College welcomes change

COMMUNITY College-Northern Inland executive officer Lynne Sheather says she is "thrilled" that former Gunnedah mayor Adam Marshall was appointed Assistant Minister for Skills.

Ms Sheather said Mr Marshall's appointment acknowledged the importance of vocational education and training (VET) in regional and rural Australia.

"That's what is great about this appointment - to sustain our rural communities we need funding for skills development programs tailored to the needs of our environment. Because Adam was born and bred in our area he understands us and our local needs," she said.

"Country areas west of the Great Divide often struggle to be heard and understood in the cities where decisions are made. Having Adam as the Assistant Minister, we know he will admirably represent us."

Ms Sheather said non-metropolitan VET participation rates were at least 50 per cent higher in regional and rural Australia than in large metropolitan areas because of the economic and business structure.

"A much larger percentage of regional and rural VET students study lower level qualifications. [The qualifications that community education providers (community colleges) excel in, with our focus on vulnerable and disadvantaged learners," she said.

Ms Sheather said she agreed with Regional Australia Institute's statement that "achieving more equitable education outcomes across regional Australia is our nation's greatest challenge in realising the potential of regional Australia."

"We continually have success stories of under qualified, under employed and under confident locals walking through our doors," she said.

"With a little bit of encouragement, a skilled trainer and some government funding Lena [Curran] and [Moana Shobert] at the Gunnedah Community College have turned their lives around with most of the students gaining employment often before they have fully completed the courses or going on to more advanced studies."