



## MAYOR'S COLUMN 21 NOVEMBER 2018

There is no doubt Dubbo is a thriving city and its role as the hub of the west is more important than ever.

Your Council will continue to work hard to ensure Dubbo maintains its trajectory of growth but we do face some challenges that need to be overcome.

Two of the biggest factors impacting us is ensuring our population continues to grow at a strong rate to support future development, and solving a current skills shortage.

The term skills shortage is thrown around a lot. It means even if there are more people who are unemployed than there are job vacancies, if those people don't have the right training to fill the position then there is a skills shortage.

Dubbo is experiencing record low unemployment rates and while that is a fantastic thing, it makes recruitment for positions difficult for employers. It can be a disincentive to expand a business if someone can't find the right people to help them run it.

Other employers struggle to fill voids because people don't want to do the work.

Abattoirs, orchards and other agriculture industries are among those who have that problem and it can be just as big an inhibitor.

Council has an obligation to work with other levels of government to ensure there is adequate population growth and training to meet the needs of business and industry. Because it is those sectors that are the backbone of the local economy and will ensure there are plenty of employment opportunities.

Our economic development team has invested a significant amount of energy into creating a snapshot of our region to inform our future plans.

What they found is that over the next five years the energy industry will be one of the most significant over the next five years for investment and employment, along with construction and mining.

Those industries are also facing skills shortages with metal fabricators, plant operators and electricians identified as the occupations most in demand.

Four out of five respondents to a Dubbo Regional Council survey said their industry suffered from a skills shortage and three in four said they were having difficulty recruiting staff.

Three in four employers also said they would recruit an additional 1-5 staff straight away if the right applicants were available. Two respondents said they would hire an additional 16-20 and 20 or more staff respectively.

Those results show just how big an impact skills shortages can have and just how big a priority it is for Council to bring skilled employees to the region.

For quite some time now your Council has been actively working to attract new residents to town, who may have the skills necessary to fill some of these vacancies. We are working with major employers to undertake targeted attraction campaigns including the health sector.

One method we have used to get new residents to our region is the Evocities platform. Evocities is a partnership between seven NSW regional councils that pools resources to try and attract people away from Sydney.

This includes creating campaigns that have the cut through in a large Sydney market – and use that opportunity to clearly demonstrate regional cities have everything they could need, but also offers shorter commutes and better lifestyle options. We're not selling a country change – we're selling a City Change.

And we are finding that it is working. As Sydney becomes more congested and the cost of living there continues to rise, people are seeing the benefit of coming over the Blue Mountains where they can afford to buy a home and only need to leave home 10 minutes before work.

However we also need to continue to work with the State and Federal governments to ensure that we do everything we can to provide training facilities, encourage the decentralisation of government departments, attract major developments and support regional migration.

Finding the right mix of business growth, population growth and education and training to meet the needs of everyone can be a difficult balancing act but I am confident that our Council is working with the community and key stakeholder to ensure Dubbo is prepared for these challenges into the future.

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