



Friday Forum notes 22/9/23

Lifelong Learning for Life and Work

ALCN Friday Forum in partnership with RMIT University

Leone Wheeler introduced speakers and acknowledgment of Country

In George Osborne's keynote speech as the Manager of Economic Development at Hume City Council, he emphasized the importance of economic inclusion and extended the learning city approach to regional economic development programs. He highlighted the diverse demographics of Hume City, with over 150 languages spoken, a wide variety of businesses, and a population exceeding 250,000. Despite having the highest unemployment rate in Victoria, Hume City has been successful in reducing its unemployment rate rapidly and achieving stronger-than-average economic growth. George also discussed challenges related to recognizing overseas skills and lower levels of tertiary qualifications.

In terms of key economic indicators, Hume City boasts a Gross Regional Product of \$16.7 billion and more than 26,000 local businesses. To address job-related issues, Hume City has adopted an innovative approach, focusing on connecting local businesses with residents, especially those facing long-term disadvantages in terms of job readiness. This is achieved through a place-based approach and initiatives such as the Social and Economic Development Program (SEED) that emphasizes local employment opportunities. Hume City also leverages partnerships, with a particular emphasis on the circular economy and StartNorth, a business hub for startups. They have established the Hume Jobs and Skills Task Force to attract funding and support various projects, including the creation of an Amazon distribution warehouse set to create 200 ongoing jobs.

The Hume Multiversity, through strong partnerships, offers a wide range of courses aligned with business needs and has entered into MOUs with various partners for programs, infrastructure, and scholarships. George mentioned the Council's significant impact on employment programs, including support for the recognition of overseas qualifications and pathways for certificate holders to pursue degree programs. They have collaborated with La Trobe University and other Registered Training Organizations (RTOs) to facilitate training pathways. Furthermore, George discussed the provision of co-working space, including a satellite library with relevant resources for newcomers, as well as initiatives aimed at introducing migrants to the Australian workforce, language courses, and mentoring programs.

Maren Klein, introduced by Bruce Wilson, delved into the topic of "Learning and/or Earning: Tensions between learning for the economic sphere (jobs) and learning for well-being/democracy." Maren raised the fundamental question of the purpose of education and learning, contrasting the perspectives of the OECD and UNESCO.

The OECD initially viewed education as a means of supporting the economy but shifted its stance in 2018 to acknowledge the role of education in building resilience and adaptation while still emphasizing economic aspects. UNESCO, on the other hand, views education as applied education, with different universities engaging students in various ways. Adult education has been called upon to reconsider the purpose of education, especially in the context of the evolving "world of work" since 1976.

Maren emphasized that the linear transition from education to work is no longer relevant, as adults now follow complex and varied trajectories. Education is seen as more than just an economic transaction; it holds both private and public value.

Maren discussed the tensions and barriers faced by adult learners, including the cost of education, time pressures, family commitments, and access to programs. To address these challenges, she proposed solutions such as credit recognition through Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL), the use of micro-credentials (despite challenges in variety and cost), and the ability to study and work simultaneously. Maren also mentioned the German dual study program, which combines advanced theoretical knowledge with work components, as a successful model.

Bruce Wilson added that in today's volatile environment, knowledge is paramount, and achieving a balance between learning and earning is crucial for individuals and organizations. He emphasized the importance of how knowledge is acquired and applied in both personal and organizational contexts.

Summary by Silvia Velez, 22/9/23

18 attendees online, 47 registered