Framework for learning in local areas

A new report *Learning Community Framework and Measuring Impact Toolkit* published by the Australian Centre of Excellence for Local Government (ACELG) links the idea of learning partnerships between councils, their communities and learning organisations internationally to the UNESCO 'Key Features of Learning Cities' framework.

The report builds upon a 2013 ACELG research project 'Learning as a Driver for Change' that examined how learning partnerships can help improve social outcomes, build community capability and strengthen community governance.

"Due to its proximity and responsiveness to communities, local government is well placed to take up the UNESCO aims locally," said ACELG Director, Associate Professor Roberta Ryan. "This report will help develop innovative strategies for citizens to learn new skills and to shift local cities and centres into 'learning cities'. This can only have positive social and economic results within local areas."

The research was developed by Dr Leone Wheeler, Dr Shanti Wong and Peter Blunden as a Partnership project between the Australian Learning Communities Network (ACLN), Melton City Council (VIC) and Gwydir Shire Council (NSW) and ACELG.

This project includes an in-depth case study from Melton City Council about its learning community approach, and complements earlier case studies from Hume and Gwydir councils developed for the 2013 ACELG project.

Max Eastcott, General Manager of Gwydir Shire Council in regional NSW, and lead agent for the current project commented:
"The case studies across the two ACELG projects demonstrate the importance and value of Council involvement in new partnerships and Council involvement with the social infrastructure of rural and remote communities and metropolitan communities. People want to build social capital and create their own positive options for the future. I am pleased with what we've achieved at our council and with the ACELG partnership."

Volume 1 of the new report includes a literature review with a key focus on evaluation frameworks; an in-depth case study on the City of Melton (VIC) and its evaluation practices; and background information on the development of the ACELG *Measuring Impact Toolkit*. This is designed to aid local government practitioners create, adopt, and evaluate a Community Learning Plan for their local government area.

Volume 2 is the accompanying Toolkit to the Learning Communities Framework. Designed as a practical resource, it provides templates for planning, reporting and evaluation, and includes other examples of Community Learning Plans.

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Jim Saleeba, CEO of the Australian Learning Communities Network (ACLN) said "The Learning as a Driver for Change project, together with this Toolkit provides a body of knowledge that will be valuable to other councils across Australia wanting to support a culture of learning in their communities. The ACLN would like to acknowledge the assistance from ACELG in getting behind this important research."

Research partner Melton City Council has a positive story to tell about the role of learning communities in its council area. Mayor Sophie Ramsay continues:
"Through the Melton Community Learning Board, Council has demonstrated the many benefits of this approach, including improved employment opportunities to reduce disadvantage and improve quality of life in our community. We are pleased to be able to contribute the knowledge we have gained over the past 16 years of the project to ACELG. It is particularly pleasing that this work has also been recognised by UNESCO."

Key aspects of the report will be presented to the UNESCO International Conference on Learning Cities to be held in Mexico City in September 2015.

The *Learning Community Framework and Measuring Impact Toolkit* can be downloaded from www.acelg.org.au

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Further information or comment:
Melissa Gibbs, Deputy Director, ACELG
Mobile: 0412 647 233
Email: Melissa.Gibbs@uts.edu.au

Images to accompany the release can be accessed
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