

REGIONS RISING CANBERRA // POLICY HACK

REGIONAL JOBS

Policy Hack Question: What policy changes would encourage people to take up employment opportunities in regional Australia?

BACKGROUND

A common perception is that there are few job opportunities in regional Australia. This is a myth. In reality there are jobs available from the high to low end of the skills spectrum.

Since 2016, internet vacancies have been growing at double the rate in regional Australia compared to capital cities and in January 2019 there were 42,000 job vacancies outside the mainland state capitals, across a range of occupation and skill levels. In fact, there are signs of the re-emergence of skills shortages in some regions where the number of vacancies has grown by over 16% in just two years.

A closer look at the mix of occupations in demand shows that there are similarities across regions, with many employers seeking similar skills to fill job vacancies. In the medium term, the healthcare and social assistance industry is expected to require another 85,000 workers in regions through to 2023, followed by education (28,000 workers). This will mean intensifying competition across regions to secure the people that each region needs in order to grow.

Evidence from regions shows that it can be hard to fill available jobs due to perceptions of poor infrastructure, services and amenity – so action on improving the stock and capability of these key assets is vital to regions being able to attract and retain the people and skills they need to grow.

Furthermore automation and the surge in digital technologies is of great concern across Australia, particularly as it simultaneously creates opportunities as well as removing some jobs. The next wave of technology change will threaten low skilled service jobs as digital technology and apps are marketed to employers and service providers as ways of reducing staffing costs. The extent to which regional business owners take up these technologies and pursue these cost savings, as well as the extent to which regional consumers engage with the technologies, remains to be seen. The impacts of digital automation will also vary considerably across different regions in Australia.

How well are education systems and regionally-based education offerings prepared for these changes to future jobs and future skills needs? In 2016, RAI research showed that future skills need to be a mix of high tech, high touch (personal contact) and high care capabilities as flexibility and creativity become increasingly important in a more dynamic labour market. With long lead times on professionals in growing industries, such as health and education, it is vital that action starts now to create the skills development pathways to fill the jobs of the future. Attraction and retention of professionals is a

challenge in most regions, alleviated somewhat where in-region education is offered so that local residents are able to take opportunities up.

Responding to the future of work in regional Australia is a multifaceted challenge, but one within which systemic responses at the state and national level can lead to significant improvements when well designed and targeted. Beneath the need for systemic responses, examples from communities around Australia show the scale of impact that well-structured local initiatives can have in helping regional residents get the most from the opportunities that the future labour market will present.

RELATED RAI WORK ON REGIONAL JOBS

[Regional Job Automation Pack](#)

[The Missing Workers](#)

[Discussion paper: Riding the next wave of automation in rural Australia](#)

[Regional Jobs Vacancy Map](#)

[Article: Job Forecasts for Regional Australia](#)

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