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## SYDNEY OPERA HOUSE MODELS THE FUTURE OF DIGITAL EDUCATION

Teachers, students and families in regional and remote Australia have taken part in a Sydney Opera House trial using broadband technology to put performing arts education and vocational learning within the reach of all. The two-year, \$700,000 study, *From Bennelong Point to the Nation*, was funded by the Commonwealth Government as part of its Broadband Enabled Education and Skills Services (BEES) program – the findings of which were presented at an Opera House forum yesterday which featured a keynote address by leading international online education expert Professor Stephen Heppell.

**Sydney Opera House CEO Louise Herron AM** said: “We are committed to inspiring the next generation through education and the liberating power of art and ideas and this study outlines how we can achieve this goal. The Opera House embeds education at the heart of its children’s programs and each year our digital education program reaches more than 7000 regional and remote students. *From Bennelong Point to the Nation* shows how high-speed broadband can help us reach many more.”

*From Bennelong Point to the Nation* delivered eight interactive digital programs in the areas of professional development for teachers, career planning in the arts for students and theatre workshops for teachers and students. A family engagement program included a digital performance for families in their homes. There were 1,177 participants during the course of the two year study, in which Sydney Symphony Orchestra, Bell Shakespeare, The Australian Ballet and Monkey Baa Theatre Company took part. Among the key findings, *From Bennelong Point to the Nation* discovered:

- Understanding of the “digital ecology” – the interaction of physical and virtual spaces - was crucial to the teaching and learning experiences
- Interactive performance led to high levels of engagement
- Teachers needed encouragement to view digital learning experiences as valid and authentic

To demonstrate the potential of fast broadband in delivering enriched learning experiences, students from some of the first schools to connect to the National Broadband Network (NBN) in Adelaide and Hobart took part in an ‘incursion’ which saw them take a virtual tour of the Sydney Opera House to learn about its indigenous history.

**Sydney Opera House Head of Children, Families and Creative Learning, Bridgette Van Leuven** said: “The Opera House is passionate about growing and improving the cultural literacy of Australian students and teachers. Through our Creative Learning program we will continue to provide innovative digital interactive learning experiences, paying particular attention this year to what we have learned from our trial.”

**Professor Stephen Heppell** said: “The very best education systems are the ones that seduce their children into a lifelong passion and hunger for learning. This program supports the global trend towards digital learning and evolving beyond simple face-to-face teaching practices by offering rich virtual learning experiences or ‘incursions’. With ubiquitous access to fast broadband through the NBN and a nation of pretty special children, Australia has an opportunity to remove the tyranny of distance and take the lead in this global exchange of fresh ideas. These ‘third millennium learning’ practices have the potential to produce a generation as adept at working and communicating with the world online, as the previous generation was at exploring it with their backpacks.”



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The Opera House Creative Learning program currently offers free digital incursions to Australian classrooms, focusing on behind the scenes tours, drama workshops and an exploration of the Indigenous history behind Bennelong Point. Select performances and post-show discussion sessions are also offered free of charge to rural and remote schools.

For more details and to download the report, visit [sydneyoperahouse.com/creative\\_learning](http://sydneyoperahouse.com/creative_learning)

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### **Feedback from trial participants**

“Prior to participating in the Sydney Opera House program, I underestimated the value of such an experience. I thought that it might be disconnected and impersonal, whereas it turned out to be the exact opposite. It was a highly engaging, exciting and ‘useable’ format for learning.” (Teacher, October 2013)

“ICT [Information Communications Technology] enabled people located in different settings (great distances apart) to communicate, interact and learn in real time as if they were face-to-face in the one setting, and experiencing the same semiotic effects.” (Teacher, July 2014)

The project provides “... the opportunity to affect the course of events resulting in heightened engagement and increased opportunities to understand the artists’ purpose through questioning.” (Teacher, July 2014)

“We have never done anything like this before, although Simon does do saxophone lessons via technology. The kids were all thrilled to be not just observers in the program, but very much involved. It was a wonderful experience which they loved. So much happens at the Opera House which we in the country never get to know about, so this may change things dramatically in years to come.” (Family incursions participant Jen Kelly from rural NSW town of Trundle, February 2014)

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### **FOR MEDIA ENQUIRIES CONTACT:**

Eli Wallis, Senior Publicist, Sydney Opera House  
02 9250 7834 / 0428 602 019  
[ewallis@sydneyoperahouse.com](mailto:ewallis@sydneyoperahouse.com)

Dan Chamberlain, Public Affairs Manager, NBN Co  
02 8918 5837 / 0400 569 951  
[danchamberlain@nbnco.com.au](mailto:danchamberlain@nbnco.com.au)