

**Check against delivery**

***Hon. Ben Franklin MLC***

***Parliamentary Secretary for Renewable Energy and Northern NSW***

**Community Colleges Australia Member Forum**

**Wednesday 25<sup>th</sup> October 2017**

- Thank you Michelle.
- And thank you for Don. I am thrilled to be speaking at the Community Colleges Australia Regional Economic Development Forum.
- I'd like to first acknowledge the Traditional Owners of the land we meet on today.
- I pay my respects to their Elders, past and present and extend that respect to any Aboriginal people present.
- I am pleased to be here today representing the NSW Government on behalf of the Deputy Premier, the Honourable John Barilaro MP.
- I also acknowledge my parliamentary colleague, the member for Ballina, Tamara Smith MP.

**NSW Government's commitment to regional development**

- The NSW Liberal / Nationals Government understands that the regional areas keep our state's wheels turning.
- It is why we have made \$19 billion worth of investment in regional NSW since being elected in 2011.
- This landmark investment is improving the lives of every person who lives in regional NSW, especially in our area on the North Coast.
- Regional NSW makes up about 40 per cent of the state's population and produces one third of the gross state product. This is why regional communities are entitled to their fair share of the state's budget.

- The NSW Government recognises the importance of ensuring all regional communities can access the essential services of a modern economy.
- We believe our geography brings enormous opportunity, and should not deter people from choosing where they live, work and play. We have created the right economic conditions for growth with a clear rationale for investment.
- Regional areas are critical to the state's economy, but even more important to our identity.
- This is why this Government has invested so much in regional areas, and with the NSW Government's recently announced Regional Growth Fund, we aren't slowing down.
- We want to transform regional communities across the state and make it so that people in your town can pursue their aspirations locally, rather than relocating to a major city.
- NSW is ranked as the best state on regional employment. Over two years to April 2017, more than 58,400 jobs have been created in our regions. This is more than all of Australia's other states' regions combined (51,140).
- Regional Growth Fund is worth \$1.3 billion and specifically for targeted investment and turbocharging local economies for NSW.

### **Regional Development Framework**

- In November 2016 the NSW Government launched the Regional Development Framework which outlines the three programs of investment this Government is focusing on. These are:
  - Providing infrastructure in regional NSW,
  - Aligning effort to support growing regional centres, and
  - Identifying and activating economic potential.
- Community colleges are key to activating economic potential and creating a skilled workforce. They help people attain jobs or progress their career.
- Community colleges are one of the many factors helping to create tens of thousands of new jobs in regional NSW each year - 70,000 during the year ending November 2015.

- This Government recognises the need for better coordination to make a difference to serious issues facing regional NSW such as youth unemployment, social disadvantage, changing economic opportunities and increased competition. And this is something we are working on.

## **Community Colleges**

- Adult community education (ACE) plays an extremely important role in our regional communities.
- They are run by dedicated providers who are leaders for their communities, who share their knowledge and do not shy away from a challenge.
- ACE providers offer a wide range of quality education to the regional and remote population of NSW.
- Community colleges have helped thousands of disadvantaged, regional and remote learners get the education they need to join the workforce and support themselves.
- The people in our regional communities deserve the best education and the best foundation to build access to jobs and further their careers.
- The Government wants to support the most disadvantaged students across NSW access community colleges as part of our Adult Community Education (ACE) Community Service Obligation (CSO).
- The ACE CSO program advances student pathways, making it easier for them to improve their skills and get a job. It also relieves pressure on approved ACE providers.
- This program is something we are proud of and we are providing \$18 million in funding to ACE colleges and students through the CSO program.
- This supports students and in turn, looks after the colleges they attend.
- The NSW ACE sector has a long and successful history of delivering targeted training to disadvantaged students across the state.
- This includes places like the Workers' Educational Association in Newcastle which celebrated its centenary in 2013. The Workers' Educational Association has been enriching lives for people all across the Hunter. This is the stability and experience all community colleges across NSW should have.

- A typical student studying at an ACE provider is twice as likely to have a disability compared to students in other VET programs which is why funding to this sector is so important.
- ACE providers are experienced in working with students who face barriers such as low levels of employability, a discontinuous education history or have issues relating to language, literacy or numeracy. Students also receive intensive support and help so they have the confidence to re-engage in vocational education and training.
- The NSW Government fully recognises the exceptional role of ACE providers which is why we support you through dedicated Community Service Obligation (CSO) funding as well as access to contestable Smart and Skilled funds.
- The CSO funding promotes access and increases vocational education and training outcomes for those who experience significant barriers to training and employment.
- In addition to the \$18 million allocated to the Community Service Obligation, the Government has also provided:
  - \$500,000 to support five remote ACE colleges. That is, \$100,000 each to Community College Northern Inland at Narrabri and Moree, Guyra Adult Learning Association, Robinson Education Centre in Broken Hill, Western College in Dubbo and Western Riverina Community College in Griffith.
  - We have also provided \$319,000 to support IT and professional development requirements of ACE colleges.
- These contributions help the students gain new skills and ensure that our adult community education providers continue to deliver the high-quality courses that change the lives of so many.

**Conclusion:**

- As providers of community education, you are the leaders of our regional communities. You are driving economic growth through education. You are making a difference in our communities. And that we appreciate.
- On behalf of the NSW Government I wish you a wonderful Forum.
- Thank you.