

Be.Bendigo
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MEDIA RELEASE

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International Students a vital part of Bendigo's future

Supporting the full return and continuing growth of International students will be essential if Bendigo is to fully realise the opportunities presented by efforts to build a stronger economic base in regional areas, according to Be.Bendigo (Bendigo's Chamber of Commerce).

"The recently released 'Regionalisation Ambition 2032' from the Regional Australia Institute (RAI) makes a strong argument for the factors that will contribute to a greater proportion of Australians living prosperously in the regions by 2032 and beyond", claimed CEO of Be.Bendigo, Mr Rob Herbert.

'Among the key pillars of the ambitious targets set in the RAI Report are those relating to Jobs & Skills, and Productivity & Innovation. Recognising that a key factor in responding to changing skills requirements in an evolving jobs market is for members of our community to have access to the training and higher level qualifications required", Mr Herbert continued, "in this regard, Bendigo has a significant advantage with the strong local presence of La Trobe University and Bendigo TAFE providing opportunities for those already in the Bendigo region, but also continuing to attract ambitious people to the City."

"Recent advice from La Trobe University that International students now account for 10% of students at its regional campuses, clearly underscores the importance of this sector to our economy and community moving forward", he said.

While this contributes to optimism for Bendigo's future growth and development, Mr Herbert indicated there was concern that International Student numbers had not rebounded as quickly as anticipated, due to being caught up in processing delays that are currently affecting all Visa classes, including those for skilled workers needed to fill critical roles.

"While there have been increases in staffing levels to clear backlogs, it is really important to recognise that it is often the presence of International students that ensures ongoing viability of programs offered at regional university campuses, including those such as IT, Engineering and Business, where there are already chronic shortages of graduates. With extended post-qualification work rights, and opportunities to work while studying, these students are also a significant ongoing component of our regional skilled workforce, and need to be encouraged", Mr Herbert said.

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“Some suggestions that international student visa applications might be being denied, because applicants don’t have a pre-existing, detailed knowledge of the regional areas for which they are applying are disturbing, since that will mean a continued skewing toward major metro areas, rather than regional areas where students and graduates can have the most impact”, he continued. “We know, from hearing directly from those who have come to study, found a home, and now work here, that Bendigo is a great place to build a life and career, and we need to ensure that we do all that we can to facilitate that.”

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