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Media Release

Time to focus on skilled jobs growth in the Hills

Establishing satellite university campuses and locating more public sector positions in the Adelaide Hills will help create a skilled, highly participatory workforce that is matched to the needs of the region's industry and businesses, Mount Barker District Council says.

According to a new report released by Regional Development Australia (RDA), strategic priorities for a skilled workforce in the Adelaide Hills were "increased attainment of tertiary education" and greater collaboration between vocational education and training providers, high schools, tertiary institutions, and industry.

The RDA's *Strategic Regional Plan 2022-2025 for the Adelaide Hills, Fleurieu & Kangaroo Island* recommended projects including promotion and support of government education and workforce programs, and establishing regional university centres.

"Education and training are already a specialised and growing sector in the Adelaide Hills, and an emerging sector in the Fleurieu and Kangaroo Island," the report found.

"It is an important trend to continue and expand on, as it is forecast that more than 33% of jobs growth in the region up to 2027 will be in professional service and community/personal service occupations.

"Critically, one in three of these new jobs will require a bachelor's degree, or higher qualification, which exceeds the region's current level of education."

Mount Barker District Council's *Economic Development Strategy 2022-2027*, released in September, also noted that despite its rapid population growth, the district was not producing enough jobs for its residents' needs, while 55.8% of residents travelled outside of the area to work.

"The creation and attraction of high value jobs in the creative and digital industries and across the professional services spectrum will be crucial to reducing the amount of residents commuting out of the district for work," Council's report said. "These jobs and businesses will drive innovation and productivity across their own and related industries in the district."

Mount Barker District Council is renewing its call for the State Government to set up a working group with local government to consider options for some positions within state agencies and departments to be located in Mount Barker.

The State Government could look at creating employment for 2,000 people or more in the broader Adelaide Hills and Fleurieu area, Council says.

Currently just 3.5 per cent of jobs in the Mount Barker district are in public administration, while the region is also underrepresented in the industries of financial and insurance services, information media and telecommunications, and professional services.

There is scope for government to offer targeted support packages for the private sector to establish offices in the Mount Barker City Centre, including a regional Lot Fourteen innovation hub, and satellite university campuses, Council says.

Plans for a new-look Mount Barker City Centre precinct, including commercial, residential and business opportunities to create and support ongoing employment growth in the city centre, and a co-working hub where people could work remotely rather than travel down the freeway, are already being advanced by the council.

Greater employment options in the Adelaide Hills and Fleurieu Peninsula also will help to boost safety and bust congestion on the South Eastern Freeway as less residents commute to Adelaide for work.

Council's Economic Development Strategy report forecast the district's population would increase to 56,710 residents by 2036.

Mount Barker District Council CEO Andrew Stuart said there was enormous economic potential across the district.

"Mount Barker is the commercial centre of the Adelaide Hills region, and with the right focus and support for a locally based skilled workforce, it can provide a focal point for commercial industries, as well as state agencies and government departments, and higher education," Mr Stuart said.

"We have a competitive advantage in being able to foster a supportive and sustainable economic environment to grow job options and allow our residents to work locally, which also means that they would have more family time and greater opportunity to provide community benefit such as volunteering or coaching a local sporting team."

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