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## Free taste of regional learning

The Australian | April 02, 2011 12:00AM

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Source: The Australian

**EXECUTIVE TRAINING**

**RURAL** Australians are being offered free professional training courses in a bid to halt the exodus of workers from regional to metropolitan areas and better educate the nation's workforce.

National private training organisation Upskilled will give 50 people in 50 locations a chance to obtain a certificate IV or diploma in one of their business courses, including business management, project management, sales, business administration and human resources. The Upskilling Australia initiative aims to show regional residents that training opportunities exist for them.

"We might have anywhere from one person in a business through to an entire organisation [that] might have a group of 15 or 20 or 50 staff members who they want to have trained and we can go on their premises and do that training."

Class sizes are kept to a maximum of 20 and participants are encouraged to share business experiences.

Upskilled's trainers are industry experts who who have run their own businesses and have been managing directors and general managers.

"They can answer all the questions. It's not just about learning from the book, it's about learning from experience," Sexty says.

"[And] it's not about doing an exam at the end of the learning; it's about competency-based training and learning the competencies of the skills you need to perform a particular job."

Sexty believes professional training has the ability to empower regional people and the businesses they work for.

He cites a study by the National Centre for Education and Vocational Research that found someone who has been trained is 230 per cent more productive than a colleague who has not, as evidence people become happier and more productive employees as a result of training.

"Education is the key to driving success in the workplace. The benefits to individuals and companies are alike. Businesses are going to get better staff retention, they are going to get improved quality and productivity from an individual," Sexty says.

"A lot of people who undertake our training have been out of education for a while and they are sometimes a bit scared, a bit apprehensive, but the feedback we get from our trainers is, 'The look on people's faces once they start progressing through the course, and the confidence they start to display is quite incredible.'"

"They are empowered. They know a lot of the stuff already and now they are validated. They are going from having either no qualification or a lower level qualification to suddenly having a diploma, which is one step below going to university. This is something many people thought they would never achieve -- or would never have the opportunity to achieve."

Upskilled can determine whether government funding is available to businesses or interested individuals to cover course costs.

To obtain a place in the Upskilling Australia program, applicants must write in 150 words why they or the person they're nominating deserves to be offered an Upskilled training course.

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"I believe there is access to education in rural Australia, but a lot of people don't know it's there, they physically don't know where to get it," Upskilled sales director Mark Sexty says.

"We do a lot of training in regional Australia and we want to give a little bit back.

"We are offering 50 places free of charge to people around Australia who for various reasons, whether it's because they're trying to get back into the workplace [and need qualifications] or for financial reasons haven't been able to get into training."

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The first training courses will be offered to a resident in each of Wollongong, Albury Wodonga, Orange, Wagga Wagga, Bathurst, Adelaide and Nowra.

The training program hopes to address some of the concerns raised in a survey of 1000 that showed that many regional people believe work and training opportunities are better in metropolitan areas, and are prepared to move there in pursuit of those opportunities.

The survey, commissioned by Upskilled, found that 49 per cent of rural people feel their relationships, health or general wellbeing are suffering because of dissatisfaction and frustration in their careers. It also showed 87 per cent of those surveyed believed that rural people did not receive the same training and on-the-job opportunities as their metropolitan counterparts; and 22 per cent of the 18-24 year-olds surveyed were planning to move to large cities in search of better training.

In Tasmania, one in four of those surveyed said they were planning a career-based relocation; and in the Northern Territory, 100 per cent of those surveyed said metropolitan work opportunities outweighed regional opportunities.



Upskilled's first regional experience was in Bathurst, NSW, where it discovered a hole in the market for training services tailored to the needs of regional areas.

It now offers courses in 75 rural and metropolitan locations, from Tasmania to Townsville. The organisation draws on about 60 trainers to run courses via computer and face-to-face classes, one day each month for eight months.

"Our goal is to not make the course too interruptive," Sexty says.

Upskilled caters to small to medium-sized businesses, multinationals and individuals such as mothers who may be returning to the workforce, the unemployed and older citizens. The company has trained, or is in the process of training, about 5000 students nationwide.

"In the Hunter region in NSW or northern Queensland, you get a lot of the mining, farming and agricultural businesses. You get a lot of small to medium businesses in these regional areas, as opposed to multinationals," Sexty says.

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