

SUMMARY NOTES

Capturing the Learner's Voice & Supporting Lifelong Learning Pathways – 28 March 2025

- **Acknowledgement of Country:** An acknowledgement was given to recognise and respect the Traditional Custodians of the lands.
- **Purpose:** The forum explored methods to amplify learner voices, share impactful case studies, and discuss practical strategies for lifelong learning initiatives.
- **Discussion Highlights:**
 - Case studies from LearNWest, Learning for Earning, and RMIT showcased effective ways to engage learners and support community-driven learning pathways.
 - Innovative tools, storytelling approaches, and collaboration across councils and networks were emphasised as key to success.
- **Next Steps:** Encourage ongoing collaboration, implement practical strategies, and engage with learning networks to build inclusive pathways shaped by learners.

Case Study 1: LearNWest Learner Stories Project

Overview: LearNWest is a collaborative network of seven councils (Wyndham, Melton, Brimbank, Hobsons Bay, Maribyrnong, Hume, and Darebin) aimed at connecting learning practitioners across Melbourne's North and West. The Learner Stories Project was launched during Adult Learners Week 2023 to showcase diverse lifelong learning journeys and amplify the learner's voice.

Objectives:

1. To inspire participation and engagement by showcasing relatable learning pathways.
2. To provide evidence for influencing policy, funding, and program design.
3. To foster inclusivity and ensure the learner's perspective remains integral to lifelong learning initiatives.

Key Outcomes:

- **Cross-Council Collaboration:** Strengthened partnerships and collective outreach through shared initiatives.
- **Social Media Impact:** Amplified learner voices on various platforms, enhancing awareness and reach.
- **Community Engagement:** Promoted intergenerational learning and strengthened social bonds.

Challenges & Insights:

- Collecting learner stories can be resource-intensive but is achievable with tools like surveys, structured interviews, and digital storytelling platforms.
- Engagement hinges on creating safe and inclusive spaces for learners to share their stories.
- Young participants often resist traditional learning labels. Approaches like TikTok videos or influencer-style content were suggested to make learning experiences more appealing.

Reflections from Practitioners:

1. Embedding learner voice into program evaluation creates rich qualitative insights.
2. Reflective practice encourages learners to explore the "how" and "why" of their journeys, adding depth to narratives.
3. The stories, combined with quantitative data, serve as powerful tools for advocacy and recognition—both locally and globally.

Case Study 2: Learning for Earning in Lockdown – Insights & Outcomes

Context: This initiative arose during the pandemic to address high unemployment and disengagement, particularly among youth and vulnerable communities. It aimed to provide pathways for upskilling, career exploration, and future opportunities.

Evolution:

- **2021:** Featured over 30 separate events but suffered from fragmented audience engagement.
- **2022:** Transitioned to a curated model with three flagship online forums:
 1. *Opportunities in the West* - Insights into local employment pathways hosted by Wyndham Humanitarian Network.
 2. *Meet the Major Employers* - Connecting job seekers with major businesses.
 3. *Careers in Local Government* - Diverse career insights from representatives of Wyndham, Hobsons Bay, Melton, and Brimbank Councils.

Key Outcomes:

- 476 registrations, 230 active participants, 19 expert presenters.
- Strengthened collaboration among six Councils and education providers.
- Featured practical workshops (e.g., resume building, job search strategies).
- Fostered lifelong learning and enhanced employment pathways through local networks.

Why Targeted Learning Events Matter:

1. Higher participation and impact with tailored events.
2. Learners access practical tools and direct employment connections.
3. Cross-council partnerships expand reach and improve resources.

4. Scalable and adaptable approach for other lifelong learning goals.

Lessons Learned:

- Curated events foster deeper engagement than larger festivals.
- Learner-driven content ensures relevance and participation.
- Collaboration with councils, libraries, and industries is vital.

Additional Insights from Practitioners:

1. **LinkedIn Learning Initiatives:** Ballarat leveraged LinkedIn Learning to encourage people to upskill and reskill, targeting those already employed but seeking career progression or transitions. Programs like *Learn Together* brought participants together to overcome barriers, demonstrating how LinkedIn Learning could support employability and resume building.
2. **Side Hustle Support:** Brimbank delivered workshops focusing on specific topics like Micro-Business marketing (on a budget) catered to niche demands. These initiatives supported participants in diversifying income through "side hustles."
3. **Support for Migrant Workers:** Programs like the Kaleidoscope Initiative (Canning) and the Hume Multi-Versity project provided mentorship and skill-building opportunities for migrant workers facing underemployment. Local governments collaborated extensively on these initiatives to address unique challenges in employment pathways.
4. **Community-Oriented Workshops:** Cities like Canning hosted job expos and popular courses such as job readiness and resume writing. The workshops often had higher demand than capacity, highlighting their importance and impact.

Case Study 3: RMIT Student Intern Program – A Case Study

Why Student Placements? Student placements bridge academic learning with real-world experience, benefitting both students and learning networks:

- Students gain hands-on professional, research, and stakeholder engagement experience.
- Learning networks gain valuable support in evaluation, storytelling, and outreach efforts.

Key Contributions by RMIT Intern Kashish Chopra:

- Designed and analysed stakeholder surveys to assess learner and event impacts.
- Authored learner stories for the ALCN, Wyndham City, and Wyndham Learning Festival, which were featured in social media and council communications.
- Supported event planning and evaluation through interactive Mentimeter sessions on learning festivals and climate resilience.
- Compiled a report on intergenerational learning, developed a volunteer role description for the Wyndham Learning Festival, and updated Wyndham's PASCAL Observatory profile.
- Played an active role in the Wyndham Learning Festival working group, attending events, supporting the Festival Launch, and contributing significantly to the final report.

Why Investing in Student Placements Matters (WIIFM):

1. **Bridging Theory and Practice:** Students apply their academic knowledge in real-world settings, building skills for their careers.
2. **Capacity Building:** Interns bring fresh perspectives, research expertise, and digital competencies to strengthen storytelling and evaluation.
3. **Collaboration:** Partnerships with universities foster innovation, knowledge-sharing, and future leaders in lifelong learning.
4. **Sustainable Impact:** Thoughtfully structured placements ensure long-term benefits for students and learning networks.

Lessons Learned:

- Student involvement enriches evaluation and storytelling, increasing the effectiveness of learning initiatives.
- Collaboration between councils and universities strengthens knowledge-sharing and creates future opportunities.
- Students' fresh perspectives and digital skills enhance lifelong learning projects.

Discussion Questions:

1. What strategies ensure placements are meaningful for students and organisations?
2. How can councils better collaborate with universities for lifelong learning goals?
3. What challenges arise in integrating students into community projects, and how can they be resolved?

Additional Insights from Forum Practitioners:

1. Collaborations and Flexibility:

- Long-standing relationships with universities like RMIT, guided by rigorous processes, ensure the success of student placements.
- Weekly online catchups with interns maintain communication, address challenges, and provide flexibility for students balancing part-time work.
- Flexibility in scheduling projects allowed students to manage their time effectively while contributing meaningfully.

2. Structured Placements and Independence:

- Practitioners emphasised the need for well-structured programs offering students real responsibilities. Providing meaningful and challenging tasks, rather than mundane or repetitive work, motivates students and enhances their development.
- Balancing guidance with opportunities for independent work enables students to grow while contributing significantly to projects.

3. Examples of Value-Driven Placements:

- Collaborations like Newcastle's youth strategy benefited from young students conducting community engagement, offering age-relevant insights.
- Placements often lead to long-term benefits for students, including future employment opportunities, as seen with RMIT and other councils.
- Programs like Canning's Kaleidoscope initiative matched students with mentors, successfully navigating employment pathways for migrants.

4. Recognition Through Compensation:

- Jenny (Newcastle) highlighted the introduction of paid placements at the University of Wollongong, offering students modest stipends (e.g., \$200–\$300) to acknowledge the reality of balancing placement hours with paid work or unpaid leave. This approach provides an additional layer of support and recognition for students.

Call to Action & Next Steps

Encourage Collaboration: Explore ways to work together to amplify learner voices in your communities. **Implement Strategies:** Take actionable tools and approaches from today's discussion to enhance learning initiatives. **Keep the Conversation Going:** Connect with ALCN, LearNWest, and other networks to continue building inclusive learning pathways.

Final Thought: "When we listen to learners, we create learning pathways that truly reflect community needs and aspirations. By working together, we can ensure these pathways are shaped by those who matter most – the learners themselves."

Upcoming Events:

- **20 May:** AGM featuring guest speaker Hannah Pia Baral, CEO, ACE Aotearoa, NZ.
- **Learning Forums – Second Half of 2025 :**
 - **18 September (to be confirmed):** Dolly Parton Imagination Library (Tamworth experience, United Way research).
 - **23 October:** Climate Action: Creating Community Circular Hubs.
 - **4 December:** Media Literacy and AI.

Looking forward to seeing you at these inspiring future events!