

National Conversation on Learning

Key Themes from the Consultations Held Across Australia for the Lifelong Learning Project

1. There was general agreement in all meetings that the concept of lifelong learning was not well understood in Australian society, and was commonly confused with access to the formal education system.
 - There was consequently limited understanding of the relevance of learning throughout life to the 21st century imperatives set out in the discussion paper.
 - Lifelong learning was seldom seen as a survival issue.
2. There was a consensus in meetings that lifelong learning should be seen as including formal, non-formal, and informal modes of learning, with informal learning in many contexts increasingly important.
3. There was a general recognition that comprehensive connected strategies were needed to ensure that the wider benefits of learning were achieved across sectors such as health, welfare, supporting families and communities, and building social and identity capital.
 - The conceptual model adopted for the project involving human, social, and identity capital was seen as useful.
4. The four scenarios in the discussion paper were generally not seen as options, but rather most meetings considered that all options were needed.
 - In particular, the view was commonly expressed that a national framework was needed to support local initiatives.
 - The growing significance of civil society attracted attention.
5. There was wide agreement that local community initiatives of various kinds to build community learning partnerships should be seen as the foundation for building Australia as an inclusive learning society.
6. The relevance of the key drivers in the discussion paper (globalisation, demographic change, knowledge economy etc) was recognised. Suggested additions to this list included diversity, shifts in lifestyle, and the major global issues such as those set out in (14) below.
7. There was wide agreement that holistic strategies were required that integrated social, economic, educational, and cultural objectives.
8. While Australia lacks a national framework for lifelong learning, a wide range of good practice examples were cited during the consultations.
9. There are signs of change in some States in a move towards greater recognition that lifelong learning is required in a context of exponential change
 - Tasmania provides a good example of a comprehensive approach underpinned by a policy and conceptual framework set out in two reports on lifelong learning.

10. A significant development lies in the development of mechanisms in two States to integrate learning and skill strategies and to replace former State training authorities.
11. The key role of technology in supporting learning in many contexts was widely recognised in the consultations.
 - The need to ensure that all Australians achieved digital literacy was a major theme.
12. The growing interest of local government councils in learning community strategies was evident. While initiatives such as the Hume Global Learning Village, Yarra Ranges Learning Communities, Marion, and Salisbury provide examples where an explicit learning community vision exists, in other cases (such as Brisbane City Council) a number of projects are widening learning opportunities without an explicit badging linked to lifelong learning.
13. There was general interest in the role of public libraries as community learning centres, and a persistent view that this role will extend.
14. Some consultations, although not all, considered that a learning society development needed to be underpinned by a vision of Australian society that included addressing major issues such as environment, sustainability, and the implications of growing diversity in Australian society and globally.

Comments on any of these points are invited, and may be sent to me before 30 April at p.kearns@netspeed.com.au (telephone 02/62314125)

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