

# SEGRA2011 PRESENTATION

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## **Background**

The Gwydir Learning Region (GLR) is a strategic partnership consisting of the various local educational providers and the Gwydir Shire Council.

Gwydir Shire is located in north-west NSW and covers an area of 9,000 square kilometres with a population of 5,800. It consists of a number of small towns and villages – Warialda, Bingara, Gravesend, North Star, Croppa creek, Coolatai, Cobbadah and Upper Horton.

A learning community is a group of people, whether linked by geography or interest, which addresses the learning needs of its members through proactive partnerships. Learning is used as a way of promoting social cohesion, revitalisation and economic development.

The GLR is a strategic partnership designed to create a co-operative advantage for the community through the best allocation of the available resources.

The overriding aim of the GLR is to tailor an individual learning experience to any member of our community, irrespective of age, who has a particular desire to learn. Our focus is on every member of our learning community.

The creation of social based learning for niche groups such as the older learners within the Shire is just as important as the vocational based learning.

The educational providers include:

Department of Education and Training, which represents the various public schools (Primary and High Schools) and the New England Institute of TAFE;

The University of New England and several other Universities such as Southern Cross;

The local Community College; and

The only non-public Primary School – St. Josephs' Catholic Primary School at Warialda.

The NSW Board of Vocational Education commissioned Dr John Mitchell to undertake an independent review of the Gwydir Learning Region in 2006. Dr Mitchell's report noted the following key messages:

1. Gwydir Learning Region is based on the shared goals and visions of a collaborative partnership of stakeholders from education, local council, business and the local community, in the Gwydir Shire, a rural area of NSW;
2. At a surface level, the Gwydir Learning Region is an example of what public and private organisations and committed individuals can achieve through goodwill, passion and determination in an economically depressed, socially disadvantaged and remote area of NSW;
3. At a deeper level, sophisticated concepts underpin the Gwydir Learning Region, including concepts of innovation and collective creativity, lifelong learning, personalised learning, learning communities, inclusive leadership, social capital, social harmony, social infrastructure, social justice, ecological community development and sustainable rural development;
4. From the point of view of individual development, the Gwydir Learning Region provides individuals with opportunities to extend their learning, develop new skills, achieve social and economic goals, and pursue pathways that might not have been available to them previously;
5. From the point of view of education, the Gwydir Learning Region represents new levels of cooperation between schools and TAFE and ACE, new ways of relating learning to local businesses and communities and new ways of implementing personalised learning – an approach to learning which involves the provision of targeted attention for

each student;

6. From the point of view of local government, the Gwydir Learning Region demonstrates the importance and value of Council involvement in new partnerships and Council involvement with the social infrastructure of rural and remote communities, where those communities want to build social capital and create their own positive options for the future; and
7. From the point of view of economic and regional development, the Gwydir Learning Region represents an innovative approach to aligning skill development with local employment needs, to create a sustainable future in rural NSW.

The recent report issued by the Federal Government's Social Inclusion Board made this observation:

A social inclusion agenda also recognises that traditional policy approaches have had limited success addressing the problems faced by the most disadvantaged. The bureaucracy's traditional siloed and top down approach is not well adapted to supporting the kinds of processes necessary for addressing the complexity and ambiguities of entrenched disadvantage.

I agree.

The Social Inclusion Board went on to identify three key principles for addressing cycles of disadvantage:

1. **the way you treat people matters**—it is not enough to focus on what support is provided, it matters how it is provided;
2. **continuity of support is essential**—episodic care based around discrete crises with a withdrawal of services in between is an inefficient and ineffective way to address entrenched disadvantage; and

3. **a focus on addressing structural barriers must be maintained**—more work is needed to implement a holistic response to disadvantage that reduces the structural barriers that contribute to one disadvantage snowballing into others.

The Board has outlined the way this ‘new’ approach could be introduced in through location-based initiatives based on five key elements:

1. a clear connection between economic and social policy and programs at a local level;
2. a framework for providing integration of effort across governments;
3. a level of devolution that allows significant and meaningful local involvement in determining the issues and solutions;
4. capacity development at both local level and in government, without which greater community engagement or devolution of responsibility will be impossible; and
5. funding, measurement and accountability mechanisms that are designed to support the long term, whole-of-government and community aims for an initiative, rather than attempting to build an initiative around unsuitable measurement and accountability.

Once again I agree and it’s what the Gwydir Learning Region is already attempting to achieve. Where the local government of an area indicates a desire to be the lead local agency in its area it seems sensible that this be the case.

### **Current Situation**

Over the last 10 years the operations of the Gwydir Learning Region have progressed and undergone a level of maturity.

The GLR has been successful in its application for funding to develop three Trade Training Centres to deliver training in hospitality, primary industries and automotive.

As with everything that we do, we attempt to 'value add' onto any project that we develop in order to always build on the community's social capital.

The following examples will give an indication of how we endeavour to display value innovation.

The Hospitality Trade Training Centre is being built adjacent to the restored Roxy Café, which is part of the Roxy Cinema Complex at Bingara. The Hospitality kitchen will act as a community and events kitchen as well as a training area. The kitchen will also have direct access to the Roxy Complex Hall.

The Primary Industries' Trade Training Centre will be part of a broader plan to create the Australian Centre for Regenerative Agriculture.

The Automotive Trade Training Centre will be the base for the Council's heavy plant and truck driving school.

Another focus area of the Gwydir Learning Region is the promotion of Active Citizenship especially with the younger members of our community.

### **A Model for the Future**

The Gwydir Learning Region could be developed more fully as a model with application in other rural and remote areas. In order to achieve this a managing, coordinating group could be established whose job it is to:

- a) Liaise and broker the best delivery of training and education to address the skills' need and educational aspiration of the community and individuals;
- b) Work with local schools, TAFE, Community Colleges, Universities and other providers to develop effective delivery and pathways for

students;

- c) To relieve schools and School Principals of the increased workload in recognition of their already large and growing bureaucratic work load and the changing nature of schools;
- d) To develop with schools and other providers, partnership programmes to address specific educational and skills identified as necessary for the future development of the community;
- e) To work with schools to identify the best use of human resources across the Gwydir Shire in order to create a strong sense of being a valued member or contributor to the overall community.

### Staff Allocation

That the concept of tailoring to all students' individual educational, economic and social needs, that underpins the GLR approach, be applied to staff allocation management.

The idea is to give staff a sense of ownership in how they are allocated - to develop them both professionally and consider their own personal needs. There should be an annual negotiation with each staff member to mutually determine how they want to operate within the structure. For example the majority of staff may want to teach at one school while others may want the variety of working at several sites, both at secondary and primary schools to work on particular projects they are interested in developing. Some may want to gain dual accreditation to teach both school or TAFE or ACE. It is essential that this approach to use staff skills and interest and changing circumstances be an integral part in determining the allocation of staff across the entire GLR.

### Staff Structure

All schools within the GLR should be seen as one united entity with a refined structure that delineates between the administration

of the schools and the delivery of educational outcomes within the individual schools.

This issue requires close scrutiny and discussion judging by the media reports prior to the last NSW State Election concerning the expected budgetary shortfall within the former NSW DET budget and the recommendations contained in the Boston Consulting Report that is pushing for school closures and other cost saving measures. It may well prove to be a pyrrhic victory if our community saves staff positions but loses an entire school or its Year 11 and 12 students are bussed to Inverell.

Why, for example, does each school require a dedicated Principal position when a system could be developed that looks at a discrete campus structure with a centralised controlling Administration Principal? and

- f) The Managing, Coordinating Committee would be made up of two permanent people: a managing coordinator and personal assistant. There would be regular term meetings with all Secondary Principals and Primary Principals to coordinate resources. Similar with educational & other service providers.

A strategic overall plan would be developed that includes:

Social, educational and economic directions over 5 years;

Priority partnership between schools, university, educational providers, business etc to address targeted projects (Adult literacy, specific skills acquisition, nurse, teacher training etc);

NB The strategic Plan is an integral part of the strategic plan at the Gwydir Shire's Plan.

Each School's strategic plan will mesh with overall Gwydir Shire Plan, whenever possible and detail the allocation of resources

(human and other) especially where formal projects including several agencies and providers are concerned; and

The plan will also detail such planning with universities and outside organisations as a formal recognition that such partnerships are not an activity done if there is spare time but as an essential reality if growth of the community is to be achieved.

Examples of partnership that can be set up in the next few months:

- 1- The teacher training/mentoring project. This is a partnership with the UNE, schools, community and Gwydir Shire to increase the standards and resilience of student teachers by directly linking them to long term mentoring by teachers and community mentoring over 2 to 3 years. It will involve community service in exchange for accommodation. All schools especially primary schools will be invited to be involved. It will involve leading edge technology developed by UNE meshed with individualised personal mentoring and involvement with the community over 2-3 year period.
- 2- To assist outlying schools within the Gwydir Shire to implement increasing demands placed upon Public School Principals and staff and recognise that quality education and sound literacy & numeracy skills depends upon teachers being valued and that professional development needs to be tailored to their circumstances the following idea could be running in a matter of months.

In order to achieve this outcome one of the existing Primary School Principals be allocated time to travel to outlying schools for a day a month to assist the other Principals in areas they would like addressed. Also this person could take a specialised teacher to help teachers in areas they feel their school or students may need assistance with such as science or music or fitness etc. The aim is for all the schools to feel they are part of a Gwydir Education

Group and not alone.

This program would be part of the Gwydir Shire Program of servicing and accessing the community in that schools area.

The idea is that greater efficiencies would be achieved and a community recognition that education service is also connected to community servicing by the Council. On that visit day residents could also access Council services and advice. This could also extend to the concept of individual careers advice etc.

- 3- The delivery of Stage 5 & 6, TAFE, Community College , Universities and other qualifications across the Gwydir Shire using the educational technology resources within the schools. The same applies to Community Forums and Community Service delivery. Ultimately the schools in the outlying community will become the hub and central community meeting and communication centre, therefore helping to make education near to people's everyday life.
- 4- The involvement of schools and students in the process of building up and setting up of real income. Entrepreneurial opportunities should be explored and discussion of this aspect of vocational development should become a core emphasis for the GLR Executive. Where appropriate support structures could be developed to assist and aid budding entrepreneurs to start a business in an identified need area.

This pilot project should be funded for at least three years and should be evaluated on a regular basis by an expert committee to establish the effectiveness of the outcomes.