

Submission to the Inquiry into innovation and creativity: workforce for the new economy

Through the unique community engagement project Shop My Town, we have uncovered a seismic change in small town communities that sees them poised for either growth or failure.

In regional Australia, small towns are in a rut. Becoming dependant on either agriculture or mining has left them vulnerable when these industries wind up.

In Oakey, the closure of the saleyards has seen the town reduced to ghost status, graffiti, cobwebs and rubbish littering the local shopping centre.

In Chinchilla, ten years ago a thriving town with a vibrant and close knit community, the massive bubble of rents & housing prices saw many move away.

In Wandoan, the community anxiously counts the number of families left attending the local school.

When we surveyed parents in these communities, 25% of those surveyed were making financial sacrifices so their children could experience a country upbringing. However, 65% stated that their children did not have a future in regional Australia and would have to move to the city to study or get a job.

However with the opening up of new pathways through increased internet access, this is the time for innovative small business to replace the employment gap.

Regional Australia Institute chief executive Jack Archer stated that the view on regional jobs needed to shift. “Our data shows that agriculture's only 3 per cent of regional employment now, so most employment's elsewhere” ([Agriculture sector welcomes Commonwealth innovation initiatives, but others warn it can't all be about agriculture, ABC Rural 8 Dec '15](#))

"We're seeing good growth and productivity across all sectors of the economy, and those services jobs are the key trend. So it's a bit of a worry that at the high level they may have missed that change, and that we're still thinking about regions in that old way.

The latest Shop My Town research has uncovered the way parents are viewing opportunity in regional Australia, and these opinions are holding young entrepreneurs back.

Local school graduates are in secret discussions with Shop My Town, desperate to start online business, selling clothing, however being discouraged by their conservative parents. Through sharing stories of success such as the incredible story of rural youth startup Outcast Clothing, we encourage these parents to let the kids off the leash and embrace the digital world.

By simply showing a new way to the community, pathways are opened up, and the gap can be closed.

In conclusion, there seems to be nothing in the way for innovative business in rural communities to drive the local economy. We would like to see further development of youth grants & confidence inspiring projects, to enable change in rural Australia.



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