and what benefits do they bring?<sup>10</sup>**

Learning Communities are collaborative — they share ideas, information and progress with other communities in their immediate location and around the world. A city of learning communities is sited as using the strengths of social and institutional relationships to bring about cultural shifts in perceptions of the value of learning. Learning Cities explicitly use learning as a way of promoting social cohesion, regeneration and economic development which involves all parts of the community to provide local solutions to local challenges. Some of the key community benefits directly linked to lifelong learning by national and international bodies are outlined below.

### ***Stronger and healthier communities***

Learning activities by local governments are often part of broader community capacity building initiatives. A key outcome of lifelong learning is enhanced community networks, social capital and community cohesion. This occurs at the personal and organisational level. People who participate in learning activities see the social networks they develop as very important outcomes of their participation. Lifelong learning also builds collaboration between learning providers and cooperation between government, community and the private sector (Adult Learning Australia 2004).

The Adult Community Education (ACE) sector contributes considerably to social capital in communities (Falk et al. 2000). Falk found that adult education magnified the capacity of networks through people gaining knowledge, confidence and governance skills. ACE was seen as a 'neutral' focus for many stakeholders in communities building links between organisations and individuals. Falk et al. (2000) also found that adult community education had positive community outcomes in all of the ten accepted OECD classes of socio-economic wellbeing such as health, employment, community control, social environment and safety and security.

A focus on lifelong learning can also enhance constructive community debate and support participative governance. It can improve the capacity of citizens to participate in local government, and contribute to forums and other forms of deliberation on challenging local, statewide, national and international issues.

### ***Informed and engaged citizens***

Lifelong Learning opportunities enable individuals to be fully aware of local and wider issues, critically consider public issues, increase knowledge about different cultures and ways of life and empower individuals to make better choices in regard to their personal health and wellbeing. Lifelong learning can also add value to existing formal education opportunities. Recent research

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<sup>10</sup> Adapted from: Cavaye and Brisbane City Council 2004, Draft Lifelong Learning Strategy Discussion Paper (unpublished).

suggests that the areas of learning that people participate most in are gaining information technology skills, young people gaining skills for employment and the pursuit of business and personal interests (Adult Learning Australia 2004). Increased school retention rates, and increasing vocational educational attainment in Victoria is partly attributed to an increased focus on lifelong learning (OECD 2002). Better informed citizens are more likely to feel they can more effectively participate in governance issues within their communities.

Lifelong learning can enhance personal wellbeing and life satisfaction. For example, there is considerable anecdotal evidence that participation in learning can improve health, reduce depression and help people gain more purpose and confidence. Anecdotally, participants in the University of the Third Age have suggested considerable savings in health care for their members due to the wellbeing and social contact derived from their participation in informal learning activities.<sup>11</sup>

### ***Economic development***

Lifelong learning contributes to employment and business activity. It supports citizens in gaining skills and networks to improve their economic input. It helps re-engage unemployed or under-employed people into the workforce. For example, the Jobs in the Neighbourhood initiative in Geelong allowed unemployed people to gain skills and employment through a partnership between local government, private enterprise and community organisations (Geelong Learning City 2003). The Skilling Solutions<sup>12</sup> Queensland initiative aims to take greater steps in Queensland to help recognise skills and knowledge gained outside formal education environments. Lifelong learning also helps economies to adjust to changing circumstances. Learning was a key component in steel workers adjusting to the closure of the BHP Billiton Steelworks in Newcastle. It not only allowed workers to gain skills for further employment but helped the city as a whole to diversify its economy.

The image and profile of learning has attracted businesses to learning communities. For example, in Albury/Wodonga and Ballarat several new businesses that have relocated to the cities felt that the Learning City initiative was a factor in their decision to locate there (Learning City Consultative Council unpublished). Lifelong learning forums and events can also focus attention on economic issues. For example in Ballarat, the Learning City project helped local business leaders develop strategies to manage an ageing workforce.

Learning itself is an important industry. Developing better targeting learning opportunities and increasing access to learning can attract full time, part time and casual learners, increasing the

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<sup>11</sup> Cavaye and Brisbane City Council 2004, Draft Lifelong Learning Strategy Discussion Paper (unpublished).

<sup>12</sup> <<http://www.skillingsolutions.qld.gov.au/index.htm>>.

economic contribution of learning. Brisbane has emerged internationally as a recognised city of learning where international students alone contribute over \$1.3 billion per annum to the City's economy (BCC 2004). To maintain an international profile and successfully compete with other cities for overseas students, educating cities need to demonstrate commitment to learning and embrace a culture of learning.

### ***Essential support for community volunteers***

Volunteers play a crucial role in supporting vibrant communities. The stories collected by Volunteering Queensland and similar organisations worldwide attest to this.<sup>13</sup> The South Australian Government has estimated the value of volunteering in that state in 2000 as \$4980 million.<sup>14</sup> Legislative requirements on volunteer organisations nowadays mean that volunteers require greater skills. By valuing lifelong learning, communities can assist volunteers with training and skilling, improve the quality of the volunteering experience through learning and lead to large and significant community outcomes.

### ***Better use of community assets***

The learning assets of communities are diverse — schools, libraries, museums, galleries, theatres, parks, sporting fields, universities, Internet sites. These assets represent a major investment by local, state and federal government, the community itself and the private sector. Lifelong learning can improve the returns on this investment by increasing use of this infrastructure and maximising community outcomes. This can be achieved by lifelong learning activities that support such as greater access and use of libraries, community use of state and commonwealth government educational infrastructure after hours<sup>15</sup> and greater involvement of community members in providing training and skilling to others.

## **3. Programs and results to date**

### **3.1 Lifelong learning and community learning programs to date**

Since the commencement of the lifelong learning program at Brisbane City Council in 2002 initiatives have principally aimed to develop Learning Communities and establish partnerships for lifelong learning.

To achieve these outcomes the following initiatives have been implemented:

- Series of partnerships with different types of community groups to catalyse their involvement in delivering information and communication technology (ICT) training

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<sup>13</sup> <[http://www.volunteeringqueensland.org.au/story\\_ndx.html](http://www.volunteeringqueensland.org.au/story_ndx.html)>.

<sup>14</sup> Dr Duncan Ironmonger 2002, *Valuing Volunteering – The Economic Value of Volunteering in South Australia*, Office of Volunteering, South Australian Government.

<sup>15</sup> Brisbane City Council and Education Queensland 2003, Community Access to ICT program.

- Community Access to ICTs partnership with Education Queensland (the subject of another paper at this conference)
- Use of council infrastructure and promotion of council programs to better enable lifelong learning opportunities
- Development of multi-purpose community hubs that include learning facilities
- Development of 'Learning Lounges' in council libraries
- Research into the benefits of learning communities and how community development policy frameworks can integrate lifelong learning
- Research into the development of performance measures for learning communities
- Partnerships with the commonwealth and state governments on investigations/consultations on lifelong learning, learning communities and connected communities
- Partnerships with not-for-profit organisations in program delivery and research
- Internal partnerships for building 'learning' components into major planning and development projects
- Internal partnerships to integrate lifelong learning issues into broader community capacity building policy frameworks.

The focus in the initial stage of the program was primarily on library based delivery of lifelong learning opportunities and the establishment of a number of pilot projects to catalyse community participation in ICT-focussed lifelong learning.

The last twelve months saw a move in the program with the aim of establishing further external partnerships with state and commonwealth government agencies, not-for-profit organisations and private developers of learning communities. The recent phase of the program has also aimed to lift the profile of lifelong learning and community learning as a community capacity building enabler. Recent program emphasis has been on working closely with learning providers to: (1) assist their planning for provision for the Brisbane community to ensure delivery targets community priorities are met; (2) play a brokerage role to bring new partners together; and (3) contribute to new policy development and implementation strategies of learning providers. At all stages the program has focussed on increasing access in Brisbane to informal and non-formal learning opportunities as easy entry pathways to ongoing learning.

### **3.2 Results of programs to date**

Based on available data the following table summarises high level outcomes (Table 1). All partnerships have successfully engaged a range of different types of learners in new pathways through the partnerships and programs run by BCC since 2002. In total approximately 13,679 people have benefited from the program with an average satisfaction rating from participants of 92 per cent.

**(i) Community access to ICT partnership with Education Queensland**

This partnership commenced in 2002 after a pilot in 2001. It is now in its third year of a four-year Memorandum of Understanding between BCC and Education Queensland. The project involves calling for applications from schools throughout Brisbane at the beginning of the year to provide basic ICT non-formal training for adults. The emphasis has recently moved to training with ICTs rather than about ICTs. Courses to be offered by schools this year include amongst other options: How to pay bills online?; How to make a family photo album online?; Chatrooms — find out what your children are doing. The program is popular and promotion aims to ensure participation by marginalised groups within the community. The partnership aims to play a part in overcoming the digital divide in society and to both (1) foster the engagement of schools with their communities and (2) provide lifelong learning opportunities that may catalyse further learning by participants. A separate joint paper and presentation by Education Queensland and Brisbane City Council will be provided at this conference.

**(ii) Community Access to ICT partnership with Artrageous Sandgate Community Arts Centre Inc.**

ArtrageIT is a community based provider of non-formal learning programs. It is a subsidiary of Artrageous Sandgate Community Arts Centre Inc which has been running arts and cultural adult education programs since 1999. Under a Service Level Agreement for 2003–04 and 2004–05, ArtrageIT has provided basic ICT training within the Sandgate/Deagon community particularly for disadvantaged groups including elderly and unemployed people and people with a disability. Courses have been pitched at a level and pace suited to client needs. In 2004–05 due to the collocation of ArtrageIT with a community arts centre, a multi-media course was included in the program as a natural synergy and to potentially as an entry point to more formal learning options.

**(iii) Community Access to ICT partnership with the Cathay Community Association**

This program has been running since 2003–04 and provides basic ICT training for senior Chinese people at the Cathay Club in Fortitude Valley, the location of Brisbane's Chinatown. The training is one of many activities available for the club members and is part of a strong commitment of the Chinese community to provide opportunities for their seniors to continue to learn in their later years. A Chinese-speaking facilitator presents the program and translated teaching materials have been provided.

**(iv) Community Access to ICT partnership with the West End Reading and Writing Group**

Members of the West End Reading Writing and Computing Group are either currently living independently in hostels or have recently moved into public housing. Each member has a disability (either physical, intellectual or psychiatric) and needs support to maintain independent living status. In the first year of support for the program, Council contributed towards a Life Skills

for Independent Living course that included training in ICTs. This year support has been for an Indigenous group using relevant components of the program that was initially trialled. As with the ArtrageIT and Cathay Club programs, this program has aimed at:

- providing entry-level training for participants
- contributing to the development of an evidence-base on the benefits of informal training in ICTs including: increases in confidence of participants in using ICTs; satisfaction levels of participants; identifying the most successful and unsuccessful aspects of the program; and ideas for program improvement.
- support for increased use on community online services.

#### **(v) Lifelong Learning in Libraries**

This program has been running for two years and involves one-hour long learning sessions in library meeting rooms throughout the city. A pool of 60 volunteer facilitators run the sessions based on topics of community interest in which they have expertise. Facilitators are required to meet the standards of Council's Code of Conduct and to run the sessions as Learning Circles rather than lectures, concentrating on the collective learning opportunities created. For example, June sessions were:

- Botanic gardens guided walks
- Credit management
- Embroidery for today
- How to minimise your bank fees and Personal and family budgeting
- Music through the ages
- Practical Feng Shui
- Rheumatoid Arthritis
- Speaking with confidence with style.

Other topics have included personal health and wellbeing, community precinct development issues, local history, environmental management and a wide range of others.<sup>16</sup>

#### **(vi) Lifelong Learning through Learning Lounges**

Council has established three Learning Lounges in libraries that provide the opportunity for individual or group learning in a comfortable setting with computers and a range of software provided. Preliminary results only are available on their success in supporting lifelong learning.

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<sup>16</sup> <[http://www.brisbane.qld.gov.au/BCC:STANDARD:908119863;pc=PC\\_1257](http://www.brisbane.qld.gov.au/BCC:STANDARD:908119863;pc=PC_1257)> and <<http://www.ourbrisbane.com/>>.

### **(vii) Learning Circles**

In the past twelve months an emphasis on the need for community capacity building in a fast-changing environment has developed. Learning Circles have been used as community learning methodologies for major town planning and development initiatives. Whilst evaluation of the success of Learning Circles continues with existing projects, results from a recently completed series of five Circles with individuals and existing community groups in regard to the Brisbane Foreshore Redevelopment, produced good results. For this project Learning Circles were held on a range of topics to inform the community on the planning and redevelopment process and to support their future involvement in it. These Learning Circles were rated highly by participants as a positive community learning process (74 per cent), were popular (84 per cent), rated highly as a way of supporting the community to become more involved in council projects (87 per cent) and rated highly as a way of better informing the community about council processes and encouraging individuals to share ideas (80 per cent).

**Table 1. Key results of learning programs established through different learning partnerships to 31 May 2005**

Community Access to ICTs Partnership Project	Partner type	Participant number as at 31 May 2005	Satisfaction with the learning opportunity	Client profile
Education Queensland	State Government	5798 <sup>17</sup>	94 (average)	
ArtrageIT	Artrageous Community Arts Centre	698	98	70% seniors 10% unemployed
Cathay Club	Social club for Chinese community seniors	305	*	Chinese seniors
West End Reading Writing and Computing Group	Community group for adults with learning difficulties	101	*	Adults with a Disability Indigenous adults
Queensland Deaf Society	Peak Body for people with a hearing disability.	154	*	Adults with a disability
Other Partnerships — Use of Learning Lounges, e.g. Somali Community group and Vietnamese	Community groups using Learning Lounges in libraries	2080 per annum <sup>18</sup>	90 (average)	66% women Mainly retired or students. Both individual and group users
Lifelong Learning Sessions in libraries	Internal partnership with BCC Library Services	4543 <sup>19</sup>	85	Age: 35-64 yrs — 63% 41% workers 36% retired Occupation: most common — professional, managers, clerical, sales.
<b>TOTAL participants in 2003/04 and 2004/05</b>		<b>13,679</b>	<b>92 (average)</b>	

\* Awaiting 2004–05 reports.

<sup>17</sup> Estimate as at 31 December 2005. 89-99 per cent of participants agreed that their confidence when using computers and the Internet had increased through the program. 78-96 per cent of participants agreed they would be prepared to pay a small fee. Approx 30 per cent of all eligible schools have participated.

<sup>18</sup> Estimate based on usage of 120 users over six weeks of survey: Learning Lounge Visitor Survey June/July 2004, prepared for Brisbane City Council by ACNielsen. Extrapolated to a two-year figure to give a meaningful indicative total.

<sup>19</sup> For 2003–04 (300 sessions) and estimate for 2004–05 (138 sessions).

### 3.3 Research into Learning Cities and Learning Communities

#### Moving forward — The drivers for Lifelong Learning and Learning Communities in Brisbane<sup>17</sup>

The *Brisbane City Council Strategic Review 2004* identified key issues affecting Brisbane and SEQ populations as: growth; changing demographics and lifestyles; and changes to the way we are working. The review also identified that international trends pointed to civic participation and informed debate as being important aspects of a sustainable approach to the city's growth.<sup>18</sup> Main drivers of international competitiveness are recognised by the work of *Aspire Australia 2025* as our capacity to innovate and by the Business Council of Australia as innovation and adaptability. These findings together with recent research outlined below, point to (1) the need for management of growth to drive community planning in Brisbane and SEQ and (2) to the role learning communities can play in this.

#### **High population growth**

As a net figure, 700 people a week move to Queensland.<sup>19</sup> Overall, Australian growth rates are at 1.2 per cent, Victoria at 1.3 per cent, New South Wales at 0.7 per cent and Queensland at 2.1 per cent. The Queensland population is expected to top four million people by the end of 2005 with half of that growth occurring in Brisbane. Recent figures show that contrary to popular belief, most of the recent new arrivals in Queensland were not retirees or cashed-up baby boomers looking for a 'sea change', but young families in their 20s and 30s who settle in and around Brisbane, and bring their small children up with them.<sup>20</sup> Developing communities have increasing demands for learning opportunities and major development companies such as Delfin Lend Lease are specifically designing communities to foster lifelong learning (Salagaras 2004).

Major planning work is currently underway in SEQ and investment strategies are in development to ensure the social infrastructure required is factored into growth management strategies.<sup>21</sup> The state government has committed to \$55 billion<sup>22</sup> in infrastructure investment over the next twenty years involving some 230 individual projects.

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<sup>17</sup> Parts adapted from Cavaye and Brisbane City Council 2004, Draft Lifelong Learning Strategy Discussion Paper (unpublished).

<sup>18</sup> Brisbane City Council Strategic Planning and Policy, Strategic Review, September 2004.

<sup>19</sup> Department of Local Government and Planning, Population Growth Highlights and Trends 2005, Queensland.

<sup>20</sup> Quoting Ross Barker, Queensland Planning and Forecasting Unit, *The Australian*, 18 May 2005, p. 4.

<sup>21</sup> Office of Urban Management, South East Queensland Infrastructure Plan and Program 2005–2026, Queensland Government.

<sup>22</sup> <[http://www.oum.qld.gov.au/docs/Minister/SEQIPP\\_main.pdf](http://www.oum.qld.gov.au/docs/Minister/SEQIPP_main.pdf)>.

## **Ageing**

In 2003, the most significant population change in Queensland was in the 45 –64 age group. In Australia, the percentage of the population over 65 years is expected to at least double from 12.7 per cent to 27.1 per cent from 2002 to 2051 respectively (ABS 2003). Over the same period, the median age is expected to increase from 35.3 years to 46.8 years. Despite recent data, ABS projections suggest that the ageing of the Queensland population is expected to be more pronounced with the proportion of the population over 65 years increasing by 2.3 times (ABS 2003). The Queensland Government has described ageing “as one of the most significant demographic trends shaping our world” (Office of Economic and Statistical Research 2003). The average life expectancy of Australian’s now ranks fourth in the world at 80 years. Older people are choosing to be active and involved in community life (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2004).

The current public debate about the retirement age in Australia is suggesting the need for older workers to diversify their roles and stay at work longer. The recent release of the *ICT Employment and Training Strategy Advisory Document for Consultation* and the establishment of Skilling Solutions are both initiatives strongly linked to the Queensland Government’s Smart State strategy. Together they point to the importance (and validity) of non-formal learning and the need for easy entry to learning opportunities for disengaged adults wishing to re-enter or stay in the workforce. The Lifelong Learning Council of Queensland advocates the need for a State Policy on Informal Adult (Post-compulsory) Learning that encompasses the breadth of adult and community education with the goal of promoting lifelong learning in Queensland.<sup>23</sup>

## **Changing nature of work**

Major changes in employment are occurring with increased home based businesses, and greater outsourcing, contract and pay-by-the-piece manufacturing work. Australia has amongst the highest rates of part-time and casual work amongst all OECD nations (OECD 2001). People are also retiring earlier and moving into self managed work (ABS 2000a). Workers are also changing jobs and careers much more frequently. Today’s school leavers are expected to have at least three different careers in their lifetime. These shifts place increased importance on appropriate learning — formal and informal — for people to gain and maintain appropriate skills and knowledge, and to adapt to changing work situations. Informal learning is recognised as a pathway for youth and adults disengaged early in life from formal education to re-enter learning.

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<sup>23</sup> Lifelong Learning and Adult and Community Learning: A discussion paper for developing a whole-of-government policy for Queensland (2002).

### ***Technology: Both the digital and the learning divide***

The rapid change in information and communication technology places increased demand on the need for people to develop ICT skills both for employment and everyday life. Without appropriate learning opportunities, there is an ongoing risk of an increased 'digital divide' where some citizens become alienated and unable to participate effectively in society because of their limited access, knowledge and confidence with information technology. This can lead to a learning divide where people have a subsequent lack of learning opportunities.

A submission from the Department of Communications Information Technology and the Arts<sup>24</sup> to the recent Senate Inquiry into Lifelong Learning pointed out that older people have been identified as a disadvantaged group in the information economy through not having the same opportunities as their younger counterparts to become information literate. Research undertaken by the Australian Council for Adult Literacy in 2001 has shown that many Australians over the age of 45 years do not have the foundation skills necessary to participate effectively in daily life and only half of this age group have literacy skills of a sufficient standard that would enable them to cope with the material they would be confronted with daily.

### ***Globalisation and the knowledge economy***

Global industry competition, free trade agreements, and reduced tariffs have seen some traditional industries struggle in favour of new knowledge and service based sectors. Even the benchmark economies of Japan and Germany have faced major structural problems while major opportunities have arisen, such as Australia's links with Asia. Globalisation and the development of the knowledge economy are increasing pressure on cities and regions to innovate and manage change. Lifelong learning and knowledge sharing are crucial to development of these attributes throughout the community.

Learning itself is becoming an increasingly important economic driver for Brisbane. For example, a recent Brisbane City Council study showed that international students contribute \$1.3 billion per annum into the city's economy (Brisbane City Council 2004). This input is expected to increase sixfold over the next 20 years. Educational services are now Queensland's third largest export earner.

### ***Regional and state initiatives***

The achievement of many commonwealth and state government community, economic development and environmental management initiatives can be significantly assisted through investment in lifelong learning. In particular, the Smart State focus of the Queensland Government and the recent establishment of the Department of Communities emphasises the

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<sup>24</sup> Department of Communications, Information Technology and the Arts submission to the Senate Inquiry into progress and future direction of lifelong learning, June 2004.

need for community capacity building and improved adult skills state-wide. This creates a positive environment to foster lifelong learning through potential partnerships.

### ***Adult and Community Education as an easy entry point into learning***

The development of Brisbane as a City of Education and Queensland as a Smart State could be supported by greater state government funding for Adult and Community Education (ACE) at both levels. ACE is one of the key areas of delivery of lifelong learning, offering informal and non-formal learning opportunities to adults as pathways to further learning or re-engagement in formal training for employment. The success of community-located ACE programs is in large part attributed to the easy-entry, non-threatening learning environments it offers. Despite this, in Queensland the vast majority of all non-formal adult learning opportunities available can only be accessed through attendance in a formal TAFE environment.

Queensland Government support of ACE organisations is significantly lower than by state governments in Victoria and New South Wales. In 2002, the investment in Queensland ACE organisations was \$647,000 compared with \$31,027,000 in Victoria and \$16,690,000 in New South Wales (ANTA 2002). This comparative shortfall in public funding is partially met by fees. Queenslanders personally paid fees of \$2,965,000 to attend ACE organisation programs in 2003. As a result, Queenslanders paid more than a third of the national fee total demonstrating strong community support for community-based ACE delivery. Where funding to ACE organisations is minimised, the opportunity to build the capacity for the involvement of community-based organisations in the delivery of community services is lost.

### ***Working towards a new Lifelong Learning and Community Learning model for Brisbane***

There are 38 declared learning communities in Australia including Albury/Wodonga, Newcastle, Port Augusta, Bundaberg, and Toowoomba.<sup>25</sup> There are many declared Learning Cities around the world including Birmingham, Nottingham and Edinburgh in the United Kingdom; Edmonton in Canada; Beijing in China; Sannois in France; and Auckland in New Zealand. A review of the strategies and initiatives of the following Learning towns/cities was carried out to identify successful approaches: Adelaide (South Australia), Geelong (Victoria), Parramatta City Council (New South Wales), Hume City Council (Victoria), Shire of Yarra Ranges (Victoria), Victorian Learning Community Network, Edinburgh (United Kingdom), Norwich (United Kingdom) and Espoo (Finland).

Despite the increasing availability of anecdotal data there has been little Australian research completed which provides an evidence-base for the support of investment in lifelong learning and learning communities. The work of Adult Learning Australia in establishing the Learning

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<sup>25</sup> Cavaye and Brisbane City Council 2004, Draft Lifelong Learning Strategy Discussion Paper (unpublished).

Communities Catalyst<sup>26</sup> and the growth of the Australian Learning Communities Network aims to fill this gap over time. In the absence of a clear value proposition, the views of stakeholders in Brisbane on the benefits of lifelong learning and opportunities to expand current services (and evaluate outcomes) were recently tested through a series of workshops with community representatives, senior state government agency officers and senior officers of Brisbane City Council.

Based on the results of workshops and on a review of available research and literature, the key 'learning community' characteristics relevant to the development of a Brisbane Learning Communities model were grouped as listed in Table 3.

**Table 3. Brisbane Learning Communities model<sup>27</sup>**

<p>A Learning Community model for Brisbane could aim at the following outcomes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The ability to plan, adapt and take advantage of emerging community and economic development opportunities as they arise and to anticipate and manage change</li><li>• A city better positioned to protect its environment, foster harmonious social interaction, attract economic development and build on its arts, culture and heritage</li><li>• Extensive and appropriate avenues for community deliberation and participation in decision-making</li><li>• A high degree of social capital with strong networks and links between individuals and between community groups leading to greater community resilience and an ability to quickly and collectively respond to challenges</li><li>• Equitable and comprehensive informal and formal learning opportunities for all ages including community-based Adult and Community Education based on a culture that values learning and discovery</li><li>• Planning systems and delivery of community services that demonstrate an understanding of how they can facilitate learning — such as public transport enabling easy access to learning assets such as libraries, museums and community organisation</li><li>• Learning assets such as libraries, schools and educational institutions that are engaged with the community and are aware of and responsive to emerging learning needs</li><li>• Equitable access to ICTs for learning such as broad community access to the Internet and high levels of ICT literacy</li><li>• Engagement of all levels of government, private enterprise, and community organisations in innovative learning partnerships fostering lifelong learning in the community.</li></ul>
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<sup>26</sup> See <<http://www.lcc.gov.au>>.

<sup>27</sup> Cavaye and Brisbane City Council 2004, Draft Lifelong Learning Strategy Discussion Paper (unpublished).

In addition, several lessons for the development of successful 'learning community' initiatives were found including:

- Australian local governments involved in supporting the development of learning communities have typically played important initiating, coordinating and partnering roles
- Many initiatives relied on partnerships but a champion was required to negotiate involvement and maintain collaboration
- Participation in learning initiatives is driven by motivation and concrete benefits
- Most Learning City initiatives depend on small achievable steps, dedicated funding and continuity of staff to sustain momentum.

Further research has since identified:

- potential performance indicators that could be applied to the implementation of a Learning Communities model as outlined in Table 3
- the types of initiatives that have had success in a local government context in promoting lifelong learning and the growth of learning communities.

#### **4. Conclusion**

In recent years Brisbane City Council has aimed at making a contribution at a local government level to overcoming both the 'digital divide' and the growing 'learning divide' through supporting lifelong learning and the growth of learning communities. This has involved investment in partnerships with a number of community-based learning providers and schools throughout Brisbane. These partnerships have demonstrated success and have benefited 13,679 Brisbane residents. Investment has however been within the limits of the role of local government and its ability to support systemic change.

Brisbane and SEQ are in rapid growth mode. Planning for growth and managing growth currently dominate the policy agenda. Supporting the maintenance and development of strong communities in this climate is the paramount challenge for planners and community development practitioners at all levels of government and in community groups.

Lifelong learning programs and the development of learning communities are emerging as potentially key components of community capacity building in the city. It is recognised that lifelong learning internationally has demonstrated its ability to contribute to the growth of resilient and inclusive communities, and, communities that are actively involved in the management and future development of their neighbourhoods and wider catchments.

Particular pressures on Brisbane and South East Queensland are supporting the emergence of a Learning Communities model that can support community capacity building through an integrated approach to infrastructure development and through new and innovative partnerships that can quickly respond to the needs of communities in transition.

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#### Appendix 1. Examples of lifelong learning already underway in Brisbane City Council

Program	Description	Relevant Council Area
Lifelong learning sessions in libraries	Learning circles on a range of topics related to personal and community well being aimed to encourage participants to use council libraries, participate in other council learning programs and assist participants into self-directed learning.	Community Information Branch, Community and Economic Development
Recreation Programs	These often have a learning aspect, e.g. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• City Entertainment (free concerts)</li> <li>• Chill Out (sporting, cultural and art activities for young people 12-16)</li> <li>• GOLD (non-traditional activities for Seniors)</li> <li>• GOLD'n'kids (older people and young children participating in leisure activities – intergenerational learning)</li> <li>• Black Diamonds (sport, recreation and art activities for young Indigenous people which involve education, training and personal development)</li> <li>• RAW (non-traditional activities for women)</li> </ul>	Community and Lifestyle, CED/Community Development Services, CCS
History and Heritage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Heritage Trails</li> <li>• Heritage Network across Brisbane</li> <li>• Research the History of your house</li> </ul>	Heritage Unit, City Planning, Urban Management
Active and Healthy	Active and Healthy activities in 65 parks around	Community and Lifestyle,

	Brisbane	CED
Social History/ Museum of Brisbane	MoB provides exhibits as well as learning programs for children and adults around social history, visual arts and crafts	Community and Lifestyle, CED/Community Development Services, CCS
Mt Coot-tha Botanic Gardens	Guided tours and information on identifying and learning about plants	City Botanic Gardens, Local Asset Services, CCS
Responsible pet ownership	Learn about managing your pet considerately and responsibly	Pollution Prevention Health & Safety
Planetarium	Educational resource including astronomy programs and displays	City Venues, City Business
Active Travel Program	The program encourages children to travel safely to school via walking, cycling and the use of public transport	Traffic and Transport, Urban Management
Travel Right Program	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• TravelRight is an environmental education program targeted at Year 6 and 7 students.</li> <li>• The program aims to reduce air pollution from motor vehicle emissions by informing students and their families about their transport choices</li> </ul>	Traffic and Transport, Urban Management
Youth	Visible Ink provides direct pathways for young people to have a say in Council's programs. Visible Ink is about Brisbane City Council working together with young people.	Social Policy, CED
Habitat Brisbane	Assists Community groups with Habitat Restoration in Parks (including a local community education and promotion role)	Environment & Parks, Urban Management
Clean and Green Living	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A virtual 'Green Home' providing info. on making your home environmentally sustainable</li> <li>• Recycling program (currently working on an online module to teach schools about setting up a recycling program)</li> </ul>	Pollution Prevention Health & Safety, Community and Economic Development
Water Quality	Produce fact sheets on stopping stormwater pollution	Water Resources, Urban Management
Pest and Weed Control	Provide the free Green Garden Guide (incl. information on weed identification and removal)	Environment & Parks, Urban Management
Water Conservation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Encouraging Rainwater tanks</li> <li>• Watersense Blue Van, which raises community awareness of water consumption and encourages use of water efficient devices inside and outside</li> </ul>	Water Resources, Urban Management

	the home	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Waterwise program for school students</li></ul>	