

The Country Advantage

Investing in regional Australians and the communities they call home

Country Universities Centre



We respectfully acknowledge the Country on which we learn, work and gather, and recognise the deep enduring connection of the Traditional Custodians. CUC acknowledges the diversity and richness of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and cultures and pays respect to all Elders, past, present and future. This land was, is and always will be Aboriginal land.

41

Communities

Across NSW, QLD, VIC,
TAS and Norfolk Island.

28

Centres

Locally based.
Community led.
Student focused.

1

Network

One shared vision.
Stronger together.
Greater impact.

3,830

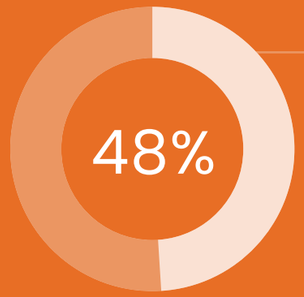
students in semester 1, 2026

1,231

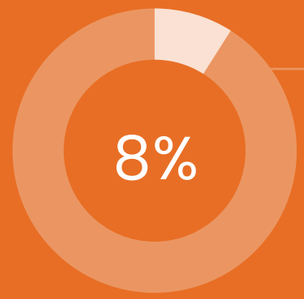
different courses studied

349

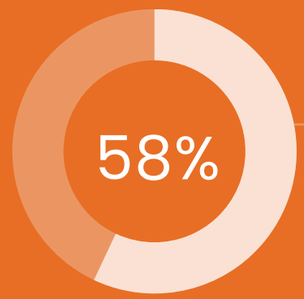
education providers



of students are the first in their family to complete a tertiary qualification



of students identify as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander



of students are aged over 25

Data is from registered students in Semester 1, 2026

13,700+

students supported since 2013

The stories within our Network	05
Message from the Founder	06
Message from the CEO	07
What drives us	08
How it works	10
Timeline snapshot	12
Built by the community for the community	14
Learning pathways for everyone	22
Growing our own workforce	34
Delivering on the Accord	44
Future growth and impact	50
The investment case	52
Partner with us	53
References and acknowledgments	54



The stories within our Network

This prospectus tells the collective story of the Country Universities Centre (CUC) Network and its impact.

The network consists of 28 community-owned centres that operate across more than 40 regional, rural and remote New South Wales, Queensland, Victoria, Tasmania and Norfolk Island communities that are united by a single purpose: where you live should never determine your opportunities.

Across these pages you will find stories about CUC communities, our students, our impact and our plan. This is for communities, for partners, for government and for every student who has wondered whether university, vocation education or further study was a pathway for someone like them.

It showcases where we have come from and where we are going. We hope it inspires you as much as the communities and the thousands of students we serve inspire us.





Message from the Founder

Duncan Taylor

The story of the Country Universities Centre (CUC) is one of empowering communities to shape their own futures by addressing local barriers to tertiary knowledge, qualifications and workforce skills.

Regional and remote Australia has always demonstrated remarkable ingenuity and resilience in responding to its local challenges. As a result, we are the people with the greatest incentive to rebuild tertiary education to work for us.

Cooma Universities Centre grew from a collaboration between local industry leaders, Snowy Hydro and the Cooma-Monaro Shire Council, who were determined to solve a problem and make a change in their region. The Centre was opened in 2013 and it worked. On the strength of what Cooma proved, five years later the CUC model was conceptualised. Since then, communities differing widely in population, industry and previous tertiary attainment have adopted the model creating the CUC network as it stands today.

The greatest strength of the CUC is that it positions communities as active leaders, not recipients, in shaping their own futures. Each Centre remains owned and operated by its community, for its community, and is governed locally to deliver the services that will have the greatest impact. Boards and management operate with integrity and accountability adapting to local needs while strengthening aspiration, opportunity and workforce in their region.

By collaborating, individual Centres combine their relatively small student cohorts into genuine critical mass supported by a central body. This creates a whole that is far more than the sum of its individual parts.

The CUC's continued success will depend on keeping students and communities very firmly at the heart of the model. Keeping that focus will ensure that the CUC grows and thrives to deliver better opportunities for generations of regional and remote Australians.





Message from the CEO

Dr Lou Conway

Education changes lives, and it changes communities.

Every student who enrols in a tertiary qualification is taking a calculated risk. Nearly one in two students registering with our Centres is the first in their family to study. They are fitting study around a job, children, a shift roster, a farm, a parent who needs them, while learning to navigate a system that assumes none of these things. They are backing themselves with time and money, on the belief that it will pay off for them, their families and their communities.

We exist to serve these students in regional Australia. CUC staff sit with students to untangle a course problem, make the call to an employer, find the mentor who turns an idea into a pathway. We are here to inspire, support, and to celebrate when hard-won milestones are met. This is the work of the CUC network, and it is a privilege to work alongside the people who are leading Centres.

Our volunteer Boards have championed learning in their communities for decades and carried responsibility for the funding and buildings that make it possible. When we build a space to learn in a region, it builds belonging for a community of learners. Across our network I have been moved, repeatedly, by the warmth and generosity inside these spaces. This is a deeply human endeavour to grow our own talent across our regions, and it is the shared CUC ambition.

We are grateful for the support of the Commonwealth and New South Wales Governments, to our university partners, and to the TAFEs and other providers who make local study possible. Industry sponsorship and support is also critical to our success and reminds us that we hold this mission in common: strong and prosperous regions, built on the skills of the people who live in them. Across our regions there is a groundswell of recognition as the evidence of this investment's impact grows.

To every regional student still weighing up whether education is worth the investment: we are here for you.

One shared vision

What drives us

01

Community first

Our students are diverse. They're carers, creators, business owners, farmers, volunteers and future leaders. They're professionals, first time learners, young, old and doers. Students study vocational certificates and bridging courses right up to PhDs. Their lives, ambitions and needs shape the CUC Centres. We listen and respond locally to design services for people, not systems or targets.

02

Collective strength

The CUC is built on the strength of local people, connected by a national network model. As independent Centres working together, we share knowledge, challenges and inventive ways of working with students and communities. As the CUC, we can achieve more collectively than any one Centre could ever do on its own.

03

Regional agency

Local people are best placed to understand their local challenges and develop solutions. CUCs do not parachute solutions into community, rather communities build their Centres to meet the unique needs and opportunities in their region. This agency guarantees the long-term success of Centres and helps shape the educational futures of the region.

How it works







A federated model built for the regions

The CUC is an affiliated group of 28 community-owned Regional University Study Hubs (RUSH) that operate across regional, rural and remote New South Wales, Queensland, Victoria, Tasmania and Norfolk Island. Each Centre in the network is run by its own independent, local skills-based Board or advisory group who is chosen to be a part of the CUC Network.

The Network is supported by a separate body, CUC Central, who works with Centres to amplify, enable, protect and connect Centres so they continue to drive value in their communities. Central provides guidance, systems and support that is not practical or achievable for an individual Centre to resource alone. By pairing local ownership with national support, the CUC Network ensures regional students have the resources they need to succeed.

Study local, dream big: the CUC difference

Students of any age, studying any course, at any tertiary education provider can register with a CUC.

By providing the facilities, services and programs to support people who are learning, reskilling or upskilling, the CUC reduces the barriers faced by regional, rural and remote students to aspire, access and thrive in higher education without leaving their communities.

Each CUC looks different, but delivers the same core services and support.

Most importantly, Centres do not duplicate or compete with provider services – we sit alongside the tertiary provider a student has chosen and provide the physical and pastoral infrastructure that the institution often can't deliver into a regional or remote town. A student studying nursing through Federation University, a student undertaking an online TAFE certificate, or a Master of Engineering student at University of Wollongong can all use the exact same Centre, on the same day, with the same support.

A physical space

A friendly smile from local Centre staff

Centres can be open from as early as 5am to midnight, seven days and staffed during business hours.

Reliable technology

Access to high-speed internet, desktop computers, monitors for BYO devices, free printing and video conferencing facilities.

Various study spaces

Individual workstations, larger meeting rooms, and private study rooms and pods.

General amenities

Kitchen/kitchenette facilities, snacks and restrooms.

Student support and wellbeing

General academic advice

Help can range from referencing, essay writing, research, exam and study prep to specific first year support. It can be delivered via group or one-on-one sessions and outside business hours.

Exam invigilation

Centre staff can arrange and monitor exams so students can do this from their community and at no cost to them.

Support with course providers

Navigating course options, student portals, application and enrolment systems.

Encouragement and connection

Scholarship support, celebrating student milestones and achievements, fostering confidence, motivation and a sense of belonging through shared successes.

Student engagement activities

Social, professional and wellbeing activities to help students build networks, meet peers and local industries.

Community engagement

Aspiration building

Working alongside schools to engage and encourage participation in tertiary education and lifelong learning through programs and outreach activities.

Connecting students with community and industry

Through events, networking opportunities and local partnerships.

Promoting pathways and opportunities

Supporting informed study and career choices through careers events, stalls and information sessions.

A journey built on community





2013
Where it began

Our first Centre, Cooma Universities Centre, opened in 2013 to offer tertiary education support for the town of roughly 7,000 people.



2018–2019
Initial expansion

With support from the NSW Government, more communities were able to embrace the CUC model.



2020–2025
Building momentum

The Commonwealth Government's RUSH program saw growth across all eastern Australian states, creating new learning opportunities and stronger futures for regional communities.



Today
13,000+ students and growing

Together, Centres are nurturing the tertiary education journey of thousands of people, building a future workforce pipeline and building a more resilient regional Australia.

CUC Centre opening timeline

2013
- CUC Snowy Monaro

2018
- CUC Goulburn
- CUC Far West

2019
- CUC Clarence Valley
- CUC North West
- CUC Western Riverina

2020
- CUC Parkes

2021
- CUC Bass Coast
- CUC Macleay Valley
- CUC Maranoa
- CUC Balonne
- CUC Southern Shoalhaven

2022
- CUC Ovens Murray

2023
- CUC Cowra Region
- CUC Cape York
- CUC Mallee

2024
- CUC Mudgee Region
- CUC Mount Isa
- CUC Southern Downs
- CUC Western Downs
- CUC RAPAD CWQ

2025
- CUC Isaac
- CUC Hughenden
- CUC Hay
- CUC Snowy Valleys
- CUC Southern Grampians
- CUC Eastern Tasmania
- CUC Norfolk Island



Built by the community, for the community

From the resource-rich mining towns scattered across our inland regions to the coasts and rivers of New South Wales, from Victoria's high country to the tropical communities of North Queensland, the CUC spans the breadth of regional Australia. While each Centre is unique, they share one defining characteristic: they are shaped by their communities.

CUC's community-led model means local people identify local challenges and work together to create local solutions. Rather than applying a one-size-fits-all approach, each Centre responds to the needs, opportunities and aspirations of the region it serves. The result is support that reflects how people live, work and learn in regional Australia.

This flexibility allows Centres to work across multiple communities in a region, build partnerships that address workforce shortages, and help create new pathways into tertiary education that work for the local demographic. It enables students to access opportunities they need most, whether that be a service that's close to home, a place to focus and connect to community during regional placements, or provide ongoing support across different stages of life.

The stories that follow demonstrate the power of this approach. In Bass Coast, a locally-designed nursing pathway is helping address critical health workforce needs. In Norfolk Island, a local leader saw how the outback Queensland operation could be adapted for the small Pacific community and ultimately become a lifelong source of support. The result? Regional students learn how to adapt, retrain and pursue new opportunities as both their communities and career outlooks grow.

Together, these stories highlight CUC's unique approach: a tertiary education model built by the community, for the community, leading to lasting regional impact.

CUC Norfolk Island
BURNT PINE, NORFOLK ISLAND

Designed by locals, for locals

Norfolk Island is one of Australia's most remote territories, located 1,600 kilometres off the east coast. We speak with Regional Development Australia Mid North Coast (RDAMNC) and CUC NI Board Member, CEO Madeleine Lawler on how a community lead approach has set the Centre up for success.

Norfolk Island is a unique community. What drew you to investigating the CUC model?

I first encountered the CUC when I was a lecturer at Southern Cross University. I was teaching Australian Politics 101 from Coffs Harbour, but had a student in Grafton who was joining from CUC Clarence Valley. I'd never heard of the CUC and it stuck in my mind as a fantastic way to expand opportunities for people who needed, or wanted, to stay where they lived.

Later, while working in Winton, Queensland, I was exposed to the Remote Area Planning and Development Board (RAPAD), which was piloting a hub and spoke model for its very remote communities. So when RDA MNC began supporting Norfolk Island, the CUC came to me as a potential solution.

When you and the RDA MNC team first arrived, what were some of the challenges locals faced when trying to access tertiary education?

Norfolk Island's barriers are quite distinct. First, there's a degree of distrust towards Australia and government being an imposition. Add to that how the community feels about self-determination, and it's not just education access, it's about autonomy and control in education access. For many people, the opportunity to finish high school wasn't available. It's only been in the last 30 years that Year 11 and 12 has been delivered on the island, so only the affluent could afford to send their children to boarding school, or relocate.

We also quickly heard about the major shortage of skilled workers. There was demand for everything from a Certificate III in Community Services to doctors and nurses to reduce the reliance on costly FIFO staffing at the hospital. There was also the reverse problem where people had the skills, but not the formal qualifications required under Australian regulations. For example, stonemasons who had been working on the island for decades were unable to carry out government contracts on its World Heritage Sites. Ultimately, it all came down to the fact that there were no local pathways.

How has having a locally-governed Centre changed what's possible for people wanting to study on Norfolk Island?

On island, it takes a groundswell of support. Without the critical tentacles of community awareness, support from local leaders, and CUC Norfolk Island being locally owned, it wouldn't have the same amount of traction or early acceptance. A locally-run organisation can also be far more agile. It can respond to unique challenges and better serve the community's needs. Like the stonemason example, when you're working without any state legislation (of which Norfolk Island has none), how you manage a whole raft of skills, qualifications and authorisations is challenging. So that kind of adaptability and problem-solving mentality is very important for Norfolk and will be the key to its long-term success.

How does the community continue to shape the Centre's priorities and future direction?

One of the best outcomes is it's providing the opportunity for the latent interest and aspiration to come to the surface. You can imagine for many residents, especially those with family or caring responsibilities, leaving the island to study and actualise your dream wasn't an option. Now we're seeing people knock on the door saying: "I always dreamed of doing this. Is it possible?"



> "I now get to step into my dream job and do what I've always hoped to do. It's not just about earning a degree – it's about having the opportunity to inspire a love of learning in my own students. Knowing that I can make a difference in their lives and help shape their confidence and curiosity is incredibly meaningful to me."
>
> **Tilly Menzies-Thompson**
> Bachelor of Education, Southern Cross University

What would you say to other communities that think the CUC might not be right for them?

CUC Norfolk Island only opened this year, but we're already supporting more than 50 students, integrating with the high school and working with its young people who are doing their school-based apprenticeship. For a community of 2,100 people (and with many of those folks over the age of 65), that's significant.

The reason it works is that it's a community institution, built by and for local people. People come in with all kinds of questions when it comes to their future and staff can sit with them and say, "Yes, what you want to do can be done and let me help you make it possible."

CUC Western Downs
CHINCHILLA, QLD



The power of going rural

When Alexandra Jefferd chose Chinchilla for her fourth year Occupational Therapy placement, she was looking for valuable clinical experience. What she found was a welcoming community and the support to build a career in the region.

What were you studying and what brought you to Chinchilla for your placement?

I was studying Occupational Therapy (OT) at The University of Queensland. During my fourth year, I elected to go to a rural or remote location for my 10-week placement and ended up in Chinchilla.

How did CUC Western Downs support your placement experience?

The CUC was incredible. It provides a separate environment from home life so I was mentally able to 'get in the zone' for study, and the various snacks in the kitchen were an added bonus! The Centre being available via swipe access outside business hours has also been really useful. The manager, Alex, was brilliant at organising small events for the students to mingle, too. This played a big part in supporting our community participation outside of placement.

What stood out to you most about the Chinchilla community?

How welcoming the town is. I think if you're someone who's not afraid to put themselves out there in the community, get involved in a few events and meet new people, you get the same fulfillment in return.

What made you decide to return to Chinchilla after graduating?

I honestly didn't think I'd be back due to limited OT job opportunities, but I discovered a temporary opening for a year and jumped on it. I had accommodation sorted very quickly and was familiar with the hospital, the staff and the caseload. I particularly enjoy hand therapy and knew that was available here – something that's challenging for a new graduate to have in the city.

What advice would you give students considering a regional placement?

Do it! It might be out of your comfort zone but it's one of the best decisions I've made. The diverse caseload you get out here is something quite special. You learn so much, so quickly and it's helped me identify the areas I enjoy most.

CUC Mudgee Region
MUDGEE, NSW



Growing careers close to home

With the support of CUC Mudgee Region, Mid-Western Regional Council is helping students gain qualifications while building careers within their own community.

Seven CUC Mudgee Region students currently work with Mid-Western Regional Council while studying, either through traineeships or by further developing their professional qualifications. One of those students is Zane Bowmaker, a Trainee Building Surveyor whose course fees are fully funded by the Council.

"It's been a bit of a juggle, but I allocate time every day after work to study. Council gives me five to six paid study days a year, which I can take whenever I want."

For Zane, studying locally has also meant he can be near the people who matter most.

"I didn't have to move away like many of my mates who went to uni, so I'm not paying high rent or living costs."

His sister, Ruby, is also undertaking the same traineeship and says CUC Mudgee Region has provided the ideal environment to balance work and study.

"The CUC is quiet, adaptable and allows me to study in any style of seating I feel like at the time."

For some students, the traineeship is just the beginning of their study journey. Sam Cowan-Pattison completed a Certificate III as part of a Business Administration traineeship with Council and is now studying a Bachelor of Science majoring in Environmental Health, while working as a Health and Safety Inspector at Council.

Together, CUC Mudgee Region and Mid-Western Regional Council are creating opportunities for local people to study, gain practical experience and build careers without leaving the region – a move that not only retains local talent, but ensures the community's long-term prosperity is built by the people who know it best.

> "The benefits extend well beyond Council. When local people gain qualifications, confidence and career opportunities, they're more likely to remain in the region and contribute to a stronger, more capable and resilient community."

Brad Cam
General Manager, Mid-Western Regional Council

CUC Bass Coast
WONTHAGGI, VIC

60 Federation University Bachelor of Nursing students have registered with the program so far

89% of students are undertaking vocational education/training

54% are first in their family to achieve university degree

76% are aged 25 years+

72% are studying full time

Nursing pathways made local

No regional community can stand on its own two feet without access to appropriate healthcare – that's where CUC Bass Coast comes in.

Just as regional students face barriers to participation and completion, rural health services face persistent nursing shortages. So when the growing need for nurses saw a collaboration building between Bayside Health and Federation University, CUC Bass Coast jumped at the opportunity to help create a smoother pathway that reflects how people in the region live, work and learn. The result is a course designed around the community, not one that requires the community to adapt.

The pathway sees students undertake their university studies through Federation University either online or at CUC Bass Coast, access assessment and study support locally, and carry out practical learning and placements at Wonthaggi Hospital. Since 2022, the program has seen over 60 students register with the Centre, with the first intake graduating earlier this year.

"What makes CUC unique is our ability to adapt to local needs," says Sarah Bourke, CUC Bass Coast Centre Director. "We can move quickly, build partnerships and create solutions that reflect the realities of our community.

"The nursing pathway developed with Federation University and Bayside Health is a practical example of this. We're helping local people access training that would otherwise be out of reach, while building a pipeline of skilled health professionals for the region."

CUC Snowy Monaro
COOMA, NSW



A place to return to

When CUC Snowy Monaro, previously Cooma Universities Centre, opened its doors, Shannen was one of its very first students. Thirteen years, a career, a marriage and three young children later, she has returned to her local CUC at every stage of her study journey. Shannen's story shows what it looks like when a Centre grows with the people it serves.

You were one of CUC Snowy Monaro's first students and have returned twice since. What's kept bringing you back?

I met the original Centre Manager while playing local footy, not long after the Centre opened. I'd recently finished high school and had no clear plan for my work or life. With the CUC team's support, I started an entry-level course, but my confidence plummeted and I pulled out. The team kept working with me to reassess my options, and I eventually decided on early childhood education. It was what I always wanted to do, I'd even done my school work experience at a local childcare centre. I just needed the right support, and I completed my Certificate III and then my Diploma in Early Childhood.

How has the Centre supported you recently?

In 2022, I became a regular at the Centre again, this time studying a Bachelor of Education (Early Childhood Teaching) through Charles Sturt University. I graduated in 2026! The CUC team got me through the times when work, life and study collided. They also connected me with other students in the same boat, which made a huge difference. Whatever I decided, they backed me, and the Centre was always my safe space to work and think through my options. I now work as the Educational Leader/Teacher at a childcare centre in town.

What's made studying locally the right fit, both then and now?

Family, mostly. I've had three kids since I started studying, and I work four days a week, so studying at the Centre was really my only option. I was born and raised in Cooma, and I wouldn't have wanted it any other way.

What has it meant to build your career in the community you grew up in?

It's a way of giving back. I know so many of the families I now teach. They are my friends, my family, my colleagues and the people I grew up with. It's a lovely feeling to know I'm part of Cooma's future, caring for and teaching our littlest community members.

What would you say to someone who thinks they need to leave Cooma for tertiary education?

I'd give them my story. If you've already built your life here, why leave? CUC gives you the support and everything you need to study and stay part of your community.



Learning pathways for everyone

Removing barriers to education isn't enough if people don't believe it's meant for them. In regional Australia, this 'aspiration gap' – the distance between what's possible and what feels possible – runs deep. Aspirations grow when opportunities feel within reach.

It's the difference between a student who avoids further study because no one in their family has, and one who does because they engaged with their local CUC in high school. It's the gap between a young person who can't picture themselves as an engineer, and one who can because their neighbour qualified.

Widening participation isn't a program; it's a culture that is built one person and one community at a time and it is perhaps the most vital work.

The impact is clear. Roughly half of CUC students are the first in their family to pursue tertiary education. Among mature-age students, 14% report high school as their highest prior qualification. Many students balance caring responsibilities or live with disabilities – circumstances that traditionally make succeeding in tertiary study challenging.

CUC's commitment to equity takes many forms: community events engaging those who've written off learning, targeted in-school programs connecting with thousands of youth, and culturally-responsive engagement helping Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students see education as a pathway that belongs to them.

Distance and barriers once made learning feel out of reach. Now, regional students access thousands of online university and training courses locally – from tertiary pathways to specialised qualifications. Education equity is about more than access, it's about creating the confidence and support to achieve ambitions regardless of age or circumstance. It is about opening doors to pathways and helping individuals build their own aspirations.

8% identify as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander

27% have caring and parenting responsibilities

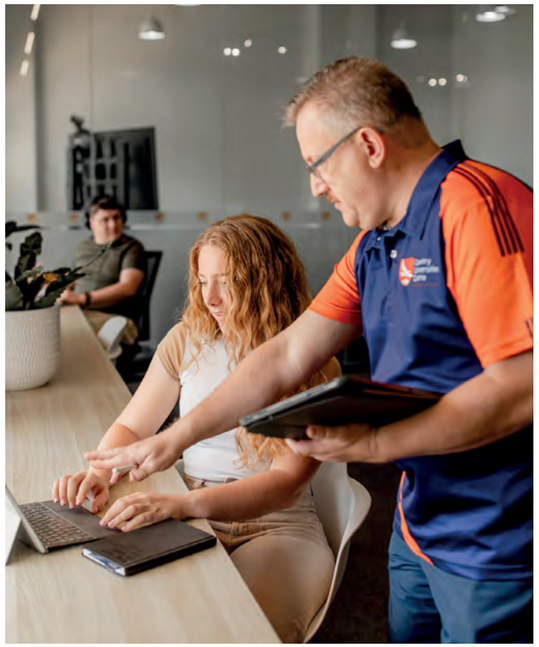
61% of students do not have a parent or guardian who has a university degree

14% of mature-aged students have no previous post-school qualification

9% have a disability or health condition

CUC Network, Semester 1, 2026

CUC Macleay Valley
KEMPSEY, NSW



Education equity starts with aspiration

At CUC Macleay Valley, creating pathways to further education starts long before students enrol in university. Located in Kempsey, NSW, the CUC Macleay Valley community ranks among the most disadvantaged Local Government Areas in the state[1].

The Centre has embraced a clear mission – to improve outcomes by raising aspirations, career confidence, and expanding education opportunities for young people. This commitment is reflected in the Centre's student cohort. While most CUC students are already engaged in tertiary study, almost one-third of CUC Macleay Valley's students are still in high school and almost 10% are undertaking vocational education and training.

These unique figures reflect a deliberate focus on helping young students mix with tertiary learners and see further education as an achievable local pathway, regardless of their background or circumstances.

For Kempsey Shire Mayor and Centre Manager Kinne Ring, this work is about ensuring people can imagine rewarding futures for themselves without feeling they need to leave home or country.

"Our whole approach is that no matter where you come, no matter what you look like, no matter what you want to do, you should have a meaningful career, have a good life, and you should be able to do that right from here in the Macleay Valley," said Kinne.

One example is the Centre's Lead Like a Girl program, delivered through a partnership between the NSW Department of Education's Regional Industry Education Partnerships (RIEP). More than 150 female high school students connected with over 40 industry representatives and community leaders from across the Mid North Coast. Students gained insights into education pathways, career opportunities and the support available to them within community.

For many students, seeing someone studying in the Centre, or connecting with a local leader, who is succeeding in community with a similar background can be the catalyst for believing they can too.



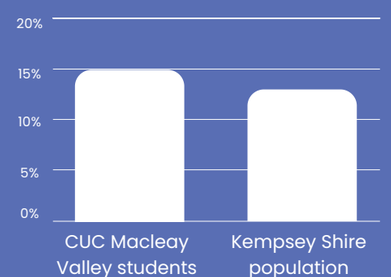
50%
of students are studying an undergraduate or postgraduate degree

32%
of students are in high school

10%
of students are undertaking vocational education/training

32%
of respondents do not have parents with qualifications higher than year 12 or equivalent

Percentage who identify as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander





"Regardless of who you are, or where you come from, you'll feel welcomed from day one."
Judi Devantier

Judi's return to study in her 80s

After retiring, Judi Devantier realised her passion for improving dementia care. Here she shares her story on how she took on a Diploma of Dementia and Services at CUC Southern Shoalhaven.

I gave up work at 84. I'd discovered so many gaps in the nursing system, especially when it came to Dementia care, and wanted to help younger staff understand that regardless of our age, culture and beliefs, we're all individuals and need to be treated as such.

I also knew I'm not the type of person to sit and do nothing for the rest of my life. So I contacted Open Universities Australia and asked what I could do. They suggested a diploma of Dementia and Services and directed me to CUC Southern Shoalhaven, saying they would help me get through the course.

When I arrived at CUC Southern Shoalhaven I immediately thought: 'What the heck am I doing here?' I looked at all these academics and felt like turning around and going home. But then I spoke with Eva, the Centre's Engagement Officer, who encouraged me to stay and said that everyone would be there to help. Over time, I learnt she was absolutely right.

I'm no longer working in paid employment and have chosen to study. I volunteer with the Red Cross, visiting clients who have no families, and I do pastoral care when needed. I'm looking forward to finishing the course and going back into the workforce.

CUC Southern Shoalhaven has helped me so much and is a great place to find support and assistance. Regardless of who you are, or where you come from, you'll feel welcomed from day one.





Staying connected, one click at a time

A partnership between CUC Hughenden and the Flinders Shire Library is helping local seniors build their confidence.

Held in a relaxed setting over a cuppa, the free Savvy Seniors sessions give participants the opportunity to work through whatever technology challenge they're facing, whether it's sending a text message, accessing an email account, understanding a phone bill or navigating an app. There are no formal lessons or expectations, just practical support tailored to each person's needs.

"We began to notice a lot of the seniors were sharing their passcodes with others for them to get into personal apps like banking and super accounts – purely because they didn't know how to navigate the apps once they were logged in," says Jo-Ella Young, Library and CUC Centre Manager.

> "It was concerning for me and got us thinking about how we can support the older generation in keeping control of their finances, while being comfortable with technology and how to use it."

Jo-Ella Young
CUC Centre Manager, Hughenden

CUC Balonne
ST GEORGE AND DIRRANBANDI, QLD



Building Balonne's agricultural future

CUC Balonne is helping students transform their local aspirations into sustainable agricultural careers. For CUC Balonne, located at St George and Dirranbandi, widening access and building aspiration is not focused on one equity group.

Through strong partnerships with local industry and community organisations, the Centre is helping regional students see new possibilities for their future regardless of their background or pathway.

Blue Light Shearing Camp brings together QLD Police, St George State High School, Dirranbandi State School, Balonne Shire Council and support from the Centre to deliver hands-on training in shearing, wool handling and farm fencing for young people, while simultaneously building their confidence, resilience and connections with mentors. Participants work towards a Certificate II in Rural Operations, gaining practical skills alongside exposure to further education and workforce development opportunities.

CUC Balonne is also partnering with Mallawa Irrigation to support its registered tertiary students pursuing agriculture, water, environmental and related studies. The bursary program supports students while they build the qualifications needed to establish successful careers in the community's largest industry, agriculture.

CUC Cape York
COOKTOWN, QLD



Culturally connected learning in Cape York

CUC Cape York is making tertiary education more accessible by prioritising deep, culturally respectful engagement with remote Indigenous communities.

No centre in the CUC Network is immune from creating programs, outreach initiatives and innovative ways to ensure everyone in the community feels welcome and is encouraged to aspire to further learning. Nowhere is that more evident than at CUC Cape York, located in Cooktown, Queensland.

The Cape's Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander population sits at roughly 47%, ranging from 22.5% across some regions to as high as 74.9% in others. The numbers are a stark comparison to Queensland at 4.6% and Australia at 3.2%[2].

This demographic is reflected in the Centre with 19% of registered students since opening identifying as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander. This is not by accident. CUC Cape York saw the value in working closely with its local Indigenous population, as well as those in the more remote communities of Hope Vale, Coen and Wujal Wujal, and developed targeted engagement activities to connect with them.

Regular visits to these communities provided support not only to current students, but also to people disengaged with education. Over time, through consistent and culturally respectful presence, trust and relationships were built. These visits also often included virtual reality programs, which proved an excellent way to engage with youth, particularly disengaged young boys.

The program featured careers pathways, including local jobs as rangers, tour guides and mechanical fitters. NAIDOC programs, prominent Indigenous artwork and room names within the Centre help create a safe and welcoming space for all students, while encouraging cross-cultural learning.

The Centre also supported Queensland University of Technology's multi-year creative partnership between its fashion students and artists from the Hope Vale Arts and Culture Centre on the Cape York Peninsula.

CUC Ovens Murray
WANGARATTA, CORRYONG AND MANSFIELD, VIC

You can’t be what you can’t see

CUC Ovens Murray is helping regional students discover career paths they never knew existed. When children are asked what they want to be when they grow up, the answers are often familiar – a teacher, a nurse or a police officer.

But what if they could see hundreds of other possibilities? Through the Australian Government’s Regional Partnerships Project Pool Program (RPPPP), CUC Ovens Murray is helping students broaden their understanding of future careers.

Delivered in partnership with La Trobe University and RMIT University, the program works with upper primary and lower secondary students across the Ovens Murray region, encouraging them to think about their strengths, interests and the many opportunities available within their own communities.



> “A key philosophy of the program is to reduce the pressure around career decisions by encouraging career conversations, exploration and pathways to get there, and by reinforcing that ‘what you try first’ may not be a final destination, but an important step in your career.”

Mark Van Bergen
Centre Manager, CUC Ovens Murray

Rather than asking students to decide what they want to do after school, the program (which is currently delivered across 15 regional schools), encourages curiosity and exploration. Through activities, students explore their individual strengths, discover a broader range of careers and consider how education and training can help them achieve their goals.

The activities also encourage students to think about careers that may not yet exist, while recognising the transferable skills that will help them adapt to the jobs of the future.

Importantly, students are encouraged to understand that career pathways are not fixed – and that the possibilities are far broader than the professions they see every day.

Building confidence through conversation

The program is designed to help students identify a broader range of local careers, employers and professionals while encouraging conversations about future pathways with parents, teachers and people within their community.

Following participation, students reported increased confidence in discussing future career options with people beyond their immediate family and peers, helping to build independence, curiosity and a future-focused mindset.

One teacher said: “Engaging activities that support social skills and goal setting has helped students change the way they think or talk about their future. The program opens up possibilities in careers that our country kids don’t know are out there.”

By helping students recognise their strengths, explore a broader range of careers and understand the education and training pathways available to them, CUC Ovens Murray is encouraging young people to approach their future with curiosity and confidence.

Rather than asking students to have all the answers today, the program empowers them to keep asking questions, exploring opportunities and imagining what their future could become.



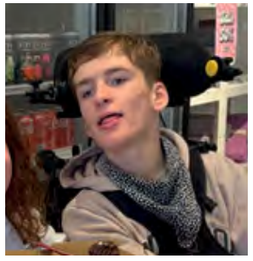
CUC Far West
BROKEN HILL, NSW

Student spotlight



Morgan Wheatley

Morgan is on her way to filling a critical healthcare role in her community, currently studying a Bachelor of Nursing through Adelaide University with plans to become a midwife upon graduation in 2026. As a disability support worker and online student, she balances study, work and life while developing the skills needed to support Broken Hill’s future health workforce. Morgan credits CUC Broken Hill with giving her the confidence, connection and support to excel in her studies. Her journey demonstrates the Centre’s role in creating the social licence for students to pursue tertiary education otherwise unavailable to students.



Callaghan Shepard

Callaghan’s daily routine includes a visit to CUC Far West, where the combination of dedicated learning spaces and local support helps him, and other students like him with a disability, succeed in their degree. Access to assistive communication technology has made pursuing his passion for mathematics and studying a Bachelor of Science (Mathematics) more accessible, while the welcoming environment and trusted staff have supported his transition from high school to study at Charles Sturt University.

CUC Clarence Valley
GRAFTON, NSW

From small dreams to big possibilities

CUC Clarence Valley's My Future CV program empowers Year 5 and 6 students to broaden their horizons by connecting personal interests to diverse future pathways.

Before participating in My Future CV, one student's picture revealed a limited view of their future opportunities. By the end of the program, that same student's drawing painted a far broader vision of what their future could hold.

They hadn't just discovered a new career, but rather a broader understanding of what their life could look like. That's the shift in thinking that sits at the heart of CUC Clarence Valley's aspiration-building program, My Future CV.

My Future CV was born when local schools discovered Year 5 and 6 students' limited knowledge of future study and career pathways. Developed in consultation with the community, the program nurtures students' aspirations early, helping them recognise their strengths, build confidence and explore possibilities before those aspirations begin to narrow.

Rather than focusing on a single career destination, the program encourages students to better understand themselves. Through hands-on activities and immersive experiences with schools, universities and community partners, students explore their strengths, interests and values while learning how these can connect to future study and employment pathways.

The program also introduces students to a wider range of careers and educational opportunities, helping them understand that there are many different ways to achieve their goals.

The impact of the program is reflected not only in survey results, but in the way students describe their own futures.

Following participation, students demonstrated an increased awareness of future study and career options, identified a broader range of careers and developed greater confidence in exploring future possibilities.

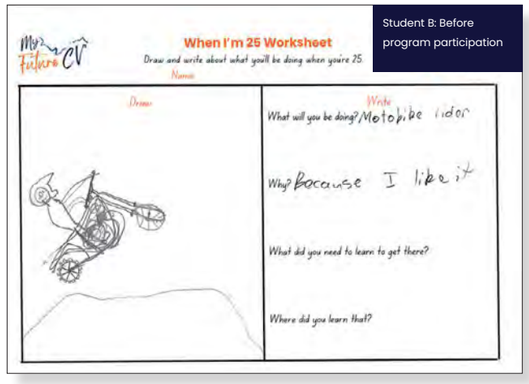
"I really enjoyed learning about new jobs and the career paths I'd need for them, as well as doing activities, discovering new things and having fun."
Year 6 student, 2025

Investing in the future

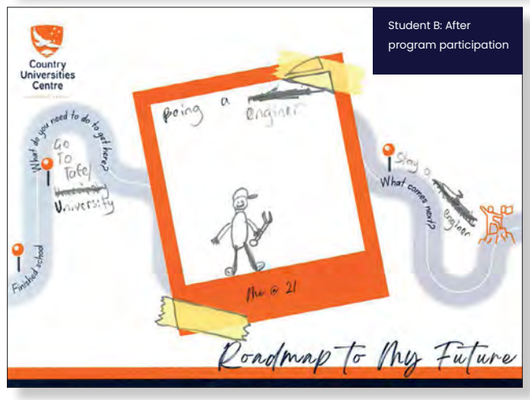
The program's impact extends beyond students, too. Teachers also observed a shift in the way students thought and talked about their futures, while reporting greater confidence in having conversations about education and career pathways.

One Year 5/6 teacher from an inner-regional school reflected: "The program triggered regular conversations around continuing education beyond high school – ultimately encouraging students to think about career paths and help them realise the importance of schooling."

By introducing young people to possibilities they may never have previously considered, My Future CV is helping students build confidence, broaden their aspirations and imagine futures that once felt entirely beyond their reach.



Student B: Before program participation



Student B: After program participation



"It's essential that aspirational conversations begin in primary school so we can break down the many barriers that regional students face. Ultimately, we do not want the aspirations of our young people to be defined by social circumscription and compromise before they've even had a chance to explore their possibilities."

Nicole Gray
Centre Coordinator, CUC Clarence Valley



Growing our own workforce

Regional Australia is vital to the nation's future economy, but our regions can't reach their full potential without a sustainable workforce. An energy zone stalls without engineers, a community can't educate its children without teachers, a mining town needs healthcare workers, and agricultural regions require agronomists.

CUCs are helping close this gap by supporting students in growing essential skills locally. More than 34% of CUC students study health-related degrees and 21% study education – professions critical to building resilient, self-sustaining pipelines. This is workforce development with a direct local return: skills nurtured in the community build prosperity for individuals and businesses alike. Local Governments and industries increasingly partner with their CUC as part of their regional resilience strategy.

In Tasmania, the Break O'Day Council facilitated the establishment of a community-led entity to operate both CUC Eastern Tasmania and a Break O'Day Employment Connect, a regional jobs hub, creating a holistic community hub for learning and employment across eastern Tasmania. As Centre Manager Leah Page noted, they are "resourced and ready to empower our community to unlock their potential and achieve thriving futures."

This investment is working. An independent 2024 evaluation by UNSW found 89% of graduates remained in their community or another rural or regional area. Over 50% were employed by State or Local Government entities, with 33% employed by the private or non-government sector[3].

Centres are creating the connective tissue between study and employment through programs like Link&Learn, which bring employers, students and graduates together to ease transitions into local jobs. Every Centre approaches this differently, but the goal is the same: a regional Australia that can train and keep the workforce it needs.

The following pages show this in practice, with Centres connecting students to the industries that sustain their regions – turning qualifications into careers close to home.

89%

of graduates remain in regional Australia

55%

of graduates were employed by State or Local Government entities

4,237

Since 2017 4,237 students have studied a health-related course

2,216

Since 2017 2,216 students have studied an education-related course

CUC Western Riverina

GRIFFITH AND LEETON, NSW



Grounded in community, building futures

CUC Western Riverina bridges regional ambition with local opportunity, empowering students to build meaningful careers at home through initiatives like Grow Our Own and Ready Set Uni.

CUC Western Riverina and Regional Development Australia (RDA) Riverina share a common goal: supporting local people to study, work and build careers within the Western Riverina. For many young people, the challenge is just as significant. They often leave school without a clear understanding of the career opportunities available in their own community, or the study pathways that can help them get there.

That's where the partnership between CUC Western Riverina and RDA Riverina's Grow Our Own (GOO) initiative is making a difference. Together, they're helping local students see a future where they can study, work and build meaningful careers without leaving the region.

CUC Western Riverina Centre Manager, Shiron Kirkman, said a young person simply can't aspire to a career they've never encountered or a pathway they have no knowledge of. "Grow Our Own exists to change that, showing students in the Western Riverina that the future they're looking for might already be here, locally."

Showing students what's possible

Sometimes the first step towards a career is simply seeing it. Through the Grow Our Own initiative, Year 9 students are invited behind the scenes of businesses across Griffith, Leeton and Narrandera, gaining firsthand exposure to industries including healthcare, agriculture, manufacturing and STEM.

In 2025 alone, more than 220 students participated across 22 industry tours, connecting with local employers and discovering careers they may never have previously considered. "Year 9 students recently participated in GOO Industry Tours, where they had an opportunity to engage with different employers and see what different local industries had to offer," said Michelle Wood, Careers Advisor at St Francis College Leeton.

"The students loved these tours and many followed up on their interest by emailing GOO so they could be linked with the business for future work experience and job opportunities. Networking is the key to employment and exposure. This has motivated and broadened students' awareness of what is available. It also allows employers to promote their businesses and skill shortages."

Rather than ending when the tour finishes, CUC Western Riverina helps students understand how they can turn those career aspirations into reality by creating tailored industry guides outlining local study options and qualifications required for each profession.

More than education

The partnership between CUC Western Riverina and RDA Riverina demonstrates that strengthening regional communities isn't simply about creating more university graduates. "We know where the region's workforce shortages are, and the most sustainable answer is growing our own," said Katie Pastro, Project Officer for the RDA Riverina Grow Our Own.

"When a student becomes a local nurse, teacher or engineer, the whole community benefits. That's what we're building together: not just graduates, but a stronger region." Every student who chooses to stay, study and work locally contributes to a stronger regional economy, a more resilient workforce and a more vibrant community. For the Western Riverina, that's an investment that benefits everyone.

100%

of participants said they would recommend the program

every student

reported feeling more confident about their future study and career options, and nearly half of participants are first in family to pursue higher education

4.8/5

students rated the support they received through the course as 4.8/5 stars

Ready Set Uni

CUC Western Riverina's five-week Ready Set Uni program guides Year 12 students and their families through the transition to further study. By offering practical support on applications, scholarships, and study pathways, the initiative empowers students – especially first-in-family learners – to confidently navigate their future. The results speak for themselves.



CUC North West
MOREE AND NARRABRI, NSW



Growing a skilled workforce

In Semester 1 2026, CUC North West had the largest cohort of its students enrolled in agriculture, environmental and related studies, making it one of the most distinctive cohorts across the CUC.

CUC North West's strong participation in agriculture and related courses mirrors the local economy, where agriculture powers the region with 25.5%[4] and 15.7%[5] of Moree Plains Shire and Narrabri Shire Council's respective employment.

The Moree hub has developed particularly strong local industry partnerships. Recognising the Centre's impact on its student members and the broader agricultural community, Young Aggies Moree donated almost $10,000 to fund bursaries and support the next generation of skilled professionals in the region.

> **"When I first moved to Moree I had no internet access, which greatly hindered my studies. CUC North West provided a quiet space with internet. The support of the team has been an asset. Having CUCNW in Moree has been great! It offers… a place to meet like-minded students who are always willing to help."**

Jack Wiseman
Vice President, Young Aggies Moree
Bachelor of Agricultural Science
Charles Sturt University (graduated 2025)



CUC RAPAD CWQ
LONGREACH, WINTON, BLACKALL, BARCALDINE, BOULIA, BIRDSVILLE, BEDOURIE AND JUNDAH, QLD

Learning without limits

Distance is a fact of life for those living in outback Queensland, but with CUC Remote Area Planning and Development Board, Central West Queensland (RAPAD CWQ) it's no longer a barrier to education.

As the largest multi-site centre, CUC RAPAD CWQ operates across eight communities – Longreach, Winton, Blackall, Barcaldine, Boulia, Birdsville, Bedourie and Jundah. It serves a footprint larger than the state of Victoria, but with a population of just over 10,000 people. Although each town may be considered the same to outsiders, they each have strong, local identities, and the students who walk through their doors are as diverse as the communities they call home.

In Blackall, five local men aged between 69 and 82 recently completed their Turbine and Steam Reciprocating Engine Operator training. Undertaking the highly-specialised qualification wasn't just for fun – the upskilled men are now able to operate machinery at the Blackall Historical Woolscour, one of the region's most significant tourism attractions.

"The CUC allowed them a space to study together and, with limited IT experience for some, I was able to support them throughout their studies," says Helen Allen, Blackall and Barcaldine Hub Manager.

"Their success just shows how important it is to upskill people of all ages in our regional communities."

Winton calling

Then there are stories of students like Caitlyn Elliott, a Winton Shire local.

After attending boarding school, Caitlyn began a Bachelor of Accounting with the University of Southern Queensland. But the pull of home was strong, and after a year on campus she returned to Winton. Caitlyn studied through CUC RAPAD CWQ's Winton Hub for the final two years of her degree. Today, Caitlyn works as the Finance Officer for Winton Shire Council, applying her skills and contributing directly to the future of the region. She's also looking ahead to the next stage of her professional journey, with plans to undertake her Certified Practising Accountant (CPA) qualification.

For Winton Hub Coordinator, Sophie Elliot, working at the Centre hits close to home.

"My dream was always to return home to live, work and study in the community that shaped me. But at the time, studying here simply wasn't a realistic option. Our students can now build their careers locally with the support of CUC, contribute to the regional economy and become active members of the community. It's incredibly rewarding to play a small part in making that possible."





CUC Mallee
SWAN HILL, VIC

Opening doors close to home

Through its Employment Support Program, CUC Mallee connects local students with paid work that aligns directly with their university studies. The result? Learners gain essential industry experience and talent stays in the region.

When Sofie Mazzotta began studying her Bachelor of Social Work, she was looking towards a future helping people in her local community. Today, she's doing exactly that. Through CUC Mallee's Employment Support Program (ESP), Sofie secured an internship at Mallee Family Care. The opportunity allows her to work part-time while studying, providing industry experience alongside her degree.

"I am so grateful that the CUC linked me into Mallee Family Care," Sofie said. "Working within the community where I grew up is incredibly meaningful and the internship is really enhancing my learning. I'm able to put coursework theories into practice."

Made possible through Partnership Funding, CUC Mallee's Employment Support Program was developed to strengthen the connection between tertiary education, local industry and workforce needs across the region. The Centre works with students to identify employment opportunities aligned with their studies, while creating stronger connections with local businesses seeking talent.

Centre Manager Hayden Hogan said, "Connecting students with employers was the missing piece in the services that CUC Mallee can provide. Sofie is just one example of how the program can benefit both the student and the employer."

The program has created meaningful employment outcomes across education, accounting and social work. Mallee Family Care CEO, Teresa Jayet, said providing internships was an investment in the future.

"Internships create value for everyone involved. Students gain the practical skills they need to launch their careers, while we benefit from fresh perspectives and help build the skilled workforce we need."

Investing in the region

The Employment Support Program forms part of CUC Mallee's broader vision to support workforce readiness. The Commonwealth funded program has enabled the Centre to employ a dedicated Partnership Coordinator, who works closely with students, businesses and community organisations. The program is available to students studying Certificate IV qualifications and above.

By connecting students with local employers, the program is undoubtedly strengthening employment pathways and encouraging students to build their careers within the region.

Hayden added, "While it's early days, the impact on students and employers is significant. Working in the field while studying ensures they'll be far more prepared once they're fully qualified."

CUC Maranoa
ROMA, QLD

Cooking up connections

CUC Maranoa's Cook + Connect program is turning simple shared meals into powerful networking opportunities that help regional students build meaningful career pathways.

When second-year nursing student Indi arrived at a Cook + Connect session at CUC Maranoa, she didn't expect to meet someone already working in her dream career. Around the table that evening was Shami, a mental health nurse with the Royal Flying Doctor Service (RFDS) and a previous University of Queensland postgraduate student at the Centre.

Indi had dreamed of working for the RFDS since watching the television series as a child. Over a shared meal, she was able to ask Shami about her career, hear about her experiences and gain advice from someone working in the field she hopes to enter.



"Cook + Connect creates a welcoming space where people can share much more than a meal."

Kat Ballon
Learning Skills Advisor, CUC Maranoa

It was an unexpected connection, but one the evening was designed to create.

Delivered in partnership with the HOPE Preventative Health Service, Cook + Connect brings students, graduates and local professionals together through a meal and informal conversation.

"Students can meet with people at different stages of study and employment, hear about pathways they may not have considered and build connections.

"Regional students don't always have easy access to professional networks or people working in the careers they're considering. Bringing everyone together gives students the chance to learn from one another and see that there are many ways to reach their goals."

That is the simple idea behind Cook + Connect: good food can begin a conversation, and the right conversation can open a door.

Meet two students supported by Cook + Connect

Campbell

While on his apprenticeship, Campbell helped construct the building CUC Maranoa calls home. Ten years later, he's now returned as a student nearing completion of a Trade-to-Teach education degree through Central Queensland University.

Addie

Addie has been part of the CUC Maranoa community since its opening day. Her study journey has taken her from a Certificate III to a Diploma, and she's now completing a Bachelor of Education through Southern Cross University.

CUC Isaac
MORANBAH AND CLERMONT, QLD



Image credit: Isaac Regional Council

Skills beyond the coalface

By partnering with local industry to offer broad scholarships, CUC Isaac is helping diversify Central Queensland's workforce – ensuring the region thrives well beyond its mining roots.

Home to 22,000 people, Central Queensland's Isaac Regional Council has over 27,000 jobs and an annual economic output of $49.460 billion. In a region where the mining (55.2% of all jobs) and construction (9.5%)[6] industries dominate the employment landscape, building aspiration for those pursuing a different path is just as critical. After all, no town can run without a strong community workforce, too.

CUC Isaac, with a Hub in Moranbah and Clermont, is helping students see that path is possible. By partnering with local industry giant Iberdrola Australia, the Centre is delivering an annual scholarship open to students studying any course, at any institution – a deliberate bet on breadth over prescription.

The results speak for themselves. In its first year alone, recipients have studied everything from a Masters of Education at University of Southern Queensland to a Bachelor of Nursing at James Cook University, a Bachelor of Engineering through Central Queensland University to a Graduate Certificate in Business with Griffith University. Proof that a mining town's workforce needs to stretch well beyond the pit.



Delivering on the Accord

The Australian Universities Accord has a challenging goal to reach by the year 2050: for 80% of working age Australians to hold a tertiary qualification (Certificate III or higher), and for university attainment among 25 to 34 year olds to rise from 45% to 55%[7].

It's a target that recognises education as a powerful driver of individual opportunity and national prosperity – but it's also a target that can't be reached without regional Australia. ABS data from 2021 shows just over 21.1% of people in outer regional areas have a bachelor degree or above, with that number dropping considerably to 16.6% in remote and very remote areas. A stark comparison of 48.6% for regional Australia's metropolitan cousins[8].

This Accord recognises that to reach this target, a more connected tertiary education system needs to be fostered. The system must support learners to enter at various stages and move seamlessly between different qualifications, institutions and sectors. Achieving this vision requires more than policy settings alone. It also calls for local infrastructure that makes participation and access possible, particularly in regional, rural and remote Australia.

Regional University Study Hubs (RUSHs), and CUCs as part of that ecosystem, are uniquely positioned to contribute to these objectives. Centres do not duplicate or compete with education providers and the model is intentionally provider-agnostic.

No matter the education level, all CUC students have access to the same services and support. Students can stay within their region and undertake any tertiary award, from a Certificate to a Diploma, a Bachelor's degree or postgraduate study. This creates something that is often missing from tertiary policy discussions: shared, community-based infrastructure that sits underneath the entire tertiary system rather than within a single institution.

CUCs are not a supplementary player in the Accord's mission to reach its targets. Rather, we will be a strategic lever, providing one of the most cost-effective, community-trusted and scalable mechanisms for lifting regional attainment.



Local support: How CUCs are delivering on the Australian Universities Accord

The Australian Universities Accord has set one of the most ambitious education targets in this nation's history – here's how CUCs are mobilising to support learning in our regions.

CUCs across Australia are a physical symbol that tertiary education is available and achievable in regional communities. As Centres encourage learner choice, students from across the tertiary spectrum are creating a unified and connected space.

The impact is visible in the growing proportion of VET students, which has almost doubled in the past four years from 7% in 2022 to 12% in 2026. Effective transitions happen daily – currently 10% of students have re-registered moving from one level of study to another.

Several Centres are already demonstrating integrated tertiary participation. CUC Hay, CUC Southern Grampians and CUC Southern Down are all co-located at a TAFE campus.

CUC Southern Downs sits within TAFE Queensland's Warwick campus. It's supported more than 200 students, with more than 10% of these enrolled in VET.

"Co-locating within TAFE Queensland has created a genuine tertiary learning hub where vocational and higher education sit side-by-side rather than in competition," says Centre Manager, Alyce Lotz. "It is a lifelong journey with many entry points.

In Victoria, CUC Southern Grampians is gaining traction.

"As an integral part of a learner's pathway, we are supporting school leavers, people returning to learning after a long time away, and professionals seeking new qualifications or engaging in ongoing development," says Centre Manager, Zoe Brinsden. "We are one piece of a much larger community puzzle, working alongside employers, schools, training providers, and local government to create a future where people can truly live, learn and work locally."

As Australia progresses towards the Accord's goals, CUCs provide a unified model for a joined up tertiary system. Combined with local efforts to improve equity, aspiration and access, this will ensure both participation and completion across regional, rural and remote communities by 2050.

CUC Hay is situated within TAFE NSW's Connected Learning Centre and on the grounds of the local high school, creating a visible pathway from secondary school to vocational and higher education. The NSW Government Minister for Skills, TAFE and Tertiary Education, Steve Whan, noted below:

> "By co-locating this centre with TAFE NSW, we're making it easier for people to move between vocational training and university study, all in one place."

Steve Whan
NSW Minister for Skills, TAFE and Tertiary Education

CUCs across Australia are a physical symbol that tertiary education is available, achievable and something to aspire to in their community.



*Percentages have been rounded to the nearest whole number

CUC Goulburn
GOULBURN, NSW

1000+
students supported since 2019

400+
courses with over 70 providers, including vocational providers, TAFE NSW and 33 Australian universities

20%
of CUC Goulburn students have registered for more than one course or qualification, progressing from widening participation programs into undergraduate study, and between VET and higher education, diploma to degree (or vice versa), and into post-graduate study

Harmonisation in practice

CUC Goulburn is bridging the gap to the Australian Universities Accord's 2050 targets by serving as a dedicated, community-based hub – supporting diverse students across every stage of their tertiary education experience.

There's little chance of reaching the Accord's targets without dedicated support for non-traditional students, including those who are mature-age, working, part-time, or from disadvantaged backgrounds.

In the Goulburn Mulwaree region, the CUC Goulburn is the in-community partner helping providers deliver on that vision. The Centre is a trusted home and access point for tertiary education, knows its community well and has designed its services around local needs and the whole student lifecycle. This starts at pre-access in supporting individuals on courses and providers before enrolling, throughout their study and then as they transition into the local workforce.

With the student lifecycle top of mind, conversations about further study happen early and frequently. The Centre's On Course outreach program, delivered in partnership with the University of Canberra (UC), the Australian National University (ANU), the University of Wollongong (UoW) and the Australian Catholic University (ACU), works with secondary students across the Goulburn Mulwaree region from as early as Year 7.

Sessions are facilitated by local university-student mentors and begin with students exploring their strengths, values and interests, and connections to the full range of post-school pathways available to them. By Years 10 and 11, the conversation continues, and students can join pop-up course advice sessions in their own schools for individualised advice. At the access and transition stage, the Centre's free book-in course advice service is offered to all locals – regardless of age or prior learning experience. It's an agnostic service, connecting each person to courses, providers and pathways that fit their needs and circumstances. For many locals, this may be early entry and enabling programs, with options available online and face-to-face at the Centre or vocational pathways. Once enrolled, students have access to academic advice, placement support and exam services regardless of their study level and pathway.

The Centre is also establishing a career development service for students, designed to build career self-efficacy and help with access to local labour market information.

Local student Archie is a testament to CUC Goulburn's approach. Initially using the Centre for course advice, he undertook tertiary preparation studies through University of Canberra's UC Prep program. On completion, he sought advice around various Bachelor of Education degrees while he worked in the community as a School Learning Support Officer. Similarly, engineering student James first registered at the Centre to undertake the free, five-week UoW Future Me program for Year 12 students. Later, he sought course advice that led to enrolling in a UOW Bachelor of Engineering and is now part of the Centre's mentor program.

This in-community continuity, no matter the tertiary pathway or provider, makes the Centre a key partner in supporting widening participation, retention and attainment across tertiary education in the region.

CUC Mount Isa
MOUNT ISA, QLD



Student spotlight

Darrin MacKenzie is the General Manager of ENZED Mount Isa and is one of over 460 students who has registered at the Centre since it opened in late 2024.

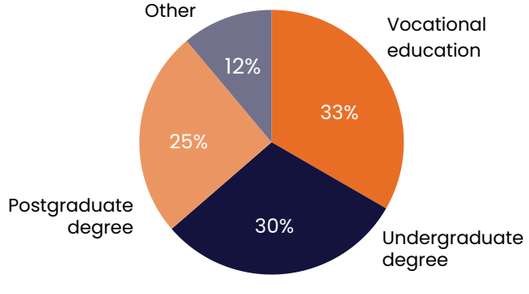
Having completed an MBA and a degree in Public Relations at Griffith University, Darrin is currently studying a Bachelor of Laws through Queensland University of Technology to further strengthen his diverse professional skillset. Passionate about the future of the iconic mining and rodeo community, he joined the CUC Mount Isa Board in 2025. He sees the Centre as a vital link between education, industry and employment for students, regardless of their starting point.

"Our students are a super inspiring bunch of people, all following different paths and all representative of the diverse community I proudly call home. At any one time there are people studying their first vocational course out of high school, right up to seasoned professionals completing Masters and PHDs. All from the middle of outback QLD. How good is that?!"

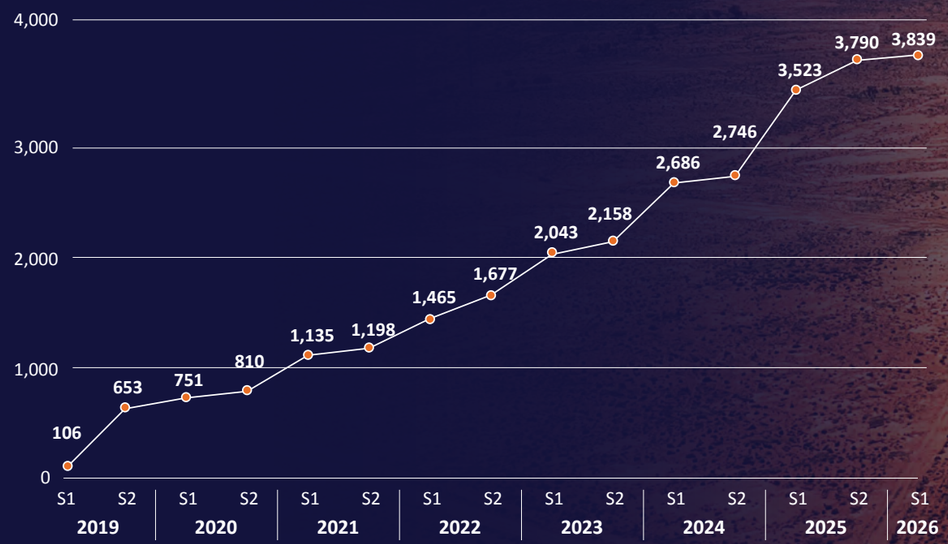
The Centre has excelled at connecting and supporting students from all tertiary education pathways with its largest cohort of students undertaking vocational education courses.



Level of study of CUC Mount Isa students since opening



Future growth and impact – expanding, deepening and evolving



In the past 10 years, the CUC has grown significantly and opened a world of opportunities for people living in rural and remote Australia.

In the next 10, we plan to go further. As a collective, we want to build stronger, robust partnerships with tertiary providers and industries; ensure Centres are more than just study spaces; and build a network with communities craving accessible tertiary education. This is how we help meet the Accord's targets and prove that a postcode should never determine potential.

Supporting more students

CUC will not just be a physical symbol of a joined up tertiary system. Using our combined resources and impact, we will work collaboratively with universities, TAFEs and other tertiary education providers to streamline the graduation pathway for regional, rural and remote students. We want to ensure their needs are met and support is available. This means offering students flexible, stackable qualifications that fit alongside work and family commitments. It also means prioritising culturally-safe environments and genuine community partnerships.

Improving workforce development

CUCs have always advocated for the power of learning and education in regional development. By formalising industry partnerships, embedding employer co-design into programs, and building clear, visible pathways from study to employment with regional providers, more locals can build careers in the communities they call home. Plus, regional employers gain the skilled workforce they so desperately need.

Workforce data will underpin this shift, enabling us to measure impact against regional labour market needs and adapt to both changing regional industries and globally-available technologies. Centres will also grow into hubs for career support – not just for school leavers exploring their options, but for people mid-career navigating a profession change, a new role or beginning or re-starting their tertiary journey.

Expanding the network

The CUC is proud to be part of a national regional study hub movement, enabling us to innovate both where and how we deliver services. By testing new delivery models, such as non-physical service options, we can support more people, faster.

That's why we're fast-tracking expansion by partnering with local industry, councils and government, expanding our Centres and services in new communities. It's a strategic approach that will not only amplify the RUSH program's impact, but extend our own reach where it matters most.



The investment case: Why the country advantage

Regional Australia is at an inflection point. Tertiary education participation rates in rural and remote areas remain significantly below metropolitan averages. Cost of living pressures, digital infrastructure gaps and geographic isolation are compounding. And yet, regional communities have something metropolitan Australia cannot replicate: deep local knowledge, extraordinary resilience and people who want to build futures where they already belong.

For industry

Partner with us to help inspire and build regional Australia's future workforce. Think upskilling existing employees, connecting students with local oppportunities and growing aspiration among young people. Together we can make sure regional industries thrive.

For government

The CUC network is proven, federated and scalable. We are supporting locals to learn, begin or progress their careers in the key industries that sustain regional Australia, and we will be a critical contributor to delivering the Australian Universities Accord targets.

For philanthropists

Your investment helps remove barriers and create opportunities for those in the bush and on the coast who need it the most. The impact of your partnership and support extends beyond an individual to create stronger, more resilient communities and lasting regional change.

Partner with us

Whether you're a funder, a philanthropist, a university partner or a community leader, there's a role for you in this network. Let's talk about what that looks like.

Lou Conway, CEO
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Acknowledgments

Country Universities Centres are proud recipients of the Australian Government's Regional University Study Hub Program. This funding has supported the establishment and operation of Centres, enabling students to pursue and succeed in their education journeys while remaining connected to their local communities.

The NSW Government has been a significant partner for many Centres, helping establish the initial CUC network across a number of the state's key regional hubs and providing ongoing operational funding.

We also acknowledge the significant contribution of Local Governments, philanthropists, businesses and community partners who have supported the development of Centres across the network. Their advocacy, investment and commitment to improving tertiary education opportunities in their regions have been instrumental in turning a shared vision into a lasting community asset. It is this collective local leadership that reflects the ambition, resilience and determination of regional communities to create pathways for future generations to learn, grow and thrive close to home.

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"CUC is about creating opportunities that allow people to pursue their goals without having to leave the region.

As a Centre, we're proud to be part of a community where students can connect, study and build their futures while remaining close to the people and places that matter to them. It's incredibly rewarding to see the confidence that grows when people realise that university and further education are genuinely within their reach."

Michelle McVicar
Engagement Coordinator, CUC Cowra Region

"The CUC was invaluable. Knowing it was available before I began gave me greater confidence to enrol...Community is such an empowering part of the study experience.

The CUC gave me a way to connect with other people who could understand what I was going through, give advice for the tough stuff, and help me celebrate my wins."

Nicole Williams
Graduate Certificate of Chaplaincy and Spiritual Care, Morling College
CUC Parkes





“The CUC is a launchpad for regional transformation. We build pathways that have a ripple effect that strengthens our entire community.

When students succeed, families thrive, businesses gain skilled workers, and our region grows stronger. We’re investing in the long-term vitality of rural and regional Australia.”

Janette Wilson
Centre Manager, CUC Snowy Valleys

Education changes lives, and changes communities.

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