



## An Australian 'first' in Western Australia

A new one-week course, presented at Edith Cowan University's Bunbury campus from 6 to 10 December this year, was a first for Australia.

It was a pilot for a national program to provide professional development leadership training specifically targeted at local government.

Developed at the University of Technology Sydney (UTS) for the Australian Centre for Excellence in Local Government (ACELG), the *Aspiring Leaders Program* was tailored to meet the needs of aspiring leaders working in WA local government.

Program presenter and developer Dr Robert Mellor from the UTS Centre for Local Government said the program builds on many years of research into leadership and competency in local government.

He had developed a framework at UTS to track professional capabilities and, from that, developed an Aspiring Leaders Framework for ACELG, detailed in a discussion paper.

In 2010, he visited the LGMA, other organisations and key people in every State around Australia, gathering data on professional development leadership programs of various lengths and styles. He also looked at overseas programs, especially in the US and UK, seeking commonalities.

'The term 'leadership' suffers from definitional sprawl,' he commented. 'It's a term people use freely as a concept, but when you try to get them to define it as a construct, there are a lot of different answers. I hope that the discussion paper is the beginning of a conversation about the capabilities that people need, who aspire to leadership positions in local government.'

### Training gaps

'It became evident that around the country there were big gaps in the training and professional development available to people in local government,' Robert said. 'There are programs that cover a few areas of capability in depth and others that cover more of them briefly—but there's no common framework being used around the country.'

'Local government is often thought of fairly late in the piece by people who design education and training and local governments often have to do the best with what they can get their hands on, for example, attending generic programs on a topic that doesn't recognise some of the unique factors in the local government environment.'



Program presenter and developer Dr Robert Mellor (UTS Centre for Local Government).

‘My students often say things like: “I went to that finance program and it was pretty good but some things they recommended would be illegal in local government.”

‘In States with smaller populations, there’s an issue with resources to develop and support training programs. And there are problems for people in rural and remote areas to get access to reasonable quality and relevant local government training.

‘ACELG will continue to develop the concept of an *Aspiring Leaders Framework* in an ongoing discussion and dialogue about what people need in local government. The general aim is to increase availability of relevant programs and get a more consistent standard of local government training and education.’

### Pilot in Western Australia

Robert said the program was piloted in Western Australia because the State’s LGMA and local government CEOs were immediately enthusiastic and very keen to support it.

‘Local government people often prefer to be able to do intense block release professional development courses, so the fully assessed Aspiring Leaders Program was designed to be taught in a five day block, workshop style.

‘People who participate have a choice: they can use the course as a stand-alone learning opportunity or to contribute to post-graduate studies. Completion of the program can be a credit if they enrol in a graduate certificate course at UTS or ECU.

‘We ran the program in Bunbury to avoid a city-centric approach and to better reflect the diversity of local government.

‘We’re pleased that ECU has partnered with the LGMA and us in the trial.

‘We’re piloting the program to see that we’ve got the content right. Once we’ve got the feel for which bits fit and what needs to be refined, we’ll finalise the package and leave it in WA to be picked up by the ongoing partnership between LGMA and ECU. We hope to replicate the model around the country.

‘ACELG put funds into the development of the program so the pilot could be offered at a low cost.’

Robert facilitated the week’s program with significant input from local government leaders who contributed time as part of their commitment to local government professional development.

‘I think the input from industry people and bodies like WALGA really brought the program to life,’ Robert said. ‘It’s an educationally robust program that incorporates a variety of learning experiences.’

Twenty-four people enrolled in the Bunbury program.

**i** You can download the *Aspiring Leaders Partnership Background Paper* from the ACELG website at [www.acelg.org.au](http://www.acelg.org.au). Click the Quick Link ‘Aspiring Leaders Partnership’.

## About ACELG and UTS

ACELG is a consortium formed in 2009 by UTS, with LGMA, IPWEA, ANZSoG, and the University of Canberra, with program partners: ECU, Australian National University and Charles Darwin University.

‘One of the ACELG program areas is to increase understanding of effective strategic leadership and build local government capacity,’ says Dr Robert Mellor, who is program manager at the UTS Centre for Local Government and has worked in local government for 32 years.

‘The Centre for Local Government is one of the few places in Australia that delivers university programs specifically targeted at and for local government.

‘We run a vast range of specifically designed post graduate professional short courses for local government, designed by people with experience in local government and presented by people with experience and recognised in local government.’

**i** For more information about ACELG, see *Statewide Winter 2010* (Issue Number 145) or visit the website at [www.acelg.org.au](http://www.acelg.org.au)





# A new course coming to ECU?



Professor Rowena Barrett (ECU).

Edith Cowan University, a partner in the pilot of the ACELG/LGMA *Aspiring Leaders Program*, is working towards a graduate certificate qualification for local government—likely to be ready to take enrolments by the end of 2011.

Rowena Barrett, Professor of Human Resource Management at ECU, and head of the School of Management, said the proposed course was in the very early stages of the development and approval process.

‘We hope to build on the pilot *Aspiring Leaders Program* and develop a graduate certificate specifically for local government, around leadership and management,’ Rowena told Statewide. ‘We hope that by the end of 2011, we’ll have a course available, with a unit of study that is focused on leadership skills in the local government context.’

‘ACELG is developing four units that will make up a graduate certificate. Our intention is to take two core ACELG units and put them in our program at ECU and then offer students another two of our units. So there would be two generic and two local government-specific units, creating a graduate certificate. The two ECU units would be workplace-based. Students would wrap their work experience around a work place project.’

‘It’s all part of a national program looking at training for local government. ACELG has a large budget from the Federal Government to find out what is happening around the country and to develop a program to meet the needs in local government education and training. We benefit by being able to pick up the units that they create.’

‘ACELG has a huge program of work across a number of themes nationally. As a program partner in ACELG, we have a staff member working on remote, rural and indigenous issues and developing strategies for local government in those areas.’

‘ECU is a community university. We’re open to responding, engaging with our communities and working out what it is we can offer that meets their needs. If we can take a course that is generic and give it a flavour that suits a particular industry, we’ll do that.’

‘The way our graduate courses are structured, people who have work experience can wrap some qualifications around it at ECU. We have very good ratings for our flexibility in accommodating students who are returning to study or starting to study at a later age.’

‘If you’ve never been inside a university, it can seem like a pretty scary place. If you’ve never written an essay or don’t know how to find a book in the library—these can be difficult things to navigate. We have very supportive academics and academic skills advisors work with students to help them fill the gaps they might have.’

‘We run most of our units online as well as on campus, so you can complete your course if you’re in a local government at the top end of WA. You don’t have to be in Perth to get a qualification.’

ECU has a research group, the Small and Medium Enterprise Research Centre (SMERC), that works closely with local governments in WA to deliver training to small businesses in local government areas.

‘SMERC currently has an AusIndustry grant to deliver training online to small businesses,’ Rowena explained. ‘It’s part of a long history of cooperation between local government and ECU. For example, we work closely with Joondalup and Wanneroo councils, and we have an MOU with Stirling on research, through the School of Marketing, Tourism and Leisure.’



To find out more about SMERC, visit [www.ecu.edu.au](http://www.ecu.edu.au), click the ‘Community’ button, and follow the links:

‘More community initiatives’, ‘Business and Law’, ‘SMERC’.