

## Industry, uni fund research into jobs

BLUESCOPE Steel and the University of Wollongong committed a combined \$45,000 for research into youth unemployment at yesterday's forum on the issue.

About 40 regional stakeholders, including business groups, community organisations and politicians, attended the forum, which was called by Wollongong Lord Mayor Alex Darling to discuss solutions to the Illawarra's youth unemployment rate.

In the Illawarra, 37.6 per cent of teenagers seeking full-time work are unemployed. That figure rises to 41.3 per cent in Wollongong. Both rates are among the nation's highest.

University Vice-Chancellor Professor Gerard Sutton said research, to be conducted by the Illawarra Regional Information Service (IRIS), would establish a clearer picture of the region's unemployed youth.

"We need to identify the characteristics of these young people and the issues causing high levels of unemployment," Prof Sutton said. B1ueScope external affairs manager Mike Archer agreed.

"One of the practical solutions to be identified in the forum was the need to accurately profile the young people in our community who make up the bulk of unemployed youth so that solutions can be targeted," Mr Archer said.

Prof Sutton said a case-by-case approach to reducing unemployment needed to operate alongside broader initiatives to attract investment to the region and diversify its economy.

"We need to move beyond the traditional industries in this region and broaden its economic bases," he said.

"But no matter how successful the economy, it's not going to help those left behind unless we have targeted management."

Although the funding for research was welcomed by members of the forum, the IRIS study is unlikely to be completed before mid-year.

South Coast Labour Council secretary Arthur Rorris suggested the region's stakeholders should be proactive in developing a consensus and drafting strategies, rather than waiting for the research to be presented.

"If we're serious about doing something for the region, now is the time," Mr Rorris said.

"If we can't speak to both major parties with one voice on youth unemployment in this region, no one else will."

Mr Rorris acknowledged that further research was necessary, but called for greater urgency in formulating a regional solution to youth unemployment.

"I'd have liked to have seen more commitment from the stakeholders here to walk the walk," he said.

"We'd be negligent in our treatment of these young unemployed if we didn't present a common set of demands ahead of the election.

"It's hard to get stakeholders to reach agreement, but this is the year to do it."