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Connecting Knowledge, Skills and Futures Through Innovation

Meeting the economic challenges of regional and rural Australia: Leveraging community capacity to foster innovation in VET

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This presentation examines a number of different approaches to leveraging regional and rural community capacity and strength to foster innovative approaches in vocational education and training.

"A basic education is the key to success in Australia's economy for individuals and regions alike. Achieving more equitable education outcomes across regional Australia is our nation's greatest challenge in realising the potential of regional Australia," says the Regional Australia Institute. Rural, regional and remote Australia face significant economic, health and other disadvantages, as a result of distance, lack of infrastructure and poor educational access. Economic development is slowing: in 2014/15, GDP per capita fell in regional NSW, Victoria, Queensland and South Australia, only increasing in metropolitan Sydney and Melbourne. Some 24 regional LGAs have NO high performing high school students. Only 6 of the 100 most "technologically ready" LGAs are non-metropolitan.

Community education provides a complementary form of educational delivery to public/government (primarily TAFE) and private providers, and is an essential component of the mix of vocational education and training in Australia. The community education sector delivers 4.7% of government-funded vocational education – compared to 63.6% of TAFE/government and 30.7% of private training providers. The community sector is particularly important in regional and rural Australia, where "market failure" is frequent: in rural NSW more than 10% of government-funded VET students study through community education providers.

This presentation examines innovative approaches to rural and regional vocational education. How can we encourage, enable and facilitate the development of "incubators" and start-ups? The presentation utilises a number of case studies, drawn from the Riverina district, the Hunter Valley, the southern NSW tablelands and the NSW north coast. These community programs build on important community connections established through a history of government and non-government funded education programs. These innovative activities are funded by a mix of public-private-community partnerships, and a diverse range of sources that taps into Australia's growing philanthropic giving sector. They point the way to a dynamic future models for regional and rural development.

Selected references:

NCVER, 2015, *Government Funded Students and Courses Jan – Sept 2015*

NCVER Statistical Report, 21 December 2015

<http://www.regionalaustralia.org.au/home/2015/11/human-capital/>

The Rise of the Creative Class Revisited, by Richard Florida, Basic Books, New York, 2012