



**REGIONAL
AUSTRALIA**
INSTITUTE

GLEN INNES SEVERN COUNCIL FUTURE JOBS GROWTH AND LOCAL SKILLS GAP RESEARCH PROJECT

WORKFORCE ATTRACTION AND RETENTION STRATEGY

May 2021

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INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

This report is commissioned by the Glen Innes Severn Council, funded under the Building Better Regions Fund, and undertaken by the Regional Australia Institute (RAI). It was motivated by the Council's desire to examine the Shire's workforce challenges and understand the future of jobs in the region. The report seeks to develop a workforce attraction and retention strategy for the Glen Innes Severn Local Government Area (LGA) as envisaged under the Glen Innes Highlands Economic Development Strategy 2020-2040 and its Action Plan 2020-20205.

Job vacancy data and job forecasts show a burgeoning need in the region for more workforce in almost all areas, but most notably professionals, especially health professions, skilled technical and trade workers and community and personal service workers. At the same time, the region is experiencing extremely low population growth. As is the case for most regional areas around Australia, the LGA is witnessing an outflow of young people, and inflows of older people. The region's aging demographic means that filling its workforce needs is an ongoing challenge. The LGA is also losing semi and skilled occupations, including personal service workers and professionals. This has significant implications for the Shire's potential workforce, the strength of its local industries and its ability to cater for the needs of its population.

This report seeks to outline the current situation and propose steps for the Shire to consider in order to bolster its workforce. The two main ways of doing this are firstly, ensuring that existing residents have the skills and viable employment pathways to stay and work in the region and secondly, attracting new residents to the area. Both are important and pursuing a strategy that has elements of both is the most sustainable way to address regional workforce issues. To this end, this report makes recommendations and proposes a strategy that will help the Shire to fill current needs while preparing for the future.

METHODOLOGY

To inform this strategy, a "Future Factors" analysis was undertaken by the RAI to assess the region's economic performance. It looked at the region's industry mix in relation to national and international growth trends and examined how the region sits in relation to the megatrends expected to impact on all regional economies. Also considered were the region's competitive advantages as well as regional growth projections. This analysis complemented the analysis and findings in the Shire's new Economic Development Strategy.

The RAI also conducted population, mobility and workforce modelling for Shire, analysing demographic and census data to understand the demographics (age, qualifications, occupations) of people moving into and out of the Shire. It conducted a series of interviews with key employers in the region in February 2021, focusing on their ability to fill vacancies and retain staff. A total of 13 interviews were conducted, 11 with private businesses, 1 with the Glen Innes Severn Council and 1 with a government primary school. The private businesses ranged in size from 2 employees to around 80 employees. A list of the interviews is attached as Annex 1. Further, several consultations were held with the Council Economic Development Manager and local volunteer project partner Hugh Eastwood from Eastman Group.

Job forecasts were done by considering historical trends and reviewing current job vacancies as well as extrapolating data from the employment projections of the National Skills Commission and analysing the Shire's current industries.

Based on this information and coupled with the RAI's expertise in regional workforce issues, this Strategy has been developed. Its aim is to ensure that the right steps are being taken to maximise the Shire's ability to access an appropriately skilled workforce, both by attracting residents from outside the Shire as well as putting in place mechanisms to "grow from within".

The report is intended to sit within the Glen Innes Highlands Economic Development Strategy 2020-2040 and Action Plan 2020-2025, and it acknowledges the studies, reports and data which underpin that work.

LABOUR AND SKILLS NEEDS ANALYSIS

There are various sources of data which can be analysed to develop a picture of the labour and skills needs in Glen Innes.

HISTORICAL GROWTH TRENDS

Changes in employment by industry can be seen in Census data. Between 2011 and 2016, census data for the Glen Innes Severn LGA show slight decreases in most industries, with the largest loss of jobs in Retail Trade, Public Safety and Administration, and Manufacturing. On the rise were jobs in Agriculture, Construction, Accommodation and Food Services and Administrative and Support Services. See Figure 1.

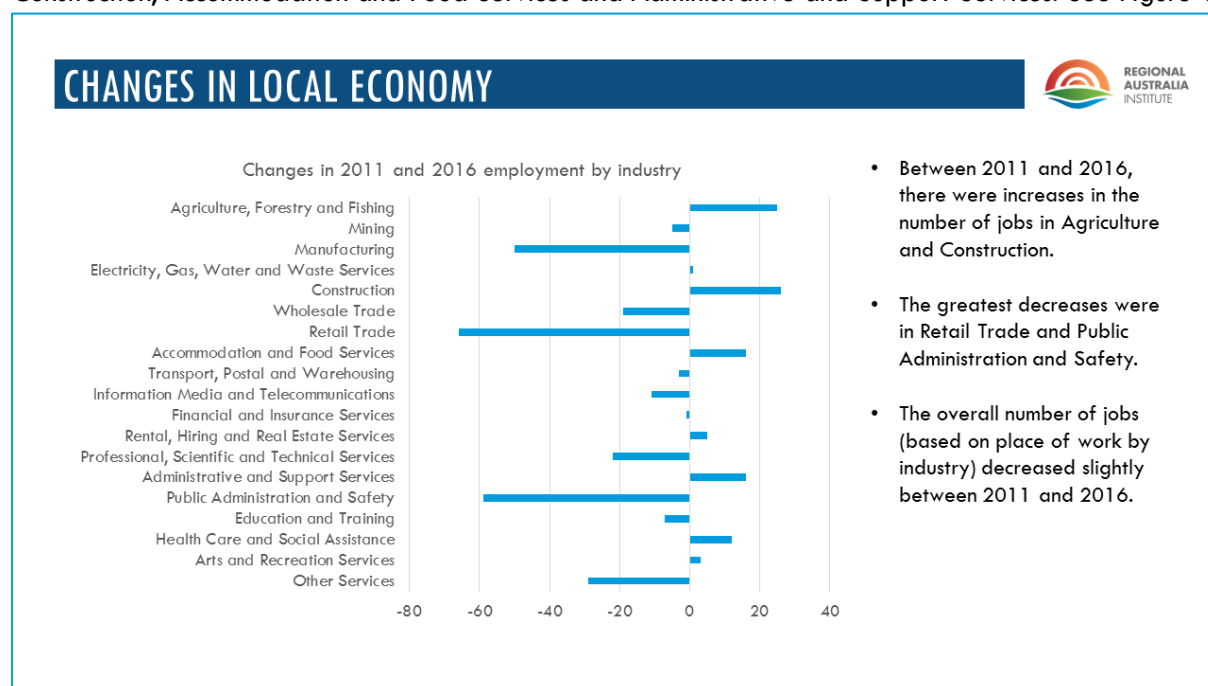


Figure 1 Employment trends, Census data

JOB VACANCY DATA

Job vacancy data is another source of information which gives an overview of the areas most in need of workforce. Each month the RAI analyses job vacancies which were advertised online on SEEK, CareerOne and Australian Job Search to see what jobs are being advertised in the region. This source of data is useful to determine overall trends in job vacancies and changes over time. It can provide a broad picture of the types of vacancies which exist in the regions. However, by itself, internet job vacancy data presents an incomplete picture, as many vacancies exist which are not advertised on these sites. The National Skills Commission estimates that some 50% of all job vacancies are not advertised, rather are filled through word of mouth. According to the interviews with employers, this seems to frequently be the case in Glen Innes, with only one employer (the Council) advertising via SEEK. A further limitation is that data is not able to be viewed at the LGA level. For Glen Innes, data is only available at a broader regional level

as shown in Figure 2. Data from March 2021 shows a total of 976 jobs advertised in the wider Tamworth and North West NSW region.

Internet vacancy data also shows that since May 2020, vacancies for most occupations have been on the rise in the Tamworth and North West Region, particularly professional jobs which had 173 vacancies advertised in September 2020. Figure 3 below shows the shift in vacancies during that time from labourers to professional jobs.

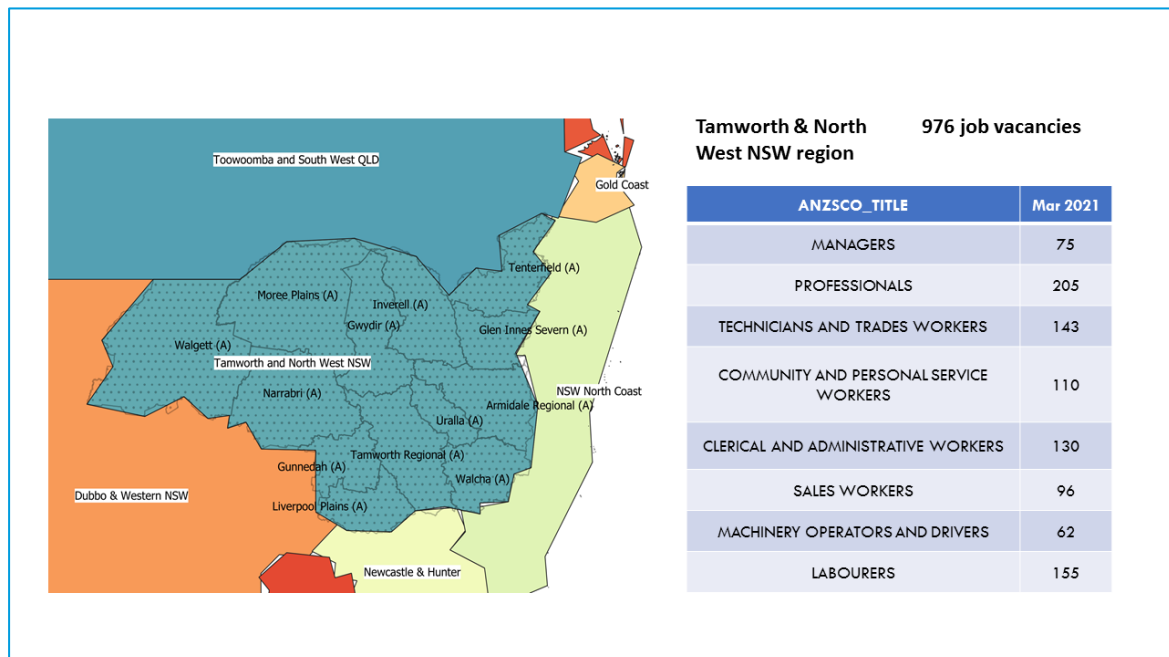


Figure 3 Internet job vacancies Tamworth and North West Region, March 2021, National Skills Commission data

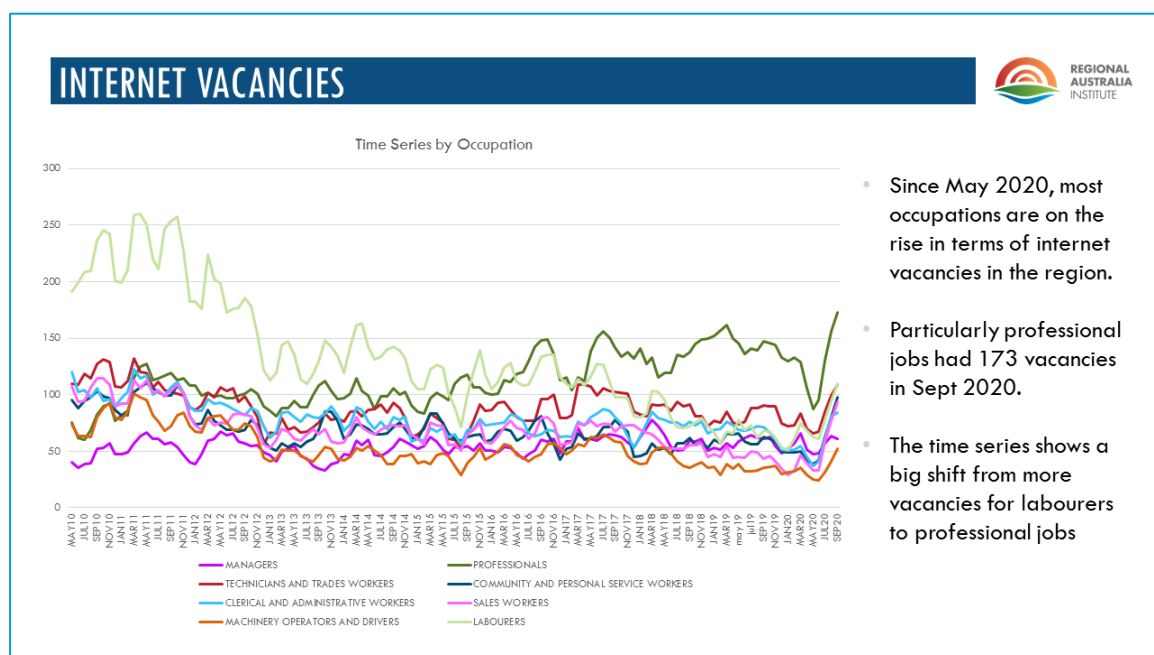


Figure 2 Internet vacancies in Region 2011 to 2020

Internet vacancy data shows that the category of “Manager” remains strong. The category, as defined by the National Skills Commission, includes Farmers and Farm Managers as well as corporate Managers and Manager positions in health, education and hospitality. The breadth of the category does not help to define what specific qualifications may be needed for the position, but it is reasonable to expect that Managers have certain business and professional skills and a certain level of experience.

The Professional category also covers a range of occupations such as Art and Media professionals, Business, Human Resource and Marketing professionals, Design, Engineering and Science professionals, Education, Health, IT and Legal professionals. These occupations would require, at a minimum, a Bachelor’s degree.

The level of Technician and Trade workers needed also remains strong. This category includes Engineering, ICT and Science Technicians, Automotive and Engineering Trades Workers, Construction, Food Trades, Skilled Animal and Horticultural workers, and other trades such as hairdressing and sign-writing. These jobs would require either an apprenticeship or a technical qualification.

Internet data therefore shows that, currently, the main vacancies in the region are ones which require further education after high school, and that this pattern has become sharper over the last decade.

JOB FORECAST DATA

Data from the National Skills Commission gives employment projections to May 2024. From these projections, data can be extracted and forecasts for Glen Innes Severn Shire can be extrapolated. These show that the main category for expected employment growth in the Shire is the Community and Personal Service workers with 74 additional new jobs projected. The main occupational group in this category are Carers and Aides (38 new positions projected), Hospitality workers (13 new positions projected) and Health and Welfare Support Workers (10 new positions projected).

An additional 69 Professional Jobs are also forecast by 2024. This includes the Health Professionals (20 new positions projected) and Education Professionals (15 new positions projected) which have the highest number of new jobs in that category.

Agriculture, traditionally a dominant industry in the Shire, is projected to see the largest decrease in job numbers, underscoring the importance of the diversification of industry planned in the Glen Innes Highlands Economic Development Strategy.

Figure 4 shows these projections for the New England and North West Region (ABS Statistical Area Level 4). Each bubble represents an industry, with the size of the bubble reflecting the number of people employed in that industry in the region in 2016. The position of the bubble (from bottom of chart to top) represents the job growth projected to 2024, with the number of new jobs projected on the vertical axis. So, for example, Healthcare and social assistance is the second largest bubble (after Agriculture), and is expecting to see just over 2,000 more jobs in the region by 2024. Further details on the projections for Glen Innes Severn LGA are provided in Annex 2.

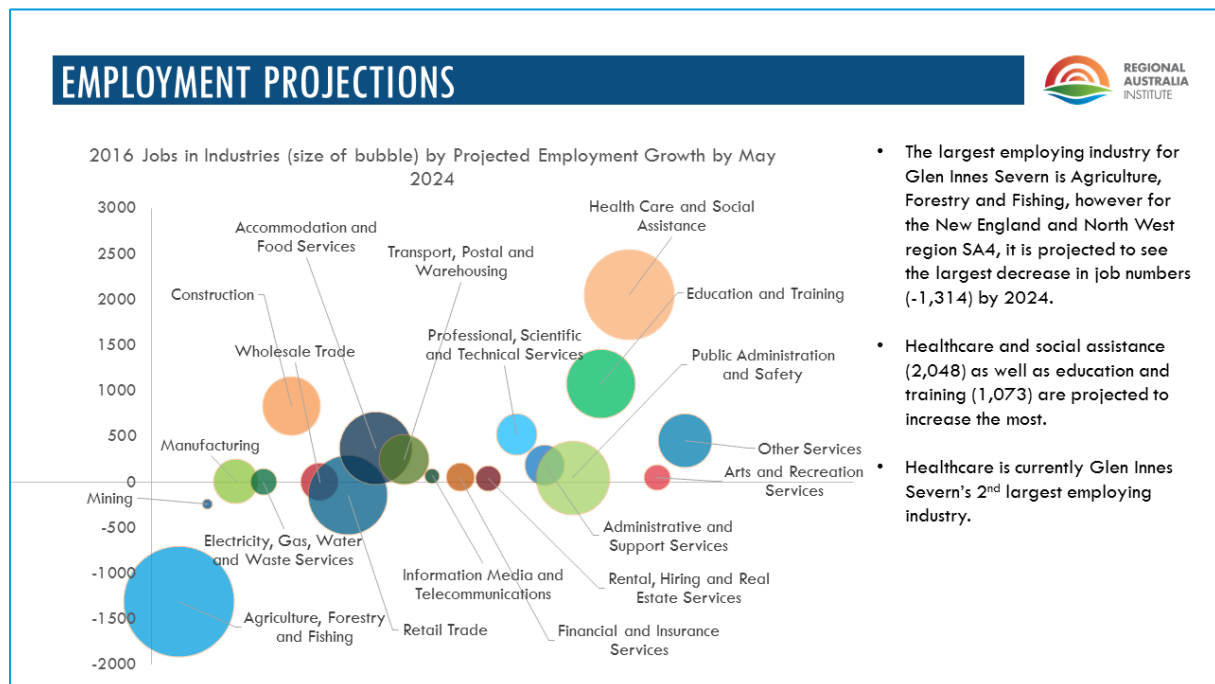


Figure 4 Employment projections for New England North West Region (SA4) to 2024

FINDINGS FROM INTERVIEWS

The limited number of interviews with employers prohibits drawing general conclusions on skills needs, however they tend to support both the historical data and the employment forecasts. The aged care facility struggles to get Registered Nurses and, to a lesser extent, Enrolled Nurses. The exercise physiologist has been trying to recruit a qualified practitioner for many months. The school was looking for 6 teachers last year and only received three applications. Maths and science teachers are needed in the High School. The construction business is looking for apprentices to train but has not had success advertising on Facebook. Other businesses agreed that recruiting skilled workers was always difficult and noted that many people recruited from outside the area for work did not stay long-term.

CONCLUSIONS ON LABOUR AND SKILLS NEEDS

Jobs in the Glen Innes Severn Shire, now and into the future, require skilled workers with education and/or training continuing after high school. Like many regional areas, the Shire needs to have a particular and urgent focus on ensuring that jobs in the health care sector are able to be filled. The sector is already a significant one for the Shire and one which will only grow, given the ageing population. Already, aged care in the Shire is having difficulty in recruiting qualified nurses. The education sector is equally important to consider, noting the current difficulties of the schools in recruiting teachers. The difficulty recruiting in these areas is part of a problematic cycle, as without a good standard of health and education services, it will be challenging to attract more people to the region.

POPULATION AND MOBILITY SNAPSHOT

Population and mobility data can show the demographics of people living in, and moving into and out of the Shire. It is possible to obtain an understanding of the available human capital in the region, as well as determine age groups that are being attracted or lost, and their level of qualifications and occupations. Understanding this data, together with projections on skills need, will identify potential challenges in finding the right workforce for current and future jobs in the Shire.

HUMAN CAPITAL

AGE

Census data shows that between 2011 and 2016, the overall population of Glen Innes Severn rose slightly, but the increase is solely attributable to people over the age of 65 years. All other age groups declined in number. This means that the number of people of working age in Glen Innes Severn Shire is shrinking. See Figure 5.

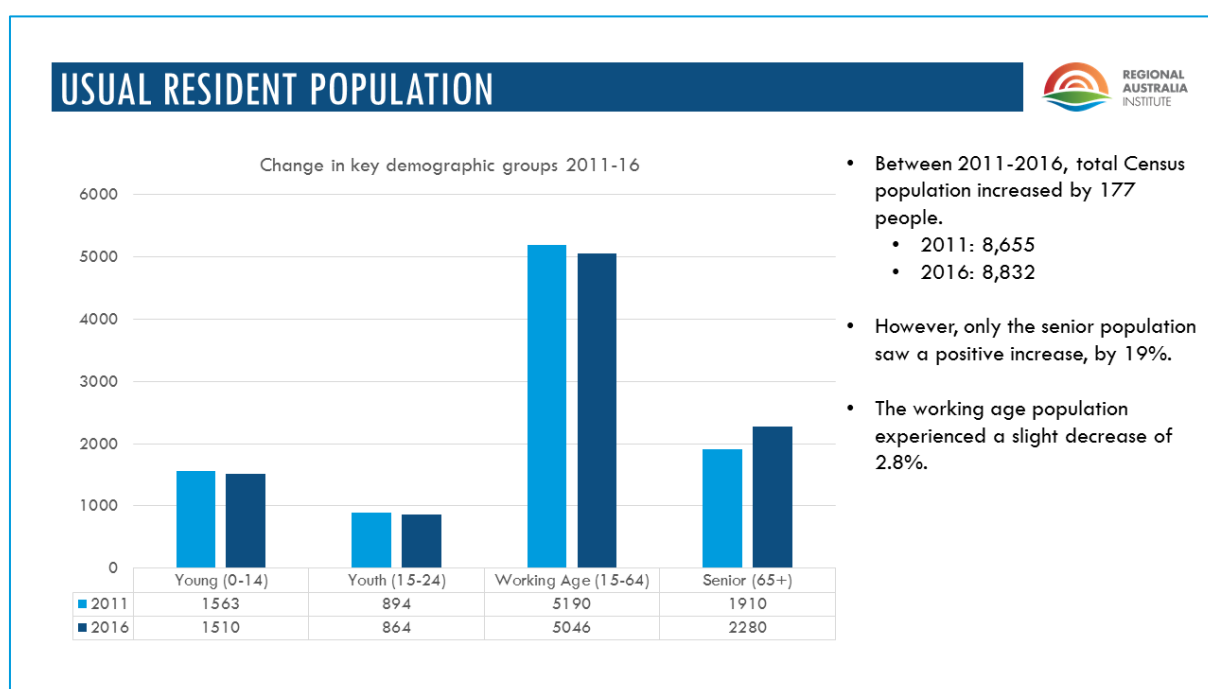


Figure 5 Age of Shire population, Census trends

Population trends for the Shire prepared by the NSW Department of Planning and Environment¹ in 2019 are quite pessimistic, projecting a 26% decrease in population to 6,730 through to 2041. Population projections for the LGA have been quite debatable as the *Fit for the Future* analysis projected a stable population for the LGA. Another population projection done by economic consultancy firm REMPLAN forecasts a decrease in population for the LGA but at a more gradual decline (8,445 VS 6,730 by

¹ <https://www.planning.nsw.gov.au/Research-and-Demography/Population-projections/Projections>

2041). Most demographic groups are intending to update their projections post-COVID to reflect the closure of Australia's internal borders and its impact on regional populations going forward.

EDUCATION

The Shire's statistics in educational attainment are generally lower than the average in regional NSW in every measure, including high school completion rate, technical or university qualifications and adult learning. Only 30% of the overall population of the Shire has completed High School, impacting the acquisition of skills. However, in the 20-24 year old population, the percentage of population with technical qualifications in 2016 (nearly 28%) is around the same as the level Australia-wide. This was an increase on the level in 2006 (24%) which is a positive trend. However, during that timeframe, the number of people in Glen Innes with a university qualification declined. See Figures 6 and 7.

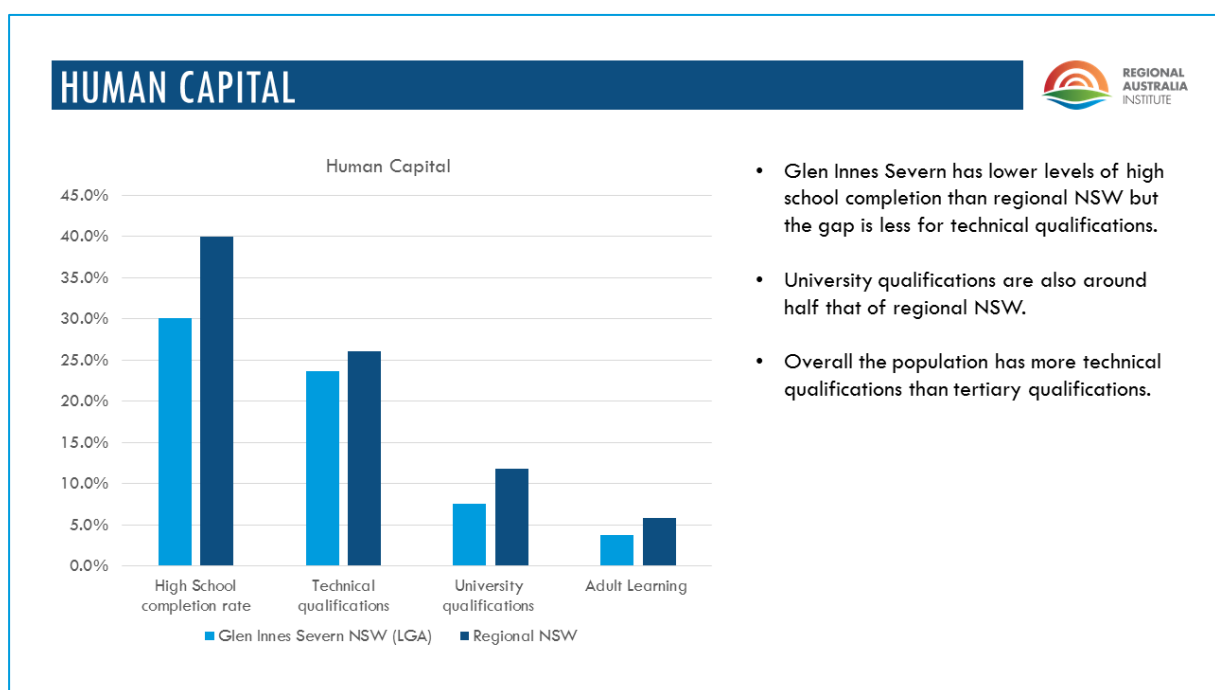


Figure 6 Glen Innes Shire Human Capital, Census data

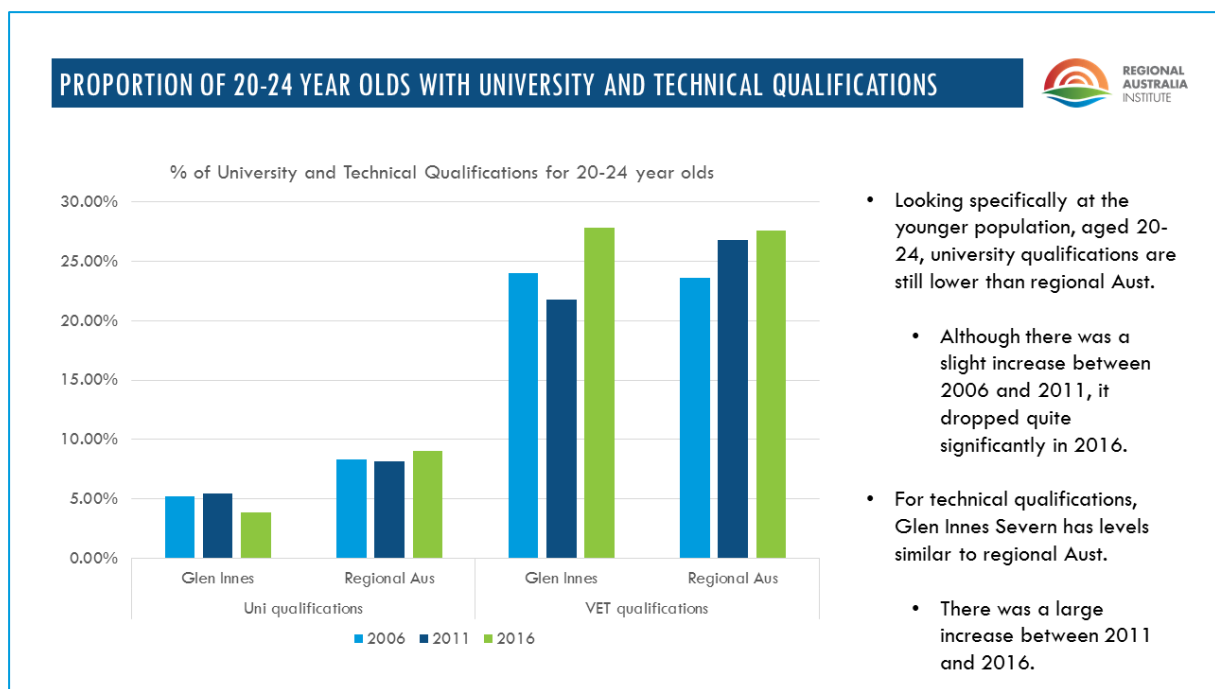
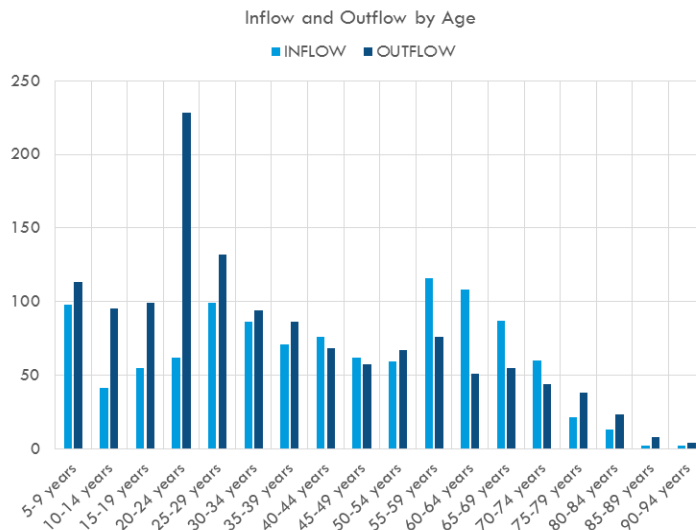


Figure 7 Glen Innes Shire 20-24yo Qualifications, Census data

MOBILITY

In terms of mobility, the Shire is losing people, but attracting others, meaning that there is a level of churn. Overall, a total of 171 more people moved into the Shire, than moved out. However, most of the inflow is people over the age of 55 years, while there is significant outflow of young people. The highest outflow was in the 20-24 year age group, which is not unusual for an Australian regional community. Those between 30-39 years were also leaving however, suggesting that young families may not be staying. Losing these age groups has implications for the availability of the region's workforce.

MOBILITY CHARACTERISTICS: AGE

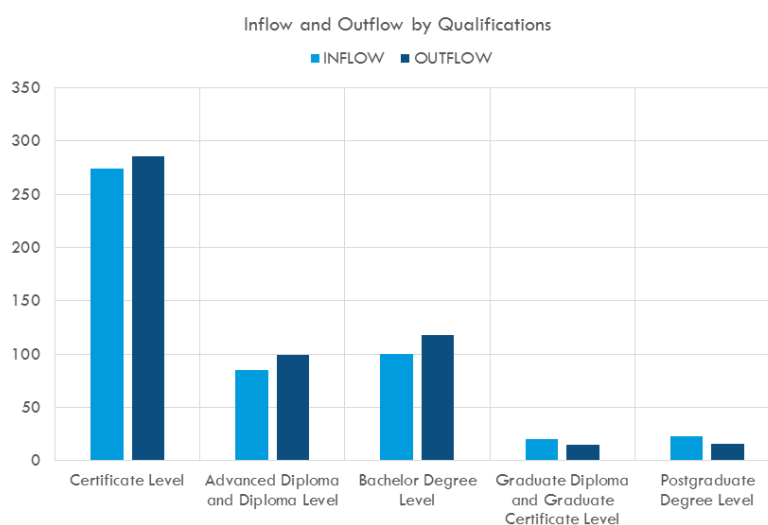


- Most of the inflow into Glen Innes Severn comprised people who are above 55 years.
- For these older age groups the inflow numbers were almost 1.5 to 2 times that of outflow.
- There was a very high outflow of young people (20-24) though that is typical of most areas where young people travel out for education and/or employment opportunities. However, the level of outflow was significantly higher than the inflow.
 - For Glen Innes Severn the outflow of young people could be due to the close proximity to Armidale which is a larger regional area that the young may go to for schooling and post-school opportunities
- Additionally, outflow was also higher in the young adult years (30-39) which could suggest that families are not staying in the LGA.

Figure 8 Mobility by Age for Glen Innes LGA, Census data

The people who come into the LGA and those moving out of it have relatively similar qualifications levels, however more people with Certificate and Bachelor qualifications were lost than gained. This may correspond to the age groups which are being lost. More positively, the Shire attracted more people with Graduate Diplomas and Graduate certificates than it lost, as well as more people with Postgraduate degrees. The overall number of increases remains small. See Figure 9.

MOBILITY CHARACTERISTICS: QUALIFICATIONS



- The number of people coming into the LGA and leaving the LGA across the different qualification levels are relatively similar.
- The LGA attracted more people with Grad Dip & Grad Cert levels as well as Postgrad Degrees compared to those leaving.
- It also lost more people with Certificate and Bachelor level qualifications.

Figure 9 Mobility by Qualification for Glen Innes LGA, Census data

Mobility data also shows an outflow of several occupational categories, the largest of which are professionals, technicians and trades as well as community and personal services workers. These are exactly the categories that the region needs to retain. Figure 10 shows the outflow of occupations, compared to the inflow. The region's stock of most needed occupations is falling, with the exception of the Manager category.

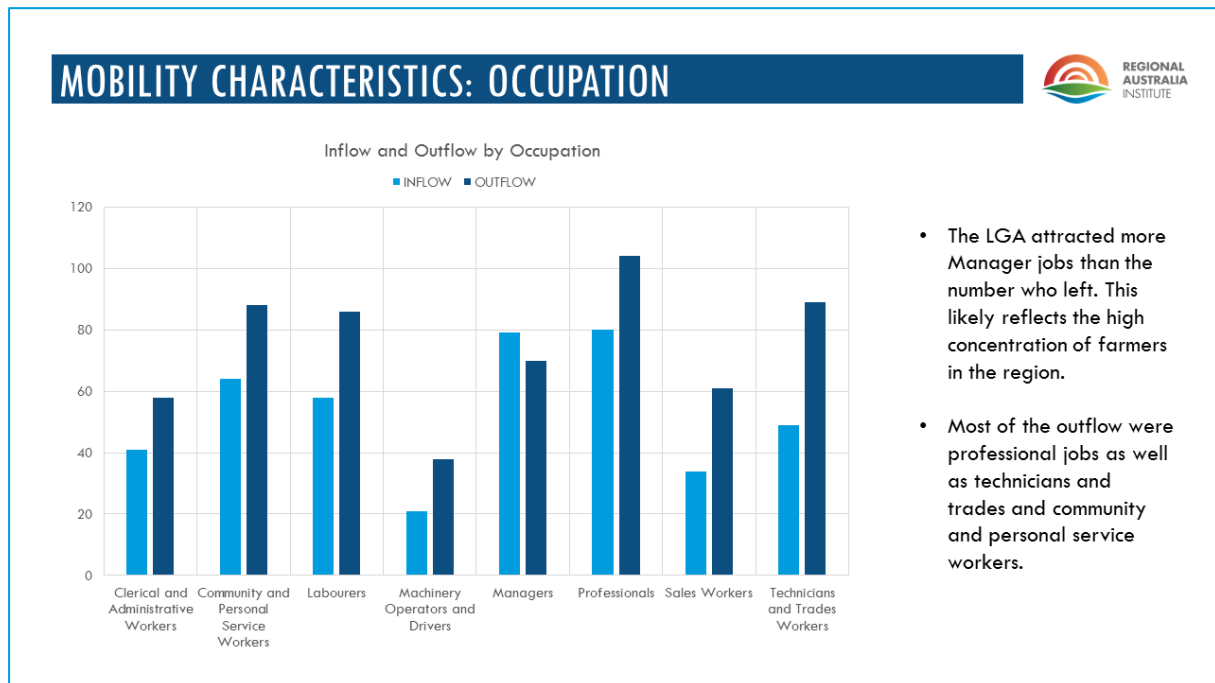


Figure 10 Mobility by Occupation for Glen Innes LGA, Census data

FILLING WORKFORCE NEEDS

The figures and projections on the skills needs, population and mobility provide a concerning picture of a declining population, a lack of needed skills and an ageing workforce. They underscore the importance of taking active remedial steps to address workforce shortages, to ensure that the region can thrive into the future.

SCALE OF WORKFORCE GAPS

The scale of projected workforce needs has been determined by bringing together trends in employment, mobility patterns, internet vacancy trends and workforce projections. Figure 11 below presents the findings of RAI estimation of the scale of the workforce gaps that the Shire will need to close by 2024.

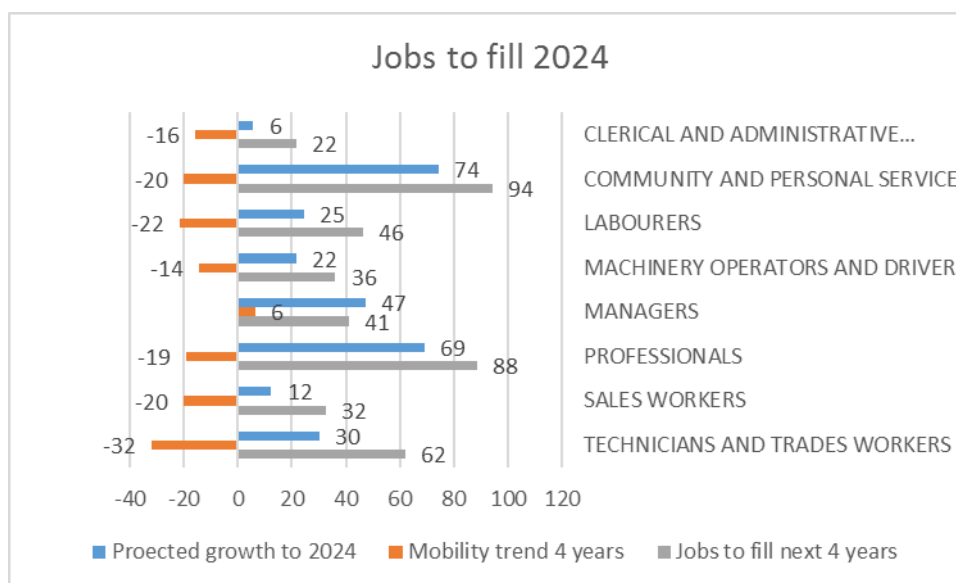


Figure 11 Jobs to fill by 2024, RAI estimation

The estimation takes account of the projections of new jobs needed through to 2024 (blue bars) and the recent trends in movement in these occupations in the Shire (orange bars). Most of the occupations have seen declining numbers of workers as people have left the Shire or retired, and this can be viewed as the underlying pattern of movement in these occupations in the Shire. If these patterns continue and people working in these occupations continue to leave the Shire over the next 4 years, these jobs will have to be replaced, thus adding to the target of workers needed in each occupation through to 2024. The silver bars present the job targets for each occupation.

On these estimations the Shire will need to find an additional 422 workers over the next 4 years, or 105 additional workers per year over that period.

Broadly speaking, there are three potential sources of workers, namely:

- From within the region
- From other parts of Australia
- From overseas.

To shore up sufficient skills and human capital, the RAI considers that regional communities should seek to pursue all three options, not focus on one source of workers to the exclusion of the others. However, with international borders currently closed, it is appropriate for Glen Innes to initially focus on the first two sources of workers. That is, ensuring skill development for those who are ‘home grown’ and seeking to attract workers from other parts of the country.

GROWING YOUR OWN

To fill jobs into the future, it is critical that regional communities can “grow their workforce from within”. Rebuilding regional learning options in both the VET (trades) and tertiary sectors was the main thrust of the National Regional, Rural and Remote Tertiary Education Strategy delivered to the Federal Government in 2019. The Government has accepted the Strategy’s recommendations, designed to address the workforce gaps in regional Australia, diversify regional learning options, increase regional student support and build aspirations amongst regional students for the variety of well-paying jobs in regions that would be available to locals with the right experience and qualifications. But progress in Australia’s regions on addressing the gaps identified has been slow, so some regions are starting to address the matters themselves without waiting for a big government fix.

Growing local workforce capability starts with opening up learning options, but it also relies on linking industry needs and employment services to education pathways. Being able to align skill supply with skill demand requires proactive and innovative education and training practices that involve a wide range of participants such as employers, young people, education providers and communities. This more inclusive, systemic approach to targeted skills development needs to monitor and forecast trends within the labour market (particularly the need for replacement workers), the education and training market as well as how skills are being used and sourced. The RAI calls this comprehensive approach to regional workforce development the “Regional Learning Systems” approach.

An important feature of the Regional Learning Systems approach is that it extends the analysis beyond the skills gap as determined by business interests, to include a broader understanding of skill formation and transition challenges as a result of structural change in regional economies. In other words, it remains flexible and is geared to ensure that the needs of the future labour market are also considered.

In pursuing a Regional Learning Systems approach, there are a number of key areas where local level interventions can create significant impact. For example:

- Aligning school pathways with community/local government goals and priorities
- Supporting close connections among community/employers/industry/education and training providers
- Providing students with a sense of ‘what’s next’, be it pathways to continue schooling or pathways beyond schooling (further study or employment)
- Equipping students with multiple skillsets to be able to pursue various pathways (rather than becoming single-tracked).

As is the case with many regional areas in Australia, Glen Innes Severn Shire is experiencing a loss of young people. Rather than losing people and trying to replace them, a better strategy for the Shire is to try to retain its young people and to ensure that they have the skills needed to contribute to the local workforce. That means increasing efforts that school students know about viable pathways available

locally. It also means aligning education and training opportunities with the skills needed in the labour market. Building connections between employers and industry with education and training providers is important to increase the employability of local students and to build the potential for regional workforce retention.

AT SCHOOL

Many towns in regional Australia are putting in place in-school programs to teach students about local industries, ensuring that students know about local economic opportunities and in the hope of inspiring them to train for that industry.

Two schools in the Barossa, South Australia have developed strong connections with the wine industry, with some incorporating various aspects of wine-making into the curriculum. From Year 10, students learn about winemaking from the point of growing the grapes to designing the wine labels and hosting a dinner to showcase food and wine created and paired by students. As well as cultivating specialist agriculture skills to produce a high-quality, commercial-grade products, students involved in the program also develop industry skills and awareness of career opportunities presented by the wine and viticulture industry. The program helps make connections between the school and the community and aligns the school with community and local government priorities. It demonstrates the effectiveness of taking a local approach to building connections between employers and industry with schools to increase the employability of local students and to build the potential for regional workforce retention.

Also in South Australia, the “Growing Great Grains” program teaches primary level students about the grain industry, which is one of the State’s most significant economic contributors. Students are taught about how science, technology, engineering and maths are needed for sustainable food production. The idea is that teaching young people about the role agriculture plays in our daily lives will pay dividends later on. In South Australia, there are 5 jobs for every 1 graduate of agriculture and agribusiness courses and more needs to be done to encourage young people into the industry.

While the Glen Innes High School has a work experience program, a more focused approach of bringing in local and emerging businesses and developing aspects of these industries into the curriculum may yield more tangible results. One employer interviewed in an emerging technology field expressed how much he would like to go into the school to tell students about the opportunities in this field. Such offers should not be overlooked; potentially it could be start of a new school program and set of pathways for students.

Of the employers interviewed, two noted that they accept work experience students if asked, but only one said he had a positive, ongoing engagement with the school. More needs to be done to strengthen the relationship between employers and the careers advisor at the school. The local Council can also play a role in regularly forecasting workforce trends and communicating these to the school and its careers service. It might be that the Council spearheads the development of a program which could be offered to students, for example, in emerging technologies such as solar.

There was a feeling among some employers interviewed that the “best and brightest” school students left the areas in search of better opportunities. Understanding the students’ motivations and aspirations is

also important information which the school could collect, to feed into planning for the creation of viable pathways to employment within the region.

VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING (VET)

Vocational training has an important role to play in a Regional Learning System. Noting the rate of unemployment in the Shire, VET can support upskilling and retraining people who are unemployed, transitioning industries or need an update to skills. It can also offer further qualifications for established workers and hence local career development.

Again, the strength of the connection between actual workforce needs and the courses offered is paramount to ensuring that the VET facility is relevant to the needs of the local region. Local training needs to meet local needs. To effectively ensure that training matches local workforce needs, it is necessary to understand both the needs of industry, but also the skills and aspirations of workers who may have insecure work or work in industry with fluctuating workforce needs. It is thus important to engage workers, their families, and their communities who are likely to be affected by changes in the regional economy in the process of planning for the future. Such an approach will result in a comprehensive and focused analysis of the skills needs of industry alongside the capacity of the education and training sector.

Tracking local job vacancies and the skills required is one way to ensure that the local TAFE is aware of local needs. With an eye to the future, some of the RAI's work on future regional employment pathways can be analysed and shared with the TAFE, as well as forging connections with local employers about their future planning. It is already apparent that nursing and aged care workers are needed in the Shire and ensuring access to these courses **in the region** should be a priority.

All the employers interviewed in the data collection phase of the development of this Strategy had a negative view of the TAFE, openly saying that the courses were not relevant and that they did not use it for the training of their staff, with the exception of some Enrolled Nurses, First Aid and liquor licensing courses. When the employers interviewed needed to upskill staff, they used private training providers. Each employer was doing this in isolation, with no apparent coordination or discussion with other employers.

This is a missed opportunity for the creation of local training which meets local needs. Supporting employers to share information about training needs, amongst themselves as well as with education providers, is an important step in developing a functioning Regional Learning System.

APPRENTICESHIPS

Apprenticeships provide a direct pathway into employment, while skills are being developed. They also provide a means to retain young people within the local community. Several of the employers interviewed either had apprentices or were interested in offering apprenticeships. It was noted however that the number of apprenticeships has declined sharply over time. With few relationships with the local TAFE among the employers interviewed, the source of apprenticeships was word of mouth or through third party companies.

Employer subsidies for taking on apprentices and trainees have again been extended in the 2021 Federal Budget, and there are systems like Group Training which defray the risk to an individual employer from taking on an apprentice or trainee. Recent incentives have targeted the employer side, and demand for apprentices seems to be rising again, so it is important that all suitable employers in the Shire know about the incentives and the pathways to taking on apprentices.

It is important that as much of the apprenticeship training as possible is delivered **in the region**, as many studies have shown that when students have to leave the region to complete modules of their course they are less likely to return. Ongoing discussions with regional TAFE are critical in enabling this local provision to expand.

UNIVERSITY

Mobility figures for the LGA of Glen Innes Severn, taken from the last census, show that it is losing people with Certificate and Bachelors' level degree and consideration is needed to determine ways to change this trajectory.

Research from the Regional Universities Network shows that 7 out of 10 graduates from a regional university will work in regional Australia, compared to fewer than 3 graduates out of 10 from other universities.² This underscores the importance of supporting young people to stay in a regional area, as well as making regional tertiary study an option for more young people while remaining in place.

Establishing a regional university centre or hub has made a difference to several regional communities. Regional university centres provide support and facilities for students who study online, making it easier for them to remain in place while accessing higher education. It would be worth undertaking an evaluation of the UNE hub in Glen Innes for local students and seeing if its effectiveness for the community can be expanded. A broader tertiary hub is an option that other regional communities have pursued.

An interesting model in this regard is the River Murray Study Hub in nearby Murray Bridge. It has been established to provide opportunities for regional students to pursue tertiary and VET studies without having to relocate to metropolitan areas or face a long daily commute. The local government, in partnership with the local RDA, TAFE SA, the Riverland G3 Alliance and the Coorong District Council, was successful in obtaining grant funding from the Federal Department of Education and Training to roll out the Study Hub, offering online and mix mode courses from CQUniversity Australia, Flinders University and TAFE SA.

Moree and Narrabri are establishing Regional University Centres with support from the Commonwealth Department of Education. These Centres will enable students in that region to access and complete higher education without having to leave their community. The Centres will meet a demonstrated gap in support for study in a regional, rural or remote community and will support students who wish to stay in their community while they complete their course of study.

² See <https://www.run.edu.au/EconomicImpactofRUNUniversities2020>

STRENGTHENING THE BUSINESS COMMUNITY

The Regional Learning System approach relies on a strong business community which shares information, coordinates on training needs and has strong community connections. This is not currently the case in Glen Innes Severn Shire, with a sense among the employers interviewed (12) that employers are isolated, do not receive business information and must pursue their own individual strategies for filling workforce needs. Employers interviewed reported little connection with Council or knowledge of business related programs or incentives available. There was a lack of confidence in the ability of the TAFE to meet local training needs.

There are signs that progress is being made in connecting the business community. The Business-to-Business Highlands Business Hub was launched in April 2020 and has steadily increased user and business registrations as well as platform engagement. Registrations as at 31 May 2021 were 131 users, 89 businesses, 11 projects, 148 events and 31 Articles, with the email digest averaging a 37% open rate. Council's Economic Development Newsletters also has an open rate are averaging just under 40%.

Support for regional businesses comes from different sources in different places. In some regions the local Regional Development Australia (RDA) Committee is a support for the business community, in others, a local Chamber of Commerce, Council, economic development committee or business coalition plays an important role. Having a body that connects local businesses helps to forge effective relationships and promotes collaboration. For example, Toowoomba and Surat Basin Enterprise (TSBE) has evolved to become an influential business-led voice and investment catalyst in the Toowoomba-Darling Downs region, working with Council, RDA and State Government to drive economic development. A group of businesses formed TSBE, and while they started small it has grown to play a leading role in promoting innovation, providing resources to strengthen the business community and in showcasing opportunities in the region.

In Glen Innes a Chamber of Commerce exists but, according to its current President, it is largely defunct. Several employers interviewed didn't know there was a Glen Innes Chamber of Commerce, others remembered it but mentioned that it was not operating. One noted however that, by contrast, the Chamber in Inverell is active and functioning well.

The sense of "apathy" in the business community and lack of engagement was a sentiment that was found in many of the interviews. Most of the 12 employers interviewed said that they felt that Council was not supportive enough or sufficiently engaged with the business community. One business owner said that he wanted to sell his house and move away as they felt there was little confidence in the town.

Reinvigorating the business community and harnessing its energy should be a priority for the Shire. Having a voice for the business community is important to support the Regional Learning System approach (above) but also will support cross-collaboration in business. It can also help to attract new businesses to the area.

There are many options for mechanisms to bring the business community together, and it may be that the time is not right for a revitalised Chamber of Commerce on the traditional model. There are alternatives to the traditional model which are already making a difference in the community, such as the new Highlands Hub which aims to be a focal point based on providing practical digital business support. And the Grow Glen Innes Think Tanks are an issues-focused way of bringing people together on an issue they

care about and want to see some progress on. A local business Facebook group³ started during COVID now has around 1,000 members. These mechanisms are more action, task and passion focused than the more traditional business network structures, and with seed support from Council could be a solid foundation for Glen Innes Severn.

As they mature these new mechanisms could help play a role connecting businesses and filling the gap reported in the employer interviews regarding a collective business voice for the Shire, a place to discuss business issues, and a way for businesses to be updated with local information. Council reports that it has plans to extend the Highlands Hub website to combine business with a community and jobs hub online, helping cross-collaboration in business and community. Council is also planning on making the digital physical, and is seeking funding for a physical space for the Highlands Business and Community Hub.

For the local business community to feel like they own these mechanisms, a small team of local business champions will need to step forward with sufficient time and enthusiasm to dedicate to building a voice for Glen Innes Severn businesses.

RECOMMENDATION

The Shire should pilot a Regional Learning Systems approach. This would involve strengthening the cohesiveness of the business community through a suitable business-led mechanism. This would then enable connections between Council, employers, and education providers in the Shire. The mechanism would allow for input from high school and TAFE students as well as employees. It would be supported by data including current job vacancies and updated and forecast training needs of employers, to create viable local employment pathways.

ATTRACTING WORKFORCE FROM OUTSIDE THE REGION

In addition to the longer-term strategy of growing its local workforce, the Shire needs to actively attract new residents from other regions and cities in Australia. The number of forecast jobs in the next three years, to May 2024, indicates the need for this.

Glen Innes Severn Shire can benefit from the fact that Australians are a highly mobile population, with the propensity to change address at nearly twice the level of most OECD countries. RAI research has shown that between 2011 and 2016, regional Australia gained nearly 65,000 more people than it lost to capital cities. There are significant intra-regional movements too, with 80% of people living in a regional area who intended to move wanting to stay in a regional area.⁴

The COVID-19 pandemic has seen a further surge in interest in regional living. The notion of how we work has dramatically changed and location is no longer being seen as a barrier to choosing where to live. Open-spaces, low-density living, lower cost of housing and minimal commute are increasingly attractive lifestyle options. The RAI's research in late 2020 showed that one in five metro dwellers in Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane and Perth are considering a move to regional Australia.⁵

³ <https://www.facebook.com/groups/222842149079592>

⁴ See Bourne, K., Houghton, K., How, G., Achurch, H. and Beaton, R. (2020) *The Big Movers: Understanding Population Mobility in Regional Australia*, The Regional Australia Institute, Canberra.

⁵ See further Houghton K. and Vohra S. (2021), *Strengthening Liveability: A Toolkit for Rural and Regional Communities Looking to Grow*, The Regional Australia Institute, Canberra.

However, people looking for a tree-change can choose from a wealth of diverse regional towns and communities across Australia and can afford to be selective about where they choose to live and work. This is especially so as there is significant demand for skilled and professional workers, in the same fields as those needed in Glen Innes Severn Shire, namely health professionals, technical and trades particularly automotive and engineering, and community and personal services workers. This means that Glen Innes needs to assess its strengths and weaknesses and how this matches with what people are looking for, and be strategic in marketing itself and what it can offer.

LIVEABILITY

The RAI Toolkit, *Strengthening Liveability: A Toolkit for Rural and Regional Communities Looking to Grow* details that when people are considering a move, they undertake a ‘liveability assessment’ considering what their lifestyle in a new place will look like. To a certain extent, different people will want different things, however some valid generalisations can be made. Young families, for example, will want to know that good quality childcare and school options exist. Young career professionals may be looking at what options there are outside working hours in terms of social activities, sport and ways to make connections. The liveability indicators common to most people are:

- Health services
- Education services
- Cost of living, including cost of housing
- Amenity, meaning parks and green spaces, sporting activities, cultural and community life
- Connection to community, meaning clubs, local community groups, ability to create and maintain friendships
- Lifestyle, which can include short commute times, easy parking, personal safety and new opportunities.

Glen Innes Severn Shire Council has already done significant work on economic development and it understands the skills needs and population dynamics of the region. It needs to attract young people and more people of working age who have post-school education. Health workers are a priority, skilled technicians and trades, as well as community and personal services workers. The next step is to assess the key liveability factors and realistically seek to address gaps as well as build on strengths. For example, the low cost of housing and the fact that it has a reasonable stock of available housing is potentially an important attractor. Many other places in regional Australia seeking to attract new residents are stymied by the lack of housing stock. This could become a centrepiece in an attraction campaign. Availability of childcare places however seems limited, and this is an area which could be addressed.

RECOMMENDATION:

Glen Innes Severn Shire to assess local liveability, using the instructions and Action Plan template in the Toolkit *Strengthening Liveability: A Toolkit for Rural and Regional Communities Looking to Grow*.

SHOWCASING THE REGION

The RAI research has also showed that people tend to consider moving to a place that they know, either through friends and family, or by visiting as a tourist. The Shire needs to use every opportunity to showcase its liveability to tourists and visitors. The Glen Innes Highlands website is excellent, highlighting

the availability and cost of real estate, education options and job vacancies. Available healthcare services could be added and stories of people who have made the move. Information on real estate and education options could also be available for visitors and at tourist events.

The Council is also encouraged to explore with the RAI how it can piggyback on the national Move to More campaign to best showcase the region to metro audiences.

There are also innovative ways of showcasing the opportunities available in the Shire to attract workforce. One Queensland Council has partnered with local hospitals and the public health provider to actively pursue growth and funding strategies for the local health system. An interesting initiative of the partnership is a dinner it holds in Brisbane for final year medical students to be able to showcase professional and lifestyle opportunities in its community.

Ensuring the region is represented at Sydney job fairs and university careers events is a strategy to consider, as well as advertising (for example, real estate or the Highlands website) in NSW industry association newsletters. In other words, rather than waiting for potential workforce to come to the region or see the website, actively engaging in areas where potential new residents may be found.

MIGRANT SETTLEMENT

International immigration is responsible for over half the population growth in Australia, however traditionally migrants tend to settle first in cities. Where migrants have chosen regional areas, the contribution has been significant. In the census period 2011-2016, international migration was responsible for reversing population decline and contributing to population growth in 151 regional LGAs. For more than 100 mostly small rural areas, international migration was their only source of population growth. These places include Naracoorte and Lucindale (SA), Banana (Qld), Circular Head (Tas) and Carnarvon (WA).

These are mostly ageing places, similar to Glen Innes Severn Shire, and migrants are often young and ambitious. They not only provide population stability, they also build diversity in the local community and create new jobs. The RAI has researched how regional communities can increase migration to their areas if they are proactive. For example, Nhill, a small town of around 2000 people in Western Victoria, achieved significant population growth through community led migration strategies, attracting migrants from Melbourne. It has grown to see nearly 260 Karen refugees settled there. A comprehensive evaluation of the economic and social impact of Karen resettlement in Nhill was conducted in 2015 by AMES and Deloitte Access Economics⁶. It found that 70.5 FTE positions were added to the regional economy over the 5 year period studied. The economic impact of this increased labour supply, in terms of Gross Regional Product, was estimated to be \$41.5million dollars. The social impact was noted too, with the “very conservative community” embracing the newcomers. The program helped Nhill to:

- Redress population decline
- Revitalise local services and attract government funding
- Increase social and human capital.

Its success and the economic contribution to Nhill’s community holds important lessons for other regional communities.

⁶ Small Towns Big Returns Economic and Social Impact of the Karen Resettlement in Nhill, AMES, Deloitte Access Economics, March 2015.

People who were born overseas account for 6.9% of the population of Glen Innes, compared to 11.2% for Regional NSW.⁷ Cultural diversity is not something that is addressed on the Council or Highlands website, and the outsider would have the impression that the region may not offer opportunities for people from a different cultural background.

This is something that the Council may want to consider addressing to ensure that it is viewed as a diverse and inclusive community. For example, the Welcoming Cities standard sets benchmarks for local councils to demonstrate their commitment to diversity and inclusion. Councils which have not yet signed on should be encouraged to explore this option.

Glen Innes Severn Shire could also consider the potential value of seeking to implement its own migrant attraction strategy, which would seek to specifically attract skilled migrants from Sydney or other metro areas. Seven fundamental factors or “building blocks” are identified by the RAI in its Toolkit *Steps to Settlement Success*,⁸ which are needed for successful and sustainable locally-led migrant attraction and retention strategy. The importance of the role of local Council in taking the lead is also apparent from the RAI’s research.

There are many migrant and refugee settlement service providers in Sydney with employment services and the Shire could consider making linkages with these services.

MIGRANT BUSINESS OWNERSHIP

The Shire could also consider taking steps to attract migrant business owners. In Australia, migrant business owners make a significant contribution to the economy and to communities. The report “Migrant Small Business Report” was released in 2018 by the insurance company CGU. Its main findings were:

- One-third of Australia’s small businesses are owned by migrants.
- Eight in 10 (83%) migrant business owners started their first business venture after moving to Australia.
- Nearly one quarter of migrant business owners started their business to try out an innovative or new idea (23% compared to 16% of non-migrant businesses).
- One in two migrant business owners are aiming to generate higher revenue in the next five years (47% compared to 38% of non-migrant businesses).
- A quarter of migrant business owners are training young people in the community (25% compared to 19% of non-migrant businesses).
- One in three migrant business owners are planning on growing their business with new hires (33% compared to 25% of non-migrant businesses).⁹

Actively supporting the establishment of migrant businesses is potentially beneficial to the Shire, bring both new business and new families to the region. Migrant owned businesses would help the Shire to strengthen its cultural diversity and attract more new residents. Considering catering for and supporting migrant small

⁷ See <https://multiculturalnsw.id.com.au>

⁸ Regional Australia Institute, *Steps To Settlement Success*, Canberra 2019.

⁹ CGU, *Migrant Small Business Report*, 2018. Available at: <https://apo.org.au/sites/default/files/resource-files/2018/01/apo-nid128756-1240451.pdf>. See also Chen, L.; Sinnewe, E.; and Kortt, M. (2018). *Evidence of Migrant Business Ownership and Entrepreneurship in Regions*. Canberra: Regional Australia Institute.

business could be an aspect that is included in the roll-out of the Glen Innes community hub. Linkages could also be made with migrant and refugee small business support services in Sydney.

RECOMMENDATION:

Glen Innes Severn Shire to consider developing a migrant attraction and retention strategy, which includes migrant businesses, using the steps in the RAI Toolkit *Steps to Settlement Success*.

GLEN INNES SEVERN WORKFORCE STRATEGY

This section aims to provide the blueprint of a workforce attraction and retention strategy for Glen Innes Severn Shire. It recognises the very important work that has already been done, in terms of economic development planning, data collection and showcasing the region. Stronger connections are key to the success of addressing the workforce challenges being faced in the region and this Strategy seeks to help develop those. While Council initially owns this Strategy, it should not necessarily be front and centre in leading it, rather an important role that it can develop is providing the right environment and support for the needed connections to evolve. Involved stakeholders should continue to review and refine it and contribute information from the local community as it becomes available.



Strategic Vision	To increase the skilled workforce of Glen Innes Severn LGA to meet current and future employment needs.
Objectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To develop skills and put in place employment pathways for existing local residents (Regional Learning System) • To attract skilled people to move to the region from other regional or metropolitan areas.
Priority Action	Tasks
Strengthen the business community, to support its workforce challenges, share information and provide input	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support establishment of a mechanism to engage the region's business community.

to the Regional Learning System	
	Key Actions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Conduct a forum with business leaders to discuss this Strategy Identify a champion or champions to find a voice for business. Identify seed funding to support the business mechanism. Regularly collect information on job vacancies and skills needs. Regularly collect information on training needs Consider collaboration with neighbouring business networks in order to get started.

Priority Action	Tasks
Establish a mechanism to lead the development and implementation of the pilot Regional Learning System	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensure regular communication between Council, business community and education providers in order to develop integrated education, training and employment pathways.
	Key Actions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Monitor, collect and share data on job vacancies and job forecasts. Collect data on training needs from employers and employees. Connect local industry with education providers, including school, TAFE and universities. Actively explore ways to connect students with required training to fill local jobs Tap into funding and programs to increase the number of apprenticeships available. Consider school programs to showcase opportunities to students and get them excited about local opportunities
Priority Action	Tasks
Strengthen local liveability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improve services and infrastructure to ensure that the Shire is an attractive place to live and work
	Key Actions
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Conduct a liveability assessment of the Shire, using the RAI's Liveability Toolkit and Action Plan template. Highlight strengths and seek ways to address gaps over time.
Priority Action	Tasks
Showcase the region	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consider target audiences and ways to ensure they are aware of the opportunities available
	Key Actions
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Include health services on the Highland website. Consider partnering with aged care and health service providers to determine ways of attracting graduates.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participate in Sydney job fairs, careers events at universities etc. • Actively ensure that visitors and tourists can access information about real estate, local opportunities etc. • Partner with the RAI Move to More campaign
Priority Action	Tasks
Develop Migrant and Migrant Business Attraction Strategy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create a migrant attraction and retention strategy for the Shire
	Key Actions
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use the RAI Toolkit to consider and develop a migrant attraction and retention strategy, including the attraction of migrant businesses. • Council consider becoming a Welcoming City.

CONCLUSION

There are two key ways for Glen Innes Severn Shire to bolster its workforce, in the face of a stagnant and ageing population, outflows of young people, and relatively high unemployment. The first is a “grow your own” strategy, where the focus is on ensuring that today’s students have viable education pathways which lead to local jobs and career prospects. Not losing young people in the first place, and bolstering the workforce with people who have family and connections in place, makes this the most sustainable long-term strategy. The Shire could become a leader in piloting the suggested Regional Learning System approach, integrating education and training with current and future skills needs. Doing this will require a stronger and more cohesive and connected business community, as well as a mechanism to link the different stakeholders.

The other way is to attract people from outside the Shire, to move to the Shire to live and work. Australia’s current mobility patterns demonstrate that there are people interested in moving to a regional area for the lifestyle opportunities available. Glen Innes Severn Shire can tap into this interest. As it will be effectively competing with many other regional communities looking for new skilled residents, the Shire will have to ensure it maximises and showcases its particular strengths and develops innovative ways of reaching out to the right audience. The Shire should also deeply consider the potential benefits of a migrant attraction strategy, learning from other regional communities around the country which have benefited greatly from doing this.

Tackling the workforce challenge with this two-pronged strategy will maximise the potential for Glen Innes Severn Shire to ensure that it has the skills and workforce needed for a strong and prosperous future.

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- Houghton K. and Vohra S. (2021), *Strengthening Liveability: A Toolkit for Rural and Regional Communities Looking to Grow*, Regional Australia Institute, Canberra.
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- *Small Towns Big Returns Economic and Social Impact of the Karen Resettlement in Nhill*, AMES, Deloitte Access Economics, March 2015.

ANNEX 1 LIST OF EMPLOYERS INTERVIEWED

NAME	COMPANY/ORGANISATION
Peter Tescher	Weir Built
Dominic McCarthy	Dom's Diesel
Nathan Sanderson	Glen Innes Railway Tavern
Hugh Eastwood	Eastman Group
Gavin Peterson	Paradigm Homes
Jane Newsom	Robert & Marrow
Helen Stapleton	Glen Innes Severn Council
Christine Dorward	Glen Innes Public School
Jason deJong	Glen Innes Solar
Aaron Childs	Rangers Valley
Ellen Adams	MoveOlogy
Graeme Quinn	Glenwoode Aged Care (Royal Freemasons' Benevolent Institution)
Pat Lonergan	Glen Innes & District Services Club

ANNEX 2 EXTRAPOLATED DATA FROM NATIONAL SKILLS COMMISSION PROJECTIONS

Occupation at Level 2	Sum of Employment level May 2019	Sum of Projected employment level May 2024	Sum of Projected employment growth	Proportion in Glen Innes (based on 2016 LGA POW* total)	Glen Innes projected employment growth
Arts and Media Professionals	108326	114996	6670	5.02588E-05	0
Automotive and Engineering Trades Workers	360334	368920	8586	0.000346224	3
Business, Human Resource and Marketing Professionals	765477	863943	98466	8.51656E-05	8
Carers and Aides	567530	677018	109488	0.000346915	38
Chief Executives, General Managers and Legislators	83108	83616	507	7.94527E-05	0
Cleaners and Laundry Workers	279555	291050	11495	0.000371421	4
Clerical and Administrative Workers nfd	119	114	-5	0	0
Clerical and Office Support Workers	99271	95961	-3310	0.000386588	-1
Community and Personal Service Workers nfd	100	100	0	0	0
Construction and Mining Labourers	203795	224599	20804	0.00016843	4
Construction Trades Workers	407568	445173	37605	0.000139246	5
Design, Engineering, Science and Transport Professionals	430488	482524	52037	0.000139232	7
Education Professionals	595809	653731	57922	0.000262324	15
Electrotechnology and Telecommunications Trades Workers	237637	245145	7508	0.000180566	1
Engineering, ICT and Science Technicians	271018	304325	33308	0.000152585	5
Factory Process Workers	200651	205315	4664	0.000108014	1
Farm, Forestry and Garden Workers	108461	108594	134	0.001103871	0
Farmers and Farm Managers	178506	177237	-1268	0.003210318	-4
Food Preparation Assistants	197305	216799	19494	0.0002997	6
Food Trades Workers	187900	210701	22801	0.000342617	8
General Clerical Workers	340546	354031	13485	0.0003096	4
Health and Welfare Support Workers	143061	166751	23690	0.000442402	10
Health Professionals	624912	702503	77592	0.000261866	20
Hospitality Workers	300774	337528	36754	0.000350847	13
Hospitality, Retail and Service Managers	525138	543775	18637	0.000319123	6

ICT Professionals	312458	375679	63221	4.06674E-05	3
Inquiry Clerks and Receptionists	310450	327002	16552	0.000144746	2
Labourers nfd	2564	2582	18	0.000692191	0
Legal, Social and Welfare Professionals	260585	315535	54950	0.000179222	10
Machine and Stationary Plant Operators	183138	189531	6393	0.000179317	1
Machinery Operators and Drivers nfd	670	733	63	0.000592467	0
Managers nfd	956	952	-3	8.18889E-05	0
Mobile Plant Operators	167722	183641	15919	0.000415946	7
Numerical Clerks	382011	378629	-3382	0.000222791	-1
Office Managers and Program Administrators	303578	320764	17186	0.000170233	3
Other Clerical and Administrative Workers	241561	242373	812	0.000280502	0
Other Labourers	220995	231651	10656	0.000379014	4
Other Technicians and Trades Workers	213445	221362	7917	0.000266211	2
Personal Assistants and Secretaries	94237	76941	-17297	0.000344371	-6
Professionals nfd	3307	3731	424	0.000157237	0
Protective Service Workers	163729	182025	18297	0.000359517	7
Road and Rail Drivers	401646	442891	41245	0.000288052	12
Sales Assistants and Salespersons	681511	713767	32256	0.00032201	10
Sales Representatives and Agents	196234	201080	4846	0.000161084	1
Sales Support Workers	245118	252885	7768	0.000212228	2
Sales Workers nfd	726	691	-34	0	0
Skilled Animal and Horticultural Workers	132768	142412	9644	0.000398333	4
Specialist Managers	748956	825847	76891	0.000131975	10
Sports and Personal Service Workers	227039	262557	35518	0.000127358	5
Storepersons	136508	154612	18104	0.000138621	3
Technicians and Trades Workers nfd	1302	1320	18	0	0

*POW= Place of work