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MEDIA RELEASE

*NE Victoria's Year 9 students are set to step out of their classrooms
and into local farms, agribusinesses, clinics and hospitals*

Following the identification of agriculture/horticulture and health care/social assistance as two of the sectors facing critical employment issues in the Hume Region's Workforce Development Plan 2015–2018¹, the newly established Workforce Development Project seeks to change this situation by introducing Year 9 students to these industries through targeted and supported work placement, followed by School Based Apprenticeships and Traineeships, and gap year employment.

From now until 2021, schools, students, communities and industry across seven local government areas in North East Victoria will feel the benefit of the Regional Skills Fund's \$1.4 million investment. Regional Development Victoria has awarded two Local Learning and Employment Network partners the project funds to implement the Workforce Development Project, expanding the successful prototype established at Mansfield Secondary College in 2009. Developed by Julie Aldous, a former teacher, the Mansfield agribusiness program—the 'Mansfield Model'—fostered strong local networks between Mansfield Secondary College, students, farmers and agribusinesses to engage students in local career pathways. Julie has been supporting the development of replicable models for the past two years and will now take on the role of Industry–Education Liaison Officer for the Workforce Development Project.

"The aim is to enable schools to introduce or further develop agricultural/horticultural studies," Ms Aldous says. "We connect students with working farms in the local area, which is why it can be adopted by other schools." Transferring the model into the health care/social assistance sector will follow the same principle of connecting students to workplaces most relevant to their study.

Partners in the project, NE Tracks Local Learning and Employment Network and North East Local Learning & Employment Network (NELLEN) will deliver the Workforce Development Project from mid-2018 through to the end of 2021. NELLEN CEO Bev Hoffmann says, "Because students will be placed in local businesses, they will be learning on-the-job work skills specific to those employers. It's a 'try before you buy' opportunity for both the student and the business owner."

Business Wodonga CEO Neil Aird said the Workforce Development Project is a strategic solution to the mounting need for skilled workforce development. "In particular, it supports young local people to enter workplaces and fill gaps created by an ageing, retiring population," Mr Aird said.

With Year 9 students accessing career pathways through early contact with local employers, the need for a sustainable and accessible workforce is addressed, leading to significant economic, social and community benefits for the Ovens Murray region well beyond the four-year project implementation.

NE Tracks LLEN EO Danny O'Donoghue said the development of strong linkages between schools, TAFEs, universities and industry as well as the community ensures that vibrant pathways exist beyond school and into the employment sectors. "The fostering of links also means that any workforce needs and trends emerging in the local region will be gauged and information fed into the project's advisory groups," Mr O'Donoghue said.

Education sites, business owners and community members interested in being involved in the Workforce Development Project can contact Project Manager Norm Madden at wdmanager@nellen.org.au or 0408 319 591 for further details.

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¹ www.rdv.vic.gov.au