RESEARCH REPORT

LEGATUS GROUP

Attracting, Developing and Retaining Regional Local Government Workforces

1st September 2022

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Acknowledgements:

Respondents of the online survey:

Legatus Group Mayors and CEOs

and Regional Local Government Associations CEOs

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1 Executive Summary

Meeting current and future skill needs will be an ongoing challenge for the Local Government (LG) sector and more significantly regional councils. Within the context of a tightening national labour market the regional LG sector will find it difficult to compete against other industry sectors and urban based LGs to attract and retain skilled labour.

For regional LGs the attraction and retention difficulties include competitive wages; limited career progression; limited infrastructure and amenities; limited employment opportunities for partners; and accessing suitable training programs. To overcome these challenges the regional LG sector will need to develop innovative programs that draw on regional strengths and attractors and identify potential skill pools that can be accessed within the region. Also importantly will be co-operative strategies that strengthen recruitment and attraction effectiveness.

The combination of focus group, survey, and student feedback information that is presented in this report suggests that following strategies be adopted by regional LGAs in South Australia.

Recommendations

Recommendation 1: The Legatus Group engages with its member councils, other Regional LG Associations and the SA LGA Secretariat outlining the findings of this report and its recommendations.

Recommendation 2: Shared Resources

A key recommendation from this report is the consideration of shared resources which could contain a regional register of professions, trades and opportunities that can be shared across LGAs. This could include a centralised collective HR "platform" to be established for use by the members for recruitment, training, retention and HR policies. Sharing professional services to reduce costs and improve access in key professional areas could also be considered.

Specific interests include shared upskilling and training between groups of councils and shared group training and short courses to develop soft skills across staff such as leadership and communications. Further sharing towards recruitment was seen in the areas of Careers Fairs and with Regional High Schools and TAFEs/RTOs; plus, support for new recruits from diverse backgrounds; and cadetships and traineeships.

Recommendation 3: Innovative Workforce Sourcing

Councils will need to recognise the potential for attracting out of region workers with specialist skills with working from home/hybrid options and block employment patterns such as used in FIFO or DIDO employment arrangements.

Develop partnerships with other sectors, to collectively develop the value proposition of regional lifestyles so as to attract people to live and work in the regions.

Recommendation 4: Marketing the Regions

Developing a marketing campaign to promote the liveability and attractiveness of SA regions to be done with other industry sectors and key stakeholders. This report has identified the need for a strong and active brand awareness for the local government sector through websites, social media, close partnerships with schools, colleges and universities, recruiters, migration agents and student advisors on job opportunities, including internships, and taking advantage of South Australia's skilled migration policy to fill specific roles. This will enable the sector to better promote itself and compete with federal, state and the private sector in attracting and retaining employees to the region.

The report seeks to encourage individual councils to actively engage in regional careers and employment events.

Recommendation 5: Employer of Choice/ LG Career Toolkit

Developing an employee retention program through a Mentoring System across councils; establishing clear career pathways across the LG sector; professional development opportunities within the sector; shared succession planning within the region; secondments across member councils and metro-regional partnering to support coaching, mentoring and secondments.

Recommendation 6: Workforce Inclusion Strategy

Developing workforce diversity plans that seek to attract and support such groups as migrants; women; Indigenous peoples; older persons; and those with a disability. This will involve integration with State and Federal government diversity programs.

There is also the potential to tap into under-utilised skilled and professional workers within the region such as retirees and women who could be attracted by flexible employment arrangements.

Recommendation 7: Future Proofing

Whilst the focus of this report was on meeting current skill shortages, there is an undercurrent of ongoing change in technology, in systems of working (such as online), in future skill and training needs and sourcing broader talent pools. This requires forward planning that forecasts the changes in LG service requirements, delivery processes, employment numbers and composition, and education and training requirements.

Consideration should be given by the LG sector to Information Workshops for Skilled Migration Schemes (Regional and Employer Sponsored) involving key stakeholders such as the State Government and Migration Agents.

2 Introduction

This report begins with the background of this project. This project commenced in 2021 as an initiative funded by the Vice Chancellor of Torrens University, Professor Alwyn Louw, through his PAN UNI Projects initiative. This provides research funds for research initiatives between Torrens University research centres and the wider community. The Centre for Organisational Change and Agility (COCA) at Torrens University Australia, (Wakefield campus, Adelaide) discussed with the Legatus Group CEO issue facing their councils and the project was conceived and funded ($10,000) to support the projects ideation through the resourcing of a Research Assistant to undertake the literature review and stakeholder mapping for the project. Once this stage of the project was completed the Legatus Group co-invested in the project with a further $10,000.00 and a Research Agreement between the two parties was signed and the second stage of the project commenced in early 2022, concluding at the end of September 2022.

The objectives of the project and the research questions driving the project are as follows:

Research Objectives

RO1: Explore the key challenges, enablers and innovative strategies for attracting, developing and retaining regional Local Government workforces

RO2: Develop a comprehensive strategy and Action Plan for attracting, developing and retaining Local Government workforces in regional SA (Legatus Group)

Research Questions

RQ1: *What are current challenges for these LGAs in SA in attracting and retaining key workforces/professionals?*

RQ2: *How can the Legatus Group strategise together with its 15 LGAs to enable and innovate in attracting, developing and retaining key regional LG workforces?*

RQ3: *What are the key workforce upskilling and training needs being experienced by Legatus LGA members?*

RQ4: *What forms of hybrid work & digitally enabled technologies and professional development & training could be used to support the development and retention of key LGA workforce groups in the Legatus region?*

Section 3 synthesises the existing research that has been conducted in relation to Local Government workforces. Section 4 describes the research design and methods employed for this study and Section 5 provides a summary of the findings. Section 6 reports the study outcomes and section 7 concludes the report recommendations and implications followed by References and Appendices.

3 Literature Review

To have a greater grasp of the issues facing the Legatus Group, research took place to understand at a national level the general obstacles with attracting and retaining a workforce to regional, rural, and remote Australia.

At a federal level, *Regions 2030* (Australian Government, 2017) is the official plan to develop regional Australia across 5 key areas: jobs & economic development, infrastructure, education, health, and communication, while at the same time acknowledging that a "*one-size fits all*" approach will not be effective.

The Australian Local Government Association (ALGA) is the national voice of Local Government (LG) representing 537 councils across Australia of which 55% LGs are deemed rural, remote, or regional (Australian Local Government Association, n.d.) Within South Australia, there are a total of 68 LGs (Local Government Association of South Australia, n.d.)

In 2018, an ALGA *Workforce & Future Skills Report* (Australian Local Government Association, 2018) stated that, in terms of emerging skill shortages & training, LGs have a workforce that:

- is older than the all-industry workforce,
- declining participation level of workers under 30,
- lacks apprentices to meet future needs,
- faces skills shortage in key professional and technical occupations, and
- is not ready for new and emerging soft skills.

In fact, 69% of LGs reported a skills shortage & skills gap, while 60% reported unmet training needs, with availability, cost, and time constraints being identified their biggest barriers to staff gaining soft skills.

That same report identified:

- inability of LGs to compete with the private sector on remuneration,
- lack of suitably qualified and experienced candidates,
- many being regional and remote locations, and
- lack of opportunity for career progression particularly in small councils while also citing similar reasons to those reported at a national level.

Meanwhile, a senate inquiry in 2019 (Australian Local Government Association, 2019) recommended:

- regional development programs to address declining industries,
- greater funding and incentives to develop local jobs,
- address infrastructure issues,
- transition to a low emissions economy,
- digital connectivity,
- new VET funding models,
- new skilled visa migration, and

- greater collaboration between all three levels of government.

In 2021, South Australia reported that 27% of the population live in regions, job vacancies had increased 73% from the previous year, there was a 26.3% decrease in available rental properties, and agribusiness, health, aged care, and energy were the top four occupations at risk experiencing a skills shortage over the next three years (Government of South Australia, 2021).

A *Growing our Regional South Australia Workforce Report* in 2021 noted that regions contribute $29B annually to the state economy and found that issues across the regions were affecting an available and skilled workforce. Six themes or "enablers" were proposed in the report:

1. identification of job vacancies and growth needs,
2. employment place-based readiness pathways in line with the Skilling SA Program,
3. workforce attraction that is sustainable to attract and retain people supported by infrastructure and services,
4. available, affordable and quality accommodation,
5. migration reform, and
6. business HR capacity and capability to help small businesses recruit and manage staff.

Multiple programs have been funded to assist those industries to attract skilled workforce, adopt technology, improve digital connectivity, infrastructure, and ensure sustainability (Regional Development South Australia, 2021).

Case studies in Victoria in 2009 (State Services Authority, 2009) cited many of the same issues in attracting and retaining staff in rural and regional regions, and suggested community sector organisations could benefit from targeting the following groups when they are looking to recruit new staff to their organisation:

- local residents interested in upskilling or a career change
- the increasing number of mature-aged people who are considering moving out of the city sea changers and tree changers
- people in their late 20s and early 30s looking to return to regional areas, often to raise families, and
- skilled migrants.

Within the report, examples were presented across different regions and sectors that reported the following strategies for successfully attracting and retaining workers:

- Supported volunteers to move into paid employment within an organization
- Offering flexible working arrangements, e.g., shared work, flexy hours helps to compete with private sector opportunities and broadens number of applicants
- Relocation support for new employees (and their families) helps to retain them as they are more likely to assimilate into the community.
- Incentives such as extra leave, salary sacrifice and housing support

- Ongoing training, development, and promotion options
- Support with work/life balance
- Succession Planning for critical senior roles by grooming potential employees, and to address sudden absences or resignations.

Becker, Hyland & Soosay (2013) report similar findings for rural and remote Queensland, but also noted the importance of promoting the region, its people, lifestyle, and resources.

A report in 2017 titled "*Local Government, an ageing workforce: are we prepared?*" noted that LG workforce is ageing, there is a risk of many retiring within a short space of time, and that unless councils have detailed information on their workforces, they will struggle to predict furfure demand (Kelly, et.al. 2017).

Research by Musoni (2019) highlighted some historical learnings from regional communities across Australia which supported regional migration. For this to be a success, they identified the need for government, business, and volunteers to all work together.

Fairbrother and Denham (2019) in their paper titled "*Future Jobs and Regional Workforce Development: Foundations and Analysis*", discuss shifting trends in local skills to enable locals to remain in their regions by again developing relationships with government, businesses, and advocacy groups.

Meanwhile, in Queensland a paper by Babacan, Dale and McHugh (2019) discuss the challenges facing policy makers to ensure workforce needs are identified for example through understanding skills shortages, education and training needs, and new workforce models.
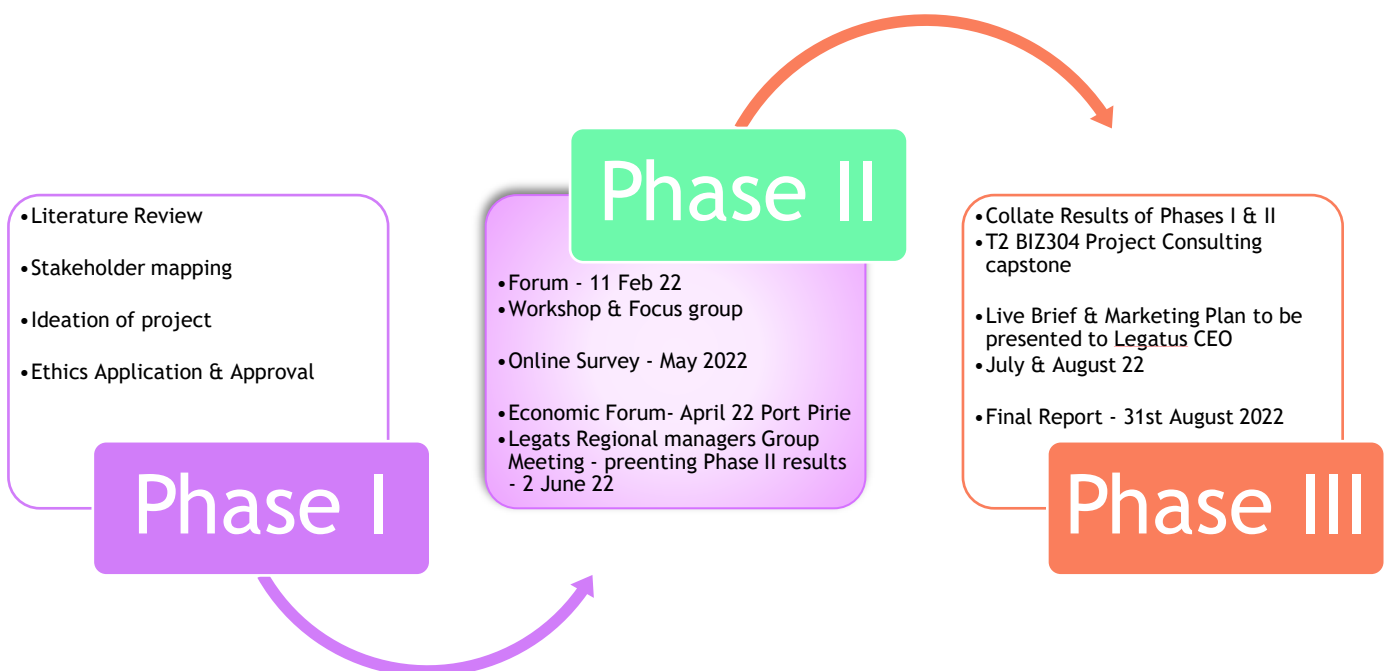
One of the recent issues identified as being important to attracting skilled labour is housing affordability and availability within the regions and in relation to this LG's lack of proactiveness to address the situation (Martin, et. al., 2021). While the impact of border closure during COVID-19 resulted in a negative net migration for the country, it should be noted that South Australia continues to offer eligible skilled and business migrants greater opportunities than some other states offering a competitive advantage and the ability to attract a workforce to regional SA (Move to South Australia, n.d.).

Across the nation and the sector the literature presents a similar picture of systemic skill shortages and the range of challenges for local governments and regional communities to meet the skills gap. As the labour market tightens in Australia over the course of 2022 with falling unemployment rates, increased labour force participation and record unfilled job vacancies (AI Group, 2022), the skills gap will intensify in regional Australia and within the regional LG sector, and to address the gap will require co-operative and innovative responses.

4   Methodology

The methodology employed for this research was an exploratory sequential mixed methods research design across three phases. Phase I included a literature review, stakeholder mapping and an Ethics application to the Torrens University Ethics Committee. Phase II saw the collection of qualitative (focus group interviews) and quantitative data (online survey).Phase III included a Live Brief for undergraduate business students enrolled in a capstone course, BIZ304 Project Consulting with Torrens University to evaluate the research findings and discuss potential solutions.

Figure 1: Research Design and Timeline

Phase I
- Literature Review
- Stakeholder mapping
- Ideation of project
- Ethics Application & Approval

Phase II
- Forum - 11 Feb 22
- Workshop & Focus group
- Online Survey - May 2022
- Economic Forum- April 22 Port Pirie
- Legats Regional managers Group Meeting - preenting Phase II results - 2 June 22

Phase III
- Collate Results of Phases I & II
- T2 BIZ304 Project Consulting capstone
- Live Brief & Marketing Plan to be presented to Legatus CEO
- July & August 22
- Final Report - 31st August 2022

4.1 **Phase I:** Literature Review and Ethics

Phase I of the project commenced in 2021 and involved a literature review and stakeholder mapping exercise which was undertaken by the Research Assistant funded by Torrens University Australia through COCA. This then assisted in the ideation of the project. The research team and the Legatus CEO then developed the overall primary data collection approach for the proposed research project.

An Ethics Application was sought through the Torrens University Ethics Committee. The application was developed by the research team and Approval (#0143) was granted on 01/02/2022.

Refer to Appendix 9.1 Ethics Approval

4.2   Phase II: Focus groups and Online Survey

Focus group

The focus group was conducted in February 2022 with invited participants from attendees at the 2022 Yorke and Mid North Regional Forum: Growing a Regional Workforce conducted virtually on 11th February, 2022.

"*Growing a Regional Wor*kforce" Forum

Focus group was made up of 12 participants who were briefed about the research project and then asked a series of focus group questions. The focus group was recorded and notes taken on the responses. A summary of this data is presented in Section 5.2.1.

Refer to Appendix 9.2 Focus Group Questions

Online survey

The online survey was conducted in May 2022 and was distributed to Mayors and the CEOs of the Legatus Group 15 local government councils.

The online survey had 22 respondents from across the 15 councils and a second follow on survey was also sent to the Regional LG Associations with a further 7 responses collected. Results from the survey can be found in Section 5.2.2.

Refer to Appendix 9.3 Online Survey

4.3   **Phase III:** Live Brief

One of the final year undergraduate subjects that business students at Torrens University Australia study is *BIZ304 – Business Consulting Project*. This is a subject where students learn the skills of being a consultant by applying their learnings to a real-life scenario. This scenario is referred to as a "*live brief*" and changes each term.

For Term 2 - 2022 (30th May – 19th August) – students were charged with the task of researching for the Legatus group "*Marketing the SA Regional Local Government sector to attract, retain and develop a culturally diverse workforce, and promoting its liveability*".

This 12-week live brief included 40 students and three assessment tasks. The first two assessments were teamwork based comprising of approximately four students per team. For assessment one, the groups had to research the situation to clearly understand the situation facing the Legatus Group. For assessment two (based on their findings from assessment one), recommendations and their implementation were proposed. During the term, the Legatus Group CEO, Simon Millcock, attended the live classes twice for an interactive Q&A with students. The final assessment is an individual presentation pitch which included the top performing student presenting live to the Legatus CEO.

Key findings and recommendations from the live brief are highlighted in section 5.3 herein for the Legatus group to consider.

Refer to Appendix 9.4 for the Live Brief

5 Summary of Findings

5.1 Phase I

Key stakeholders linked to the evaluation of the research questions include, but are not limited to:

Local Government entities:

Legatus Group Members:

- Adelaide Plains Council
- Barunga West Council
- Clare and Gilbert Valleys Council
- Copper Coast Council
- District Council of Mount Remarkable
- District Council of Orroroo Carrieton
- District Council of Peterborough
- Light Regional Council
- Northern Areas Council
- Port Pirie Regional Council
- Regional Council of Goyder
- The Barossa Council
- The Flinders Ranges Council
- Wakefield Regional Council
- Yorke Peninsula Council

- All regional SA LGA's and LGA of South Australia (SAROC)
- LGA through the SA Regional Organisation of Councils and the LGA Secretariat
- Australian Local Government Association (ALGA)

Education and training providers:

- Torrens University Australia
- LG Professionals SA
- Educational providers: Dept of Education-secondary schools; VET sector providers and higher education providers - University of Adelaide, UniSA & Flinders University

Professional bodies:

- Regional Development Australia (RDA) which are delivering Employment Initiatives
- Industry bodies/Professional Associations/Recruitment Agencies e.g. Local Govt IT SA, Economic Development Australia and Institute of Public Works Engineering Australasia (SA)
- Regional Australia Institute
- LG Professionals
- Employment services e.g., Maxima/McArthur

Federal and State government Departments

- Australian Industry & Skills Committee (AISC)

- National Skills Commission (NSC)
- Australian Industry and Skills Committee (AISC)
- Regional Development South Australia (RDSA)
- Department for Innovation & Skills, Government of South Australia
- Tourism South Australia
- Migration South Australia

- SA Industry Skills Council (ISC)
- SA Agribusiness ISC
- SA Food, Wine, Tourism & Hospitality ISC
- SA Construction, Mining and Energy ISC
- SA Creative Industries, Business & Digital Platforms ISC
- SA Defence, Aerospace, ICT and Cybersecurity ISC
- SA Health, Disability, Aged Care & Community Services ISC
- SA Education & Service Sector ISC
- SA Transport and Manufacturing ISC

5.2 Phase II: Focus Group and Online Survey
5.2.1 Focus group

The focus group was conducted after the "*Growing a Regional Work*force" Forum in February 2022, the attendees were asked the four key research questions noted below. The overall findings from each question are highlighted below.

Q1: What are current challenges for the Legatus Group LGAs in SA in attracting and retaining key workforces/professionals?

There was a clear consensus that career development was limited including the lack of promotional opportunity to move into management roles, an unclear direction with professional development, and that professional stimulation ceases at a certain level. It was noted that the LGA cannot offer the same compensation for equivalent roles in metro regions, and that they are not just recruiting an individual but also their partner and family where applicable. In line with this, liveability, access to amenities such as schools and medical services, and integrating into the LGA were also considered challenges.

However, discussion noted that the LGAs across the Legatus Group provide a diverse range of projects and opportunities, and as such can take advantage of shared services between LGAs, the more services being offered will increase job opportunities, and that the same recruitment and retention issues facing LG are also affecting the regional private sector.

Q2: How can the Legatus group strategise together to enable and innovate in attracting, developing and retaining key regional LG workforces?

It was recommended that the Legatus 15 LGAs together review their needs, gaps and issues, and from this generate a regional register of professions, trades, and opportunities that can be shared across LGAs. To support this, it was suggested that a centralised collective HR "platform" could be established for use and sharing with LGAs for recruitment, training, retention, policies, etc.

Q3: What are the key workforce upskilling and training needs being experienced by Legatus LGA members?

Pivotal to this question was ensuring that any education and training provided is relevant to upskill, mentor and guide those less experienced, e.g., on-the-job training, cadetship, etc. In relation to cadetship, it was commented that this was expensive for individual LGAs, however there was an appetite for the possibility of cost sharing between LGAs needing similar cadetships. Discussion also centred around engaging with universities on promoting and supporting internships in regional environments and LG.

Q4: What forms of hybrid work & digitally enabled technologies and professional development & training could be used to support the development and retention of key LGA workforce groups in the Legatus region?

Currently, nine of the member councils stated they are researching how to best use technology and as part of this, would they benefit from sharing the costs of its implementation, upgrading, etc. In line with this, several risks were identified, including keeping up to date with the technology, connectivity in regions is often poor, the cost to enable people to work from home, and for older employees the need for extra training on use. However, due to COVID-19 and working from home, some of these issues have been lessened. Similarly, it was proposed that the Group could promote the regions by attracting more metro employees who could work several days a week in the regions, and the other days from their home. Like Q1, selling the liveability of regional SA is critical, and it was noted that everyone needs to remember that the LGAs are major employers in SA.

A discussion also took place on LGA corporate social responsibility to ensure greater employment opportunities for Indigenous and disability workforces.

Q5: Are there any additional comments?

Like Q1, as a sector, the LGAs are competing with private and public industries e.g., mining, healthcare, etc. to attract and retain their workforces.

5.2.2 Online Survey

The following data is based on the first survey sent to Legatus group members in which there were 22 respondents nine of which were CEOs, six mayors and other senior staff (n=7).

Recruitment

When asked which roles were the hardest to fill the responses were multiple and several usually senior roles were repeatedly mentioned with Engineers, Planners, Finance managers/Accountants being the most frequent mentioned roles. However other roles were also identified, such as: Technical and operations roles, IT, senior management, business analysts, building surveyors, property management, governance, WHS/EHO, project managers, environmental health and experienced machine operators and grader drivers with LG experience.

Members of the Legatus group utilise a variety of recruitment practices with the most common approach being a combination of their own recruitment practices and utilising the services of a Recruitment Agency. Six councils used labour hire companies and five did their own recruitment. Interestingly four indicated they utilized shared approaches with other councils/ Legatus members.

When asked how much the yearly budget was for recruitment (e.g., advertising, Recruitment agencies, in-kind resourcing etc) six respondents indicated $5,000.00 to $10,000.00 and another six indicated $10,000.00 to $20,000.00 with 2 respondents indicating above $30,000.00. This equates to approximately $250K per annum and does not account for other costs for having roles unfilled for lengths of time and low productivity during onboarding periods. This provides an indication of spend and presents evidence to argue for more shared practices in the recruitment space.

A HR benchmarking survey was recently undertaken by ELMO and AHRI and found that on average it took 40 days to fill a vacant position (and executive roles even longer at 59 days) and the report estimated the cost to fill a vacancy being $23,860.00 (ELMO and AHRI, 2022).

Respondents were most likely to use the following recruitment method options: Federal or State funded employment and training, Shared Recruitment Kit between Councils, shared cadetships/traineeships and a Skilled Migration Employer Sponsored Visa. Shared recruitment costs- joint or bulk recruitment was the least likely to be used option.

Fifteen respondents indicated their council had not used or attempted to use a Skilled Migration scheme/visa with one respondent indicating that they had. When

asked if their council was to use a skilled migration scheme which roles/occupations would they consider using such a scheme the responses were in reference to engineering and technical roles, however many indicated that many of the hard to fill roles, general administration, finance and construction would also be considered. Two respondents indicated they would not consider skilled migration options.

Attraction Strategies

A variety of attraction strategies were listed by respondents in reference to recruiting staff – see Table 1 below.

Table 1: Attraction Strategies

Benefits - Flexible work, income protection, training and development, RDO's, wellbeing program Using professional bodies to reach a broader audience for targeted roles Social media platforms to reach different demographics
Flexible and great conditions, e.g. working from home, generous leave and pay. Diverse workplace and good culture!
Only informal strategies
We are a developing council with interesting exciting strategic roles to be filled.
Location lifestyle of choice, job security, lifestyle, SEEK, Linkedin, newspaper, recruitment agencies
Good salaries Good Lifestyle Flexible working conditions
Advertising -internally and externally, recruitment Agency advertising, word of mouth between Fellow Councils
Meaningful work, flexible working arrangements (work-life balance), ability to evolve professionally, and culture.
Various depending on the role.
Organisational culture, location, salary packaging, conditions of employment, above award payments, vehicles, flexible work arrangements, professional development, professional memberships
Lifestyle and liveability
Benefits of the area, quick access to local attractions / leisure pursuits
Employer of choice, social media, lifestyle promotion
Pay above the award, free housing for CEO

Council's reputation as a great employer (employer of choice) Flexible work arrangements (WFH, RDOs etc)
Lifestyle, work life balance
Location and lifestyle

The top six attraction strategies used in descending order were:

- Salary packages – vehicle;
- Flexible work arrangements;
- Hybrid work options (mix of work from home and office);
- Relocation Assistance - Packing Service and Relocation Insurance;
- Liveability promotional marketing and
- Relocation Assistance – Travel Reimbursement – auto and airfares.

Four options that none of the respondents indicated were utilised are as follows:

- Relocation Assistance _ Home selling assistance;
- Private Schooling assistance;
- Support for the partner to secure work in the LGA and
- Staff onboarding and family community integration support.

The latter two would not be costly or resource heavy and could become part of the role of Community Services.

Current challenges for Councils in terms of retaining staff included overwhelmingly:

- Private sector remuneration
- Competition between Councils for staff especially metro councils- more liveability advantages
- Demand for certain occupations pushing up wages and salary packages (Eg Planners)

Other issues mentioned related to aging workforces, size of councils and limited resources, Life style, distance to services, lack of employment opportunities for partners and housing and further education availability.

Retention Strategies

Retention strategies most likely to be considered included:

- Mentoring System across Councils
- Sector Support System- provides professional development opportunities - Sub regional, Regional & State Wide
- Shared succession planning
- Secondments across Councils
- Metro-Regional partnering: coaching, mentoring & secondments
- Professional Development for structured CEO career pathway

Workforce Upskilling Needs

Respondents were asked what they saw as sector specific training needs and these responses are listed in table 2 below.

Table 2: Sector Specific Training

Rating processes and modelling Governance - LG reform Act/ICAC reform Development engineering - this is unique for LG blending Planning and Engineering knowledge
Administration and governance based training
Understanding Local Government
Planning, EHO and Building inspectors
Annual/routine WHS/compliance training.
Management, Leadership, Customer Service Skills, Development Planning, Building Surveying, Information Technology / Critical Thinking, Change and Project Management
Compliance
Feel there will be a shortage of planners and building surveyors, works managers with regional experience
Urgent works needs to be done in providing pathways for Building and Planning Officers - there is an acute shortage in regional areas
Role based up skilling
As above; risk management; systems control

The shortage of planners and surveyors is mentioned again however the general theme coming across the responses relates to sector specific training in the following areas: rates and modelling, LG Governance and Reform, blended LG planning and engineering, surveying and IT, EHO and Building Inspectors, Compliance/WHS, risk management & systems control.

One respondent listed a comprehensive list of "soft skills".

Respondents were also asked what the gaps were in terms of regional training provision (Table 3).

Table 3: Gaps in Regional Training Provision

We are able to access city training, therefore not overly affected by regional training gaps
Similar to those mentioned above - technical areas mainly
Not sure as we are peri-urban and have access to Adelaide (CBD) based providers
Quality professional compliance & regulatory trainers
Planning, EHO and Building inspector courses. Courses run out of QLD for EHOs as just one example.
Affordable, consolidated and regional WHS and compliance training.
All of them.
Electronic training
We are pretty well serviced in Pirie - however we buy in training from legal firms in governance, specialist HR training
We are generally able to source training required - however are hampered by cost
Limited training opportunities due to regional location.
Training providers generally good as they will run programs for the region and council in the region.

The respondents that were furthest away from Metro areas felt gaps in training provision in terms of limited training opportunities in general, with specific gaps in training noted as follows: electronic training, WHS, compliance and regulatory training and EHO and Building inspecting training.

Respondents were also asked which types of training approaches they might be interested in. A majority were interested in:

- Shared upskilling and training between groups of Councils
- Shared Group training (soft skills) – e.g., Leadership

Others indicated interest in Short Courses online and there was some interest in Shared professional Services (e.g., HR, legal & Finance) and some interest in Micro Credentials however the response to that option had a high rate of "Not Sure" which may indicate that respondents may not be aware of what these are and the potential utility of these types of credentials for the KLG sector.

Respondents were also asked if they would be interested in a set of shared resourcing options in respect to attracting staff. A large majority of the respondents were interested in the following 3 options put forward:

- Shared Resources for Careers Fairs at Regional High Schools and TAFEs/RTOs
- Shared support for new recruits from diverse backgrounds
- Shared cadetships
- Regional Register of LG professionals

Diverse and Inclusive Workforce

Respondents were asked what strategies their council engages in to encourage a diverse and inclusive workforce. These responses are listed in Table 4 below.

Table 4: Diversity and Inclusive Workforce Strategies

Targeted recruitment such as youth employment Identify as an equal opportunity employer supported by clear and transparent recruitment processes Ensure we have structures, policies and training to promote inclusiveness and behavioural standards
We have policies and procedures in place such as Equal Opportunity. We also promote diversity in our employment/recruitment marketing
Doesn't have strategies but is simply open with recruitment
We are an inclusive Council with a diverse Council workforce - gender, age, ethnicity etc
None it just happens
Discussion with CEO if required. Staffing and their requirements are his responsibility
Strong leaderships. training and development. Flexible working arrangements.
We fill our positions with the best candidate.
Workplace flexibility, diversity of engagement processes, social events, organisational culture development, knowledge sharing
Tailored
Adopted and published our Disability Action Inclusion Plan,

Strive to ensure the selection panels are gender balanced and selection occurs based on skills and expertise
Organisational values and behaviours which has a strong focus on a "One Team" approach.
Targeting of specific groups, eg Indigenous

The responses demonstrate a general commitment to diversity through policies, recruitment, selection and some marketing practices. However, we don't get a sense of the actual diversity of the existing workforce and whether Councils are actively accessing targeted employment programs such as Indigenous Employment programs or those for people with a Disability. There may be potential for the Legatus Group to work more closely with these employment program providers such as Maxima and other related groups such as the federally funded *Local Jobs Program* Employment Facilitators.

5.3 Phase III: Live Brief

Following completion of the student's 12-work BIZ304 "*live brief*" project, extensive review took place of the student's findings and recommendations into *"Marketing the SA Regional Local Government sector to attract, retain and develop a culturally diverse workforce, and promoting its liveability"*.

The overarching recommendations for the Legatus Group were the need for a strong and active brand awareness campaign through websites and social media, a close partnership with schools, colleges and universities, recruiters, migration agents and student advisors on job opportunities, including internships, and taking advantage of South Australia's skilled migration policy to fill specific roles. This will enable Legatus Group members to better promote themselves and compete with federal, state and the private sector in attracting and retaining employees to the region.

Below are the key findings and subsequent recommendations.

Findings:

- Job vacancies have increased by 73%, even though only 23% of the population resides in regional SA. However, ABS data shows population growth in the regions.
- Meanwhile data shows that 51% of Australians would not relocate to regional areas as they believe it is "career limiting".
- There is a high demand across the labour market for specific occupations, lack of opportunity for career progression, and lack of higher education opportunities

- At a regional level, Legatus competes with Federal and State Government, plus private businesses in attracting employees.
- LGAs struggle to compete on remuneration and other benefits.
- Those competing sectors actively promote themselves and the benefits of working for them on their respective websites and social media.
- Poor and limited social media presence by the Legatus Group.
- Limited use of Skilled Migration opportunities by LGs to fill key roles.

Recommendations:

- **Marketing and Communications Brand Awareness** through a strong marketing recruitment & liveability campaign targeting recruiters, migration agents, and international student advisors to promote SA and the regions to potential domestic and international students to consider for their studies instead of locations like Sydney and Melbourne. This would include LGA specific websites, and social media (LinkedIn, Facebook, TikTok and Instagram) with respective campaigns to market jobs and the region.
- **Partnership with Secondary and Tertiary Educational Institutions** to a) pitch to high schools across the main cities of Australia, and b) bring TAFE/uni students to SA in exchange for work experience, such as internships, work placements and job-ready placements.
- Legatus **Job Boards** (including internships) to be shared with students, recruiters, agents, etc.
- Legatus **"Big Meet" Workshops** in major cities (and virtually) targeting domestic universities and working hand in hand with recruiters, migration agents and international student advisors to promote Legatus and explain the opportunities that arise in the South Australia region. In addition to electronic medium, collateral would be required.
- **Destination Marketing** on the benefits of "working and living" in the region.
- **Target Skilled Migration** by attracting and supporting more migrants and international students through promotion of job opportunities within the region. Leverage that in SA there are fewer requirements for Medium & Long-Term Skills (MLTS) and Short Term Skilled Occupational List (STSOL) occupations, and actively make them aware of regional jobs in SA through partnership with recruiters, migration, student & employment agencies.
- Smoother paths to **Permanent Residency** already available in SA can be further exploited through the regional skilled visa program to solve labour shortages and sponsorship for PR.

6 Study Outcomes

Given the focus group, survey and Live Brief findings we address each of the study's Research Questions as outlined below:

Research Questions

RQ1: *What are current challenges for these LGAs in SA in attracting and retaining key workforces/professionals?*

The study identified the following challenges for regional councils in in terms of attracting and retaining key workforces: non-competitive salaries and remuneration packages; lack of employment opportunities for partners/families; limited career path opportunities; insufficient local amenities/infrastructure; and social isolation. There are many senior and professional roles that are hard to fill and recruitment costs remain high with an estimated significant combined yearly budget spend across the regional LGAs. Retaining workers also remains a major challenge and innovative ideas around succession planning, secondments, sharing of professional services amongst Councils and developing career pathways and initiatives for senior roles (CEO career pathway) were proposed.

RQ2: *How can the Legatus Group strategise together with its 15 LGAs to enable and innovate in attracting, developing and retaining key regional LG workforces?*

Innovative strategies identified include: Co-operative and sharing potential in terms of marketing the regions as an attraction strategy with emphasis on a Regional Employer of Choice campaign along with promoting the liveability and attractions of regions; sharing of recruitment costs and targeted recruitment strategies for those hard to fill professional roles (ie Planners and Engineers). There is also some existing sharing of professional roles between neighbouring Councils which can be drawn upon as test cases for how this might be operationalised more broadly across the regions. Co-operative and sharing potential has also been identified for sector specific training and accessing key professional services. A key outcome of the study was the identification of closer and targeted engagement with regional secondary schools/TAFEs/training providers and SA based universities in relation to LG career pathways, work integrated learning (WIL) and work placements; and active promotion of career pathways for existing workers, and the potential for a shared coaching and mentoring network across the regions.

RQ3: *What are the key workforce upskilling and training needs being experienced by Legatus LGA members?*

Specific training needs were identified for professionals in the areas of rates and modelling, LG Governance and Reform, blended LG planning and engineering, surveying and IT, EHO and Building Inspectors, Compliance/WHS, risk management & systems control. Developing soft skills were also important around leadership and to support succession planning.

RQ4: *What forms of hybrid work & digitally enabled technologies and professional development & training could be used to support the development and retention of key LGA workforce groups in the Legatus region?*

The sharing of development and training programs; online working opportunities; flexible work options to attract locals and remote workers; and the sharing of key professional services were all presented as options to address. These could include hybrid options to work in metro regions/from home and regionally; shared office spaces for specialist roles in regions/neighbouring councils in roles and work that are more conducive to flexible online work (ie Finance and accounting). The idea of creating a Register of LG Professionals that could share their expertise with Legatus Group members was also put forward as an option.

7   Conclusion

The research has identified that the Local Government sector in Regional SA is not immune to the issues facing other industry sectors and that the majority of the efforts to attract employees is on an individual council level.

Whilst councils are supporting employment attraction and retention for other industries through regional development approaches, they do not have a collective approach specific to their industry.

The Local Government sector has a limited approach to Career Pathways nor a recognised Workforce Toolkit that Regional SA Councils could utilise. Both these would be of immense value to the sector. Through the partnership developed by Torrens University Australia and with the support of Regional LGAs there is an opportunity to help develop these.

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9. Appendices

9.1 Ethics Approval
9.2 Focus Group Questions
9.3 Online survey – separate pdf
9.4 Live Brief

Appendix 9.1 Ethics Approval

1/02/2022

Dear Roslyn

Ethics Application 0143 Attracting, Developing & Retaining a Local Government Workforce in Regional South Australia in Collaboration with the Legatus Group **Approval**

I am pleased to advise that ethics approval for your project has been granted. The formal ethics approval is attached.

Reporting requirements for the lifecycle of the research project are in accordance with the National Statement. Please note that changes to the approved research project require an Amendment Request to be completed, and approval granted prior to implementation. Also annual reports and completion reports are required to be submitted to the Human Research Ethics Office in a timely manner.

All the best with your research.

Kind regards

Suzette Rawady

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TORRENS UNIVERSITY AUSTRALIA

Professor Roslyn Cameron

E-mail: ethics@torrens.edu.au

Dear Roslyn

Torrens University Australia Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) Approval Notification

Project title: Attracting, Developing & Retaining a Local Government Workforce in Regional South Australia in Collaboration with the Legatus Group

HREC Reference number: 0143

Thank you for submitting the ethics application for the above research project. This project was considered and reviewed by the HREC at 1 December 2021 meeting, and subsequently out of session by the HREC Executive.

I am pleased to advise you that this research project has been granted ethical approval.

In this project the methodology and participating site(s) are as stated in the application.

Note: If additional sites are engaged prior to the commencement of, or during the research project, the Chief Investigator is required to notify the Human Research Ethics Office. Notification of withdrawn sites should also be provided to the Human Research Ethics Office in a timely fashion.

Appendix 9.2 Focus group questions

Focus Group Questions

Q1: What are current challenges for the Legatus Group LGAs in SA in attracting and retaining key workforces/professionals?

Q2: How can the Legatus group strategize together to enable and innovate in attracting, developing and retaining key regional LG workforces?

Q3: What are the key workforce upskilling and training needs being experienced by Legatus LGA members?

Q4: What forms of hybrid work & digitally enabled technologies and professional development & training could be used to support the development and retention of key LGA workforce groups in the Legatus region?

Q5: Are there any additional comments?

Appendix 9.3 Online Survey

Attached as pdf

Appendix 9.4 Live Brief

BIZ304 Consulting Project Live Brief

Subject Name and Code	BIZ304
Client Name (Organisation)	Legatus Group, South Australia, https://legatus.sa.gov.au AND Centre for Organisational Change and Agility (COCA), Torrens University Australia (TUA)
Client Representative Name & Position	Mr Simon Millcock, CEO Legatus Group Director and Professor Ros Cameron, COCA-TUA
Introduction to the Legatus Group and their Research Project with TUA	The Legatus Group of South Australia is a peak regional local government organisation that focuses on the wealth, wellbeing and social cohesion of its 15 member councils via sustainable productive landscapes and the natural environments. For details of these 15 LGAs, click here https://legatus.sa.gov.au/about-2/ COCA at TUA is research department ……ROS TO ADD A FEW WORDS
The key Issues (Introduce any key challenges or context that impact the project)	*Regions 2030* is the Federal Government's official plan to develop regional Australia across 5 key areas: **jobs & economic development, infrastructure, education, health and communication** while acknowledging "one-size fits all" will not work. In South Australia, **27% of the population live in regions**, **job vacancies have increased 73%** in the last year, there has been a 26.3% decrease in available rental properties, and **agribusiness, health, aged care, and energy are the top 4 occupations at risk experiencing a skills shortage over the next 3 years.** A *Growing our Regional South Australia Workforce* Report in 2021 noted that **regions contribute $29B annually to the state economy** and found that issues across the regions were affecting an available and skilled workforce. **Six themes or "enablers" have been proposed** in the report: 8 identification of job vacancies and growth needs, 9 employment place-based readiness pathways in line with the Skilling SA Program, 10 workforce attraction that is sustainable to attract and retain people supported by infrastructure and services, 11 available, affordable and quality accommodation, 12 migration reform, and 13 business HR capacity and capability to help small businesses recruit and manage staff. Multiple programs have been funded to assist those industries to attract skilled workforce, adopt technology,

	improve digital connectivity, infrastructure, and ensure sustainability. To align with the *Growing our Regional South Australia Workforce Report*, **the Legatus Group has included in this year's business plan a proposal to identify issues that can then be used to assist its member councils with attraction, retention and development of their workforce.** This in turn can be used by the Local Government sector with a focus on regional issues facing them in South Australia. To understand and develop those 6 "enablers", a **case study has taken place in collaboration between TUA and the Legatus Group.** Whilst the focus is on the Legatus Group member councils the study has also reached out to other Regional Local Government Associations in SA. This study has included a **research project** to understand their joint key challenges, enablers, and strategies to attract, develop, and retain their local government workforces. From this, a **strategy & action plan will be developed** to attract, develop and retain their local workforce.
Project Title	*"Marketing the SA Regional Local Government sector to attract, retain and develop a culturally diverse workforce, and promoting its liveability"*
The Project Opportunity (Introduce the key elements of the project, including the current state and targets)	From the Strategy and Action Plan a marketing plan is to be developed for the Legatus Group. As part of your consulting, you will need to: 1. Understand and validate the key issues facing the region. 2. Understand and key findings from the Strategy and Action Plan to help determine the opportunity. 3. Research the region to understand its demographics, employment, and liveability. 4. Develop a marketing plan to attract, retain and develop a culturally diverse workforce, and to promote liveability of the region. 5. Research the benefits and drawbacks of living in the region. 6. Determine the cost, timeline, and resources to establish the marketing plan 7. Demonstrate a marketing strategy to enable awareness and promotion of the regions to attract, retain and develop a culturally diverse workforce 8. Complete an implementation plan and how its success would be measured.
Engagement with CEO / Representative	The CEO and Professor Cameron will attend in class via Collaborate Ultra: Week 4 or 5 (week June 20 or 27) – an overview of the organisation and its goals as per this brief. Plus, time to ask the CEO and Professor Cameron any questions.

	Week 8 or 9 (week July 18 or 25) – Q&A with the CEO and Professor Cameron based on student findings from Assessment 1B and as they commence on Assessment 2B. Week 11/12 (August 8 or 15) – the top 2 students from the class will present Assessment 3 LIVE to CEO and Professor Cameron.
Target (Identify any targets or desired outcomes)	This tender process will be conducted in two parts: - A Research Report, and - A Recommendation Report The top 2 performing students in class will present live to the CEO and Professor Cameron their recommendations at the end of course