

CEO Report on UNESCO 2nd International Conference on Learning Cities, Mexico City 2015

Background

The Melton City Council Plan and subsidiary strategic document “Community Learning Plan” emphasise how Melton City Council Plan our communities through development of Precinct Structure Plans’, early delivery of Council facilities, services and programs that build communities including economic development, social planning , environment and culture. Melton City Council Learning Plan 2015-2018 is the fifth Learning Plan adopted by Council which clearly establishes it as one of the early adopters of the Learning Cities Concept.

Lifelong Learning is an essential survival feature of humanity and can be evidenced in most progressive cultures. The 21st century is a fast changing world where social, economic and political norms are constantly being redefined and studies have shown that lifelong learners, citizens who acquire new knowledge, skills and attitudes in a wide range of contexts are better equipped to adapt to changes in their environments.

Leadership is extremely important in the development and sustainability of Learning Communities and Local Government is a significant player in this leadership role.

It is in this context that Melton City Council determined at 23 June Council Meeting that the Mayor, Chief Executive and Lifelong Learning Coordinator should attend and participate in the UNESCO 2nd International Conference on Learning Cities held in Mexico City from the 28-30 September 2015.

Conference Highlights – Melton City Council

Councillors will be aware that Melton City Council was one of twelve case studies of Learning Cities featured in the publication entitled ‘Unlocking the Potential of Urban Communities’ produced by the UNESCO Institute of Life Long Learning. At the 2nd International Conference, each of the twelve cities featured in that publication were awarded the UNESCO Learning City Award 2015. This was indeed a significant acknowledgement of the work of Council over a substantial period to develop a Learning Community through partnership, early delivery of infrastructure, services and facilities, and commitment to community development.

The prominence of Melton City Council as a Learning Community was further evidenced by the invitation to Peter Blunden, Lifelong Learning Coordinator, to be a presenter at the conference in the session focusing on “Measurement of Outcomes from Learning Cities”. Mr Blunden was instrumental in the development of the “Collective Impact Assessment Tool” in association with Dr Shanti Wong and Dr Leonie Wheeler, which is a unique methodology for assessing the collective impact of partners engaged in Learning Community activities. The presentation was extremely well received by delegates at the conference, and many enquiries have been generated in relation to the use of the measurement tool.

Mayor Cr Ramsey, was invited to nominate as the Chair of the “Conference Statement on Sustainable Learning Cities Drafting Committee”. This select committee of noted academics, UNESCO representatives and leading Lifelong Learning practitioners, was charged with the significant responsibility of drafting the Statement from the Conference to guide UNESCO member nations on Sustainable Learning Communities over the next three years until the 3rd International Conference is to be held.

This invitation which was later endorsed by the 700+ delegates from over 90 nations participating in the conference, reflected very positively on Council’s standing within the International Learning Community and was indeed a significant honour for both Council and the Mayor. The Mayor was very capably supported in this key role by Mr Blunden and their work in guiding the committee and producing a high quality statement was broadly acknowledged by the UNESCO leadership at the conference.

Key Learnings from the Conference

During the course of the conference there were a number of presentations of specific relevance and interest to a city such as Melton City Council. The highlights from my point of view were the following.

1. In the opening session, French Philosopher and Author Mr Gilles Lipovetsky, focused on the established framework from the 1st International Learning Cities Conference held in Beijing for the establishment of Learning Cities and commented that from his assessment, the missing or under emphasised element within the framework was the importance of the Arts and culture to the development of a Learning Community. This point was expanded on in some detail and the argument proposed was quite convincing in that the Arts provided a significant medium for community engagement, community development and community learning.

When reflecting on this and the Melton Learning Plan, I believe that it is an element that is not adequately picked up through the Melton Learning Plan, although it could be considered to be brought in under the Culture theme identified in the Community Learning Board’s Mission. I do believe there is a significant opportunity for Council, currently with its Arts Officer position vacant, to re-define and re-focus this role to more closely align with the community development theme through engaging with schools and particularly Arts Programs within schools, to foster a post formal education enthusiasm within the community for developing Community Arts Programs from the grass roots up. Previously the Arts Officer position in Melton had a primary focus on Public Art, and whilst this is commendable from a community pride point of view, it does little to engage the community in the broader Arts and develop the Learning Community theme. This opportunity needs to be further pursued through the Learning Board and through discussion with the Community Planning unit of Council, as the Arts Officer position currently sits within the Events unit.

2. Mr Jose Garcia Mayor of the City of Balanga Philippines, delivered a very inspiring presentation in relation to initiatives this relatively small community has undertaken to develop as a Learning Community. He firstly spoke about the importance of parenting to children gaining an early appreciation of the importance of education. This in some ways mirrors or reflects Council's approach through the Early Years Program, particularly "Best Start" and the Program now funded under Medicare Local funding of "Growing Children".

Under the Parenting Program at the City of Balanga, some 8,000 parents have participated in a Parent Education Program specifically designed to address the key issues around parenting within that community, elevate parents understanding of the importance of education and assisting in skilling parents with little formal education to assist educators in developing their children. A second program run by this community was where it developed a Leadership Management Program for 500 identified community leaders who ran not for profit committees, clubs, sporting associations etc within their community. The program sought to provide management skills to those individuals so they could enhance the operation of the committees or organisations they were involved with so as those organisations in turn could better lead the community down the ongoing community development path. The third program he spoke about was their "Go 4 Health" Program in which they branded many initiatives with the Go 4 Health logo to emphasise that to learn, one needs to be in a positive health situation and healthy eating, healthy cooking, healthy lifestyle, all contributed to community capacity to absorb information, to grow and to learn.

All of these concepts have to some degree been taken up by Council, however I believe there is opportunity to further expand on this through the already funded programs that Council have, and this matter will be discussed and the potential fully explored through the Children's Services unit within the Community Services directorate.

3. By contrast the Mayor of the City of Dublin spoke at some length about her pride in the Mayoral Education Awards Program that had been implemented at Dublin. This program sought to recognise students and community members who had risen above the norm and had displayed a great determination and resourcefulness to achieve at a high level. She also spoke at some length about the Annual Youth Mayor Competition which was run whereby the successful applicant was appointed Youth Mayor and was mentored by the Mayor which is a program that may be able to be incorporated into Council's Youth Council Program.

Regional Forum

The last session of the underlying program at the conference explored the potential for the establishment of Regional Forums with one to cover the Asia and Pacific Region. From listening to the debate around this matter I believe that there is not a real requirement for a physical forum, however a virtual forum conducted online, I believe would have significant potential and this is a matter that I believe should be further considered and discussed at

the Melton Learning Board, and will doubtless form part of the presentation to that Board by Peter Blunden in his report on the conference.

Costs

At this stage not all costs are to hand and further detail will be provided once all international; exchange rate adjustments and credit card vouchers have been received in the office, however, indicative costs at this stage are on a per person basis.

<u>Cost</u>	<u>Budget</u>	<u>Actual</u>
Airfares	\$2,500	\$2,808
Accom	\$1,500	\$1,040
Meals	\$ 250	\$ 230
Transfers	\$ 200	\$ 150
Incidentals\$	Nil	\$ 150
<u>TOTAL</u>	\$4,450	\$4,378