

# ROADMAP TO SUCCESS

A 'What Works' guide to  
Regional University  
Study Hub partnerships



The author acknowledges the traditional custodians of the land on which the University of Technology Sydney operates: the Gadigal people of the Eora Nation.

Research was conducted on the lands of the Wilyakali, Yugambeh, Kombumerri, Nukunu, Barngarla, Nunggubuyu, Yolŋu, Peerapper, Toogee, Biripi, Bpangerang, Jaitmatang, Taungurung, Dhudhuroa, Waywurru, Guugu Yimithirr, Menang (Noongar nation), Warndarrang, Minggirringi, and Bigambul peoples.

First Nations sovereignty was never ceded. This continent always was and always will be Aboriginal Land.

This guide is a resource developed as part of Danielle Keenan's Equity Fellowship conducted under the Australian Centre for Student Equity Success (ACSES) Equity Fellows Program, Funded by the Australian Government, Department of Education.



## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The project would not have been possible without the generous support of the Australian Centre for Student Equity and Success (ACSES), who funded this fellowship.

I sincerely thank the Network of Regional University Study Hubs and the communities who contributed to this research:

- Uni Hub Spencer Gulf
- Study Hub West Coast
- Goondiwindi Regional University Centre
- Country Universities Centre Cape York
- Taree Universities Campus
- Wuyagiba Bush Uni
- Great Southern Universities Centre
- Country Universities Centre Ovens Murray

I would like to express my deepest gratitude to Dr. Joshua James of the University of Technology Sydney, whose insights, dedication, and expertise as Research Officer were invaluable throughout this project. Josh's thoughtful approach to data analysis, commitment to ethical research practices, and unwavering support greatly enriched the outcomes of this work.

Special thanks also to my fellow 2024 Equity Fellows for their inspiring contributions to advancing equity in higher education: Associate Professor Amani Bell, Dr Bret Stephenson, Dr Tracy Woodroffe, Professor Peter Anderson and Dr Darren Garvey.

Finally, sincere thanks to Maddie Cummins for her outstanding design of the project documentation and Corey McInnes of [Shameless Visuals](#) for his exceptional work in capturing the beautiful landscapes across regional Australia.



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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

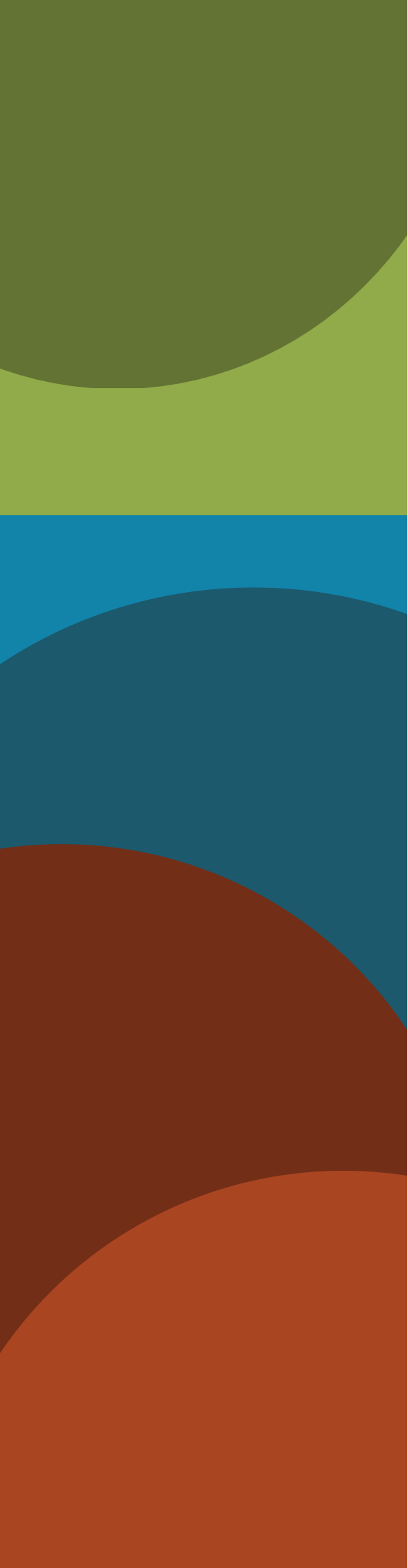


Danielle Keenan is a regional Australian with a deep personal connection to regional, rural, and remote (RRR) communities, having grown up in far western New South Wales. Her own experiences of navigating the higher education system as a student from a regional background fuel her passion for creating better access pathways for historically underserved students.

This lived experience, combined with her extensive professional expertise, positions Danielle as a trusted advocate and leader in improving educational access for regional students.

Before her work with Regional University Study Hubs (RUSH), Danielle spent nine years in higher education, developing a strong foundation in student services, equity initiatives, and regional engagement. She later became the inaugural Centre Manager of the Country Universities Centre (CUC) Far West, where she led the development of place-based student support services tailored to the unique challenges faced by RRR learners. As Director of Student Services at CUC Central, she expanded these initiatives across the network, influencing national policy on Regional University Study Hubs operations. Throughout her roles, Danielle maintained a commitment to co-designing solutions with communities, ensuring that student services were both culturally and contextually appropriate.

Her practitioner expertise was critical in shaping this research project, offering nuanced insights into the operational realities of Regional University Study Hubs and their capacity to widen participation. Danielle's role as Chair of the Regional University Study Hubs Network Advisory Committee, while separate from this project, reflects her ongoing leadership and deep commitment to supporting Regional Hubs practitioners across Australia. Leveraging her broad network of personal and professional connections, Danielle engaged directly with Regional Hub staff, universities, and policymakers to gather diverse perspectives and ground the research in real-world practice. This unique combination of personal motivation and professional experience underpinned her approach to building evidence-based strategies for improving educational outcomes in regional areas.



## ABOUT THE EQUITY FELLOWSHIP

The fellowship investigated the widening participation abilities of the Regional University Study Hubs using a mixed-methods approach. Interviews were conducted with 57 stakeholders at nine Regional Hubs (students, staff, community representatives), surveys were completed by 26 Regional Hubs, and ethnographic observations were collected during fieldwork. Four key findings emerged from this research, all of which enhance our understanding of the relationship between the Regional Hubs and their widening participation effects, but also their role in RRR communities.

Key findings from the fellowship were:

1. Regional Hubs widen participation by offering dedicated study places with appropriate facilities and infrastructure, such as high-speed internet. Users of Regional Hubs identify more as students, increasing their retention and self-belief in their capabilities. They also cultivate a culture of higher education in their communities, providing additional benefits to the student identity of their users.
2. Staff play an important role in the widening participation activities of the Regional Hubs. Positive staff-student relationships were widely reported, and staff were seen as friendly, trustworthy, and welcoming. These positive relationships further enhance the student-identity widening participation functions.
3. Partnerships strengthen the widening participation activities of Regional Hubs. Three key partnerships were identified: with higher education institutions, with other education providers, and with the community at large. All three partnerships have their unique strengths and challenges, but all enhance the ability for Regional Hubs to widen participation.
4. Regional Hubs contribute to the prosperity of regional communities by developing the workforce to meet the skill needs of their communities and encouraging young people to stay in the area, effectively halting the brain drain that many RRR communities experience.

The research highlights the valuable role that Regional Hubs play in supporting regional, rural, and remote communities, as well as their broader contribution to Australia. Beyond the economic benefits of a more highly skilled population, higher education brings unquantifiable advantages to these communities—fostering aspiration, innovation, and resilience that are essential for Australia's future.

## PARTNERING WITH REGIONAL UNIVERSITY STUDY HUBS IN AUSTRALIA

This guide serves as a roadmap for success in widening participation to higher education for regional, rural, and remote (RRR) communities. It is designed to support higher education institutions (HEIs) in building meaningful, sustainable partnerships with Regional University Study Hubs (RUSH) by offering practical guidance grounded in principles of effective engagement. These principles—shared goals, trust, strong governance, partner relations, and capacity for partnership work—stand as ideals for fostering collaborations that can drive educational initiatives and support regional development.

By translating these principles into actionable strategies, the guide provides HEIs with a framework for establishing successful partnerships that benefit both institutions and society. The recommended practices focus on co-creation, reciprocity, and long-term commitment, ensuring that partnership efforts are responsive to the needs of RRR communities.

Importantly, the guide features a collection of case studies generously contributed by universities and Regional University Study Hubs.

These case studies illustrate ‘what works’ in practice, offering real-world insights into successful partnership models and showcasing the dedication and innovation of those working to improve access to higher education in regional areas. The contributions reflect the significant efforts of each institution and Regional Hub in sharing their experiences to support sector-wide learning.

Case studies have been contributed by:

- Charles Sturt University
- Country Universities Centres
- Curtin University
- Goondiwindi Regional University Centre
- Greater Southern Universities Centre
- La Trobe University
- Macquarie University
- Open Universities Australia
- Taree Universities Campus
- Uni Hub Spencer Gulf
- University of Southern Queensland
- University of Technology Sydney
- Wuyagiba Bush Uni



## PARTNERING WITH REGIONAL UNIVERSITY STUDY HUBS IN AUSTRALIA

For decades, partnerships between higher education institutions and regional communities in Australia have been fraught with challenges, often leading to outcomes that fell short of addressing the unique needs of regional, rural, and remote (RRR) populations. Historically, university engagement in regional areas has been criticised for adopting a centralised, institution-centric approach that disregarded local knowledge and failed to foster genuine reciprocity.

The Bradley Review of Higher Education (2008) identified significant inequities in participation and attainment rates among students from RRR backgrounds, emphasising that systemic reform was required to ensure universities engaged meaningfully with regional communities (Bradley et al., 2008). A decade later, the Halsey Review (2018) underscored the persistent gap in access to higher education for regional Australians, attributing this disparity, in part, to the lack of tailored, place-based strategies.

The Australian Universities Accord Final Report (2024) further emphasises the importance of universities collaborating more effectively with regional communities. It calls for universities to establish stronger partnerships with regional communities to address local needs and drive regional development. The report also recommends setting meaningful targets to increase participation from under-represented student cohorts, particularly in regional areas, and suggests that universities should integrate more closely with regional industries and community organisations to ensure that education and research are aligned with regional priorities.

These findings point to a critical need for change in the way universities approach regional partnerships. Effective engagement must go beyond mere outreach and prioritise co-design, community leadership, and sustainable, locally driven solutions.

Place-based models, such as Regional University Study Hubs, have demonstrated success by embedding higher education within the social, cultural, and economic fabric of regional communities. Partnering with these Regional Hubs offers universities an opportunity to reimagine their role—not as external providers imposing predetermined frameworks but as collaborators committed to fostering equitable access, inclusion, and long-term capacity-building.

*“We require both independence and greater partnership opportunities grounded in our community connection and responsibility and accountability to our local community. While this is ostensibly paradoxical we believe we are well uniquely placed to see this vision progressed”.*

*- research participant*

Partnerships between higher education institutions (HEIs) and Regional University Study Hubs offer a pathway to more equitable and sustainable education ecosystems. The Regional Education Commissioner’s Annual Report (2023) underscores the critical role of Regional Hubs in enhancing access, participation, and retention for RRR students through tailored support services and community engagement. By partnering with Regional Hubs, universities can strengthen their social impact, improve access for historically underserved students, and support regional capacity-building. These collaborations can drive long-term positive outcomes for both higher education and regional communities.

## PRINCIPLES FOR EFFECTIVE PARTNERSHIPS WITH REGIONAL UNIVERSITY STUDY HUBS

Successful partnerships between higher education institutions and Regional University Study Hubs are grounded in a set of core principles that guide collaboration and maximise mutual benefit. These principles reflect the specific context of Regional Hubs and serve as a foundation for fostering reciprocal, sustainable and impactful educational initiatives. The following principles are essential for forming, developing, and sustaining effective partnerships:

*“It is important to stress that initiatives genuinely co-designed with rural, regional, and remote communities can lead to high engagement and improved access.*

– Worsley 2024



### 1. Shared Goals:

Establishing shared objectives tailored to the unique needs of Regional University Study Hubs is fundamental to successful partnerships. Clearly defined and mutually agreed goals help align efforts in delivering meaningful educational outcomes for RRR communities. Shared goals ensure a collective sense of purpose and direction, fostering alignment between universities and Regional Hubs.



### 3. Capacity for Partnership Work:

Effective partnerships depend on the ability of both higher education institutions and Regional University Study Hubs to contribute resources, expertise, and time. Developing institutional and community capacity ensures that partnerships remain resilient and adaptive to evolving regional needs, empowering stakeholders and enhancing sustainability.



### 2. Strong Partner Relations:

Building and sustaining effective relationships requires open communication, mutual respect, and a commitment to shared success. In the context of Regional University Study Hubs, strong relations enable partners to navigate geographic and institutional challenges more effectively. Trust-based relationships and active engagement with local communities foster long-term collaboration and local ownership of initiatives.



### 4. Shared Governance and Leadership:

Clear governance structures and proactive leadership are critical to ensuring accountability and strategic alignment in partnership activities. In Regional University Study Hubs, leadership fosters collaboration, maintains focus on long-term goals, and ensures responsiveness to local priorities, thereby strengthening the overall partnership.

## PRINCIPLES FOR EFFECTIVE PARTNERSHIPS WITH REGIONAL UNIVERSITY STUDY HUBS (CONTINUED)



### 5. Trust and Trustworthiness:

Trust is a cornerstone of partnerships with Regional University Study Hubs. It is cultivated through consistent, transparent actions and a demonstrated commitment to the partnership's goals. Trustworthiness is further strengthened by the continuous involvement of local communities and transparent decision-making processes.

While these principles are common to all forms of engagement, their application within Regional Hubs partnerships requires a deep focus on place-based collaboration and long-term sustainability. Rather than being shaped by short-term priorities, these partnerships must be built on trust, adaptability, and capacity-building to ensure they remain responsive to the evolving needs of regional communities. By embedding these elements at their core, Regional Hubs partnerships can create lasting impact and remain effective despite shifts in policy, funding, or institutional priorities.

### More Ideas



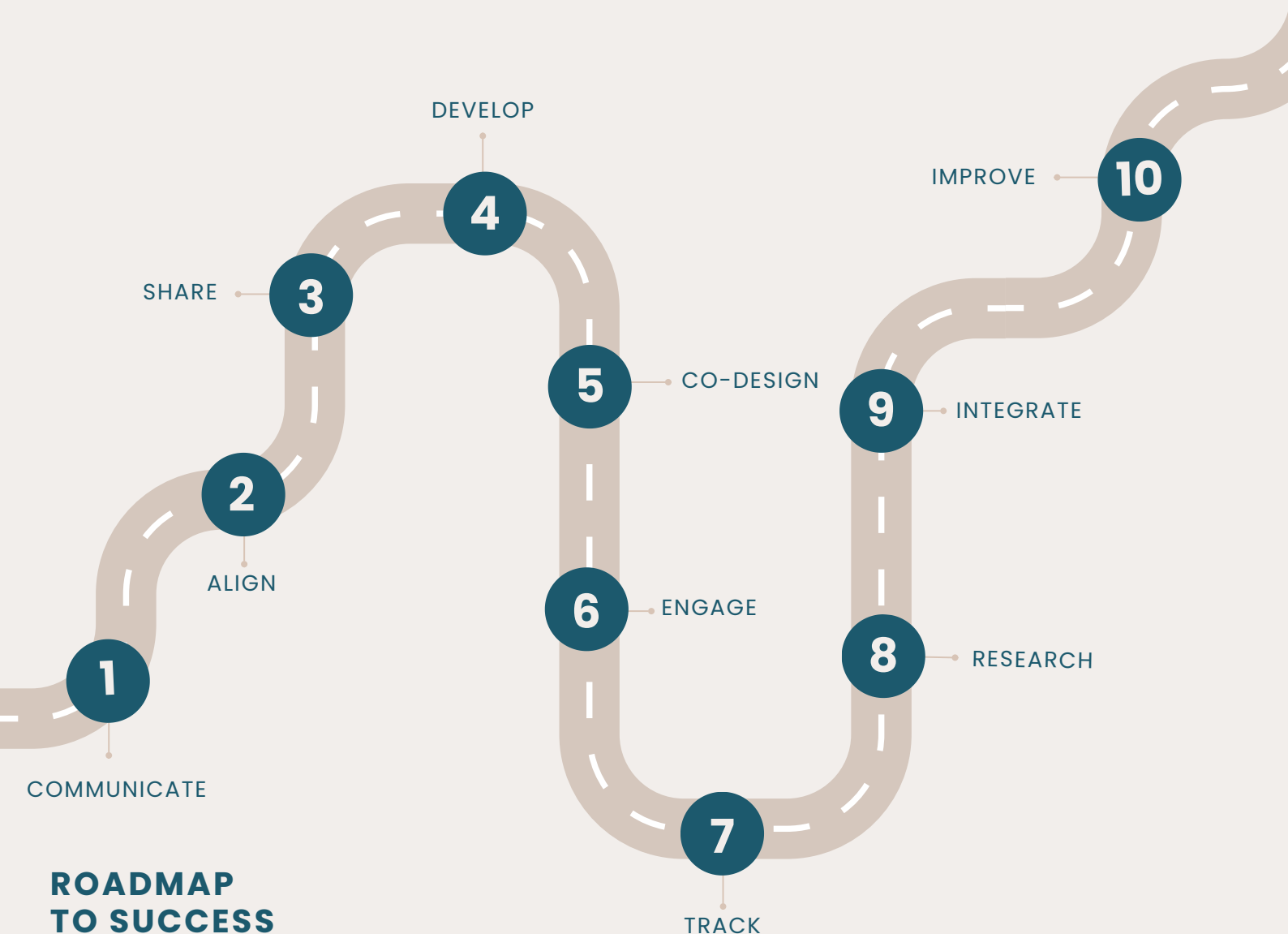
**Engagement Australia**

Champions the unique role universities have with society to address contemporary global challenges and trends through teaching, learning, research and partnerships.

## GUIDELINES FOR EFFECTIVE PARTNERSHIPS WITH REGIONAL UNIVERSITY STUDY HUBS

The following guidelines provide practical actions that can enhance partnerships between higher education institutions and Regional University Study Hubs. Each action includes a description followed by examples illustrating how these actions can be implemented in practice. Examples have been derived from the interview data, and related publications are included to provide additional ideas for further exploration and investigation of implementation possibilities.

It is essential to note that while these guidelines provide a strong foundation, the diversity of regional communities requires that partnerships be adapted to local contexts. What works in one Regional Hub may not necessarily work in another. Each region has distinct needs, histories, and community structures, making it essential that partnerships are co-designed through deep collaboration rather than imposed based on assumptions. Understanding the unique intricacies of each community is paramount, and universities must engage in meaningful dialogue with Regional Hubs to develop partnerships that reflect local aspirations and conditions.



## 1 Communicate

Effective communication between higher education institutions and Regional University Study Hubs is essential for supporting student success in regional, rural, and remote areas. Strong partnerships rely on clear, consistent, and responsive communication that defines roles, facilitates timely information sharing, and creates opportunities for collaboration. Prioritising open dialogue enables universities and Regional Hubs to align efforts, enhance support services, and deliver high-quality, place-based education.

### WHAT WORKS

Establishing effective communication channels requires a structured and intentional approach.

This includes:

- Defining key contacts and responsibilities within both the university and the Regional Hub.
- Scheduling regular check-ins through meetings, reports, and digital platforms.
- Developing shared repositories for essential documents, policies, and student support resources.
- Promoting staff engagement through site visits, joint initiatives, and professional development.
- Implementing feedback mechanisms to continuously refine communication strategies.

## 2 Align

For a successful partnership, Regional University Study Hubs and higher education institutions must align their objectives to ensure they are working towards shared, mutually beneficial outcomes. Clear alignment strengthens collaboration, enhances student support, and integrates Regional Hubs operations with the university's broader mission and strategic goals. By establishing common priorities, both partners can maximise impact and sustainability.

### WHAT WORKS

Ensuring alignment requires structured planning and active collaboration.

This includes:

- Facilitating joint strategic planning sessions to establish shared priorities and integrate them into institutional goals.
- Developing a structured partnership agreement that defines objectives, roles, and mutual responsibilities.
- Co-designing an implementation plan with clear milestones, measurable outcomes, and accountability mechanisms.

## 3 Share

Ensuring students and staff at Regional University Study Hubs have access to university resources enhances learning, strengthens support services, and fosters deeper connections between institutions and their students. Equipping Regional Hubs with the right tools and materials ensures they can provide high-quality academic support and create an inclusive learning environment.

### WHAT WORKS

To make university resources accessible and valuable to both students and Regional Hub staff, institutions can:

- Enable remote access to digital libraries, research databases, and academic support services.
- Provide Regional Hub staff with access to learning management systems, educational software, and professional development opportunities.
- Repurposing surplus academic materials and equipment to improve study spaces and technological capacity at Regional Hubs.

## 4 Develop

Ongoing professional development for Regional Hub staff enhances their ability to support students effectively and adapt to evolving educational needs. Recognising and building on the strengths of staff—who bring deep local knowledge, strong community connections, and a commitment to student success—ensures they are equipped with the latest tools and insights to provide high-quality support.

### WHAT WORKS

To deliver impactful professional development for Regional Hub staff, institutions can:

- Host annual training workshops that focus on practical areas such as academic advising, student well-being, and support services.
- Provide access to HEI-led webinars, short courses, and training programs that ensure content is relevant and accessible.
- Establish mentoring programs that pair experienced HEI staff with Regional Hub staff to build knowledge, share best practices, and strengthen institutional relationships.

## 5 Co-Design

Co-design should be at the core of partnerships between universities and Regional University Study Hubs, ensuring program initiatives are shaped by the needs of regional students and communities. Meaningful collaboration leads to more relevant learning experiences, and stronger student services that genuinely reflect the realities of studying in regional, rural, and remote areas. By valuing diverse perspectives and shared expertise, universities and Regional Hubs can create more responsive and impactful educational opportunities.

### WHAT WORKS

Authentic co-design requires active participation from both universities and Regional Hubs. This includes:

- Co-developing short courses and programs that align with local industries, workforce needs, and regional priorities.
- Adapting university curricula and student support initiatives to reflect regional contexts, challenges, and opportunities.
- Embedding Regional Hubs staff in decision-making processes, including curriculum review committees, student support strategy discussions, and program development initiatives.

*“True partnership means committing to a community—not because of geography, but because of shared values—and creating space for the Regional Hub to have an equal voice that respects their knowledge, strengths, and vision. When universities take the time to co-design and partner, rather than trying to capture a community, transformative impact can occur.”*

– Chris Ronan, CEO Country Universities Centre

## 6 Engage

Active involvement from university faculty and staff in Regional University Study Hubs helps foster a sense of belonging, improves student engagement, and strengthens connections between students and their institution. By creating opportunities for direct interaction, universities can bridge the gap between remote learners and on-campus experiences, ensuring students feel supported and included in the broader university community.

### WHAT WORKS

Strengthening student engagement requires collaboration between universities and Regional Hubs. This includes:

- Participating in the delivery of academic skills workshops at Regional Hubs, providing direct access to university expertise.
- Collaborating on student-led events and activities that enhance peer connections and engagement.
- Facilitating stronger links between Regional Hubs students and university support services, ensuring they can access academic, well-being, and career development resources.

## 7 Track

Collaborative monitoring of student progress enables universities and Regional University Study Hubs to identify challenges early, provide timely support, and improve retention rates. By sharing insights and coordinating interventions, universities and Regional Hubs can ensure students receive the guidance they need to succeed.

### WHAT WORKS

Effective tracking and support require ongoing collaboration. This includes:

- Utilising shared data dashboards to monitor student engagement, academic progress, and support needs.
- Scheduling joint progress review meetings to analyse student outcomes and identify trends.
- Implementing early intervention programs to provide targeted support for at-risk students.

## 8 Research

Joint research initiatives between universities and Regional University Study Hubs create opportunities to address region-specific challenges while leveraging the strengths of both institutions. By working together, universities and Regional Hubs can generate valuable insights, inform policy, and contribute to the broader knowledge base on regional education and community development.

### WHAT WORKS

Effective research partnerships require shared commitment and engagement. This includes:

- Initiating research projects focused on local issues, ensuring findings are relevant to regional needs.
- Partnering on grant applications to secure funding for region-specific studies.
- Publishing joint research findings to amplify impact of Regional Hubs and contribute to academic and policy discussions.

## 9 Integrate

Regional University Study Hubs are uniquely positioned to facilitate work-integrated learning (WIL) by leveraging their strong local connections with businesses, industries, and community organisations. These partnerships create valuable opportunities for students to gain hands-on experience, build professional networks, and develop career-ready skills—all while contributing to local workforce development. By working together, universities and Regional Hubs can ensure students access meaningful placements that align with both their studies and regional employment needs.

### WHAT WORKS

Maximising WIL opportunities requires collaboration between universities, Regional Hubs, and local industries. This includes:

- Utilising Regional Hub networks to establish internship programs with regional employers, ensuring opportunities reflect local workforce demands.
- Facilitating work placements and industry projects that provide students with real-world experience in their local communities.
- Collaborating and participating in career expos and networking events that connect students with local businesses, mentors, and potential employers.

## 10 Improve

Regular evaluation of partnerships between universities and Regional University Study Hubs ensures continuous improvement, strengthens collaboration, and maximises benefits for students, staff, and institutions. By assessing effectiveness and responding to feedback, universities and Regional Hubs can refine their strategies, address emerging challenges, and enhance the impact of their work together.

### WHAT WORKS

Ongoing evaluation and improvement require structured reflection and responsiveness. This includes:

- Conducting annual feedback surveys with students, Regional Hubs staff, and university personnel to gather insights on effectiveness and areas for growth.
- Holding regular review meetings to assess progress against shared objectives and address any challenges.
- Using evaluation findings to refine partnership strategies, ensuring they remain responsive to student needs and partner priorities.



## CASE STUDY 1

## LA TROBE UNIVERSITY AND COUNTRY UNIVERSITIES CENTRE

La Trobe University and Country Universities Centre (CUC) share a foundational commitment to improving access to higher education for regional and rural communities. La Trobe's mission aligns with CUC's objective of enabling equitable access to higher education and supporting student success in regional Australia. Both organisations understand the critical contribution of rural areas to national prosperity, with vibrant communities and industries essential for economic growth and sustaining vital services.

This partnership directly responds to the Australian Universities Accord (AUA), which has set a national target for 55% of Australians aged 25–34 to hold a higher education qualification by 2050, up from 42% in 2022. Regional Australians are currently 40% less likely to achieve such qualifications than their metropolitan peers, making increased regional participation essential for meeting this goal. This collaboration leverages the complementary capabilities, resources, and expertise of both organisations to make a meaningful contribution to this national objective.

La Trobe's intensified focus on regional growth and innovation, viewed through a regional development lens, has highlighted the importance of partnerships with organisations like CUC. Such partnerships not only enhance La Trobe's impact but also ensure that the university collaborates to generate economic, social, and cultural benefits for rural communities. Recognising that achieving the AUA targets will require the collective investment of many partners, La Trobe's role is to support CUC in creating community ownership of local education access, engagement, and success.

*“Partnerships with Regional University Study Hubs not only enhance our institutions impact but also ensure that the university collaborates to generate economic, social, and cultural benefits for rural communities”*

– Melanie Bish, Pro Vice-Chancellor (Regional),  
La Trobe University

### Key Elements of the Partnership

Formalised through a comprehensive Memorandum of Understanding (MoU), the partnership outlines three key areas of collaboration:

1. **Widening Participation:** Coordinated outreach activities across northern Victoria, linking into the Eastern Australia Regional University Centre Partnership.
2. **Community Engagement:** Enhancing rural communities' understanding of La Trobe University's programs and pathways to encourage participation.
3. **Student Support:** Delivering tailored support for La Trobe students studying in rural communities through collaboration with CUCs.

The MoU facilitates coordinated advocacy, promotes the partnership to stakeholders, and dispels misconceptions about the relationship between higher education providers and CUCs. Integrating the partnership across La Trobe's university operations ensures a systemic approach that is not person-dependent.

## LA TROBE UNIVERSITY AND COUNTRY UNIVERSITIES CENTRE

A critical element has been maintaining open communication between the CUC CEO and La Trobe's Pro Vice-Chancellor Regional. This ongoing dialogue ensures iterative improvements, enabling both organisations to contribute effectively to the broader educational ecosystem servicing rural communities. The partnership also fosters mutual understanding of policy settings, political priorities, and opportunities for collaboration with other mission-aligned entities.

### Actions Implemented

#### Communication and Coordination:

- Extensive promotion of the partnership through media releases and internal communications across both organisations.
- Connecting CUC managers to the nearest La Trobe regional campuses to strengthen regional networks.
- Supporting community submissions for new Regional University Study Hubs, including letters of support and comprehensive data generation.
- Pro Vice-Chancellor Regional engaging with Victorian Rural City Councils to explain the partnership's value and impact.

#### Resource Sharing:

- A formal Commonwealth Supported Place (CSP) arrangement allocating CSPs to La Trobe in 2024, supporting equity-focused programs.
- Inclusion of CUC in La Trobe's Open Day events across regional campuses to showcase opportunities.
- Biannual data sharing between CUC managers and La Trobe, detailing enrolment profiles, learning modes, and student demographics to tailor support strategies.



## CASE STUDY 1

#### Professional Development Initiatives:

- Pro Vice-Chancellor Regional participating in CUC study tours (Broken Hill, 2023; Cape York, 2024).
- Delivery of tailored professional development sessions for CUC managers.
- La Trobe staff visiting CUC locations to enhance institutional understanding of CUC operations.

#### Student Engagement and Support Activities:

- Establishment of a Regional Equity Advisor role to serve as a dedicated liaison for CUC staff.
- Targeted communications promoting CUC services to La Trobe students in relevant catchment areas, ensuring students are aware of available resources and support networks.



*La Trobe University Head of Mildura Campus, Sandy Connor with CUC CEO Chris Ronan attending the opening of the CUC Mallee.*

## LA TROBE UNIVERSITY AND COUNTRY UNIVERSITIES CENTRE



### CASE STUDY 1

#### Whats working

A standout achievement of the partnership was the development of the 'Peak Pathways' program in collaboration with the CUC Ovens Murray. Focused on educational partnerships and community engagement for Years 6–8 students in Mansfield, Corryong, and Wangaratta, the project was funded under the Australian Government's Regional Partnerships Project Pool Program.

Key aspects included:

- Community co-design phases tailored to each location.
- Development and delivery of bespoke outreach workshops by La Trobe.
- Recruitment and training of local student ambassadors to sustain community engagement.

Teacher feedback highlighted the program's success in raising student aspirations and fostering stronger connections between regional students and higher education opportunities. The program's impact has established a foundation for its continuation and expansion in 2025.

#### Challenges and Lessons Learned

The primary challenge was the limited understanding of the CUC model in Victoria. Educating university staff, students, and stakeholders on the partnership's purpose and benefits was crucial. Emphasising that CUC services complement La Trobe's support, rather than replace it, ensured that rural students viewed CUC as an additional and valuable resource.

A key lesson has been the recognition that each CUC operates uniquely based on community needs. Approaching each

partnership without preconceived assumptions and tailoring engagement strategies accordingly has proven essential. Working through CUC as trusted local entities has generated sustained impacts and strengthened higher education pathways.

#### Impact of the Partnership

The partnership has deepened La Trobe's understanding of rural learners' needs, highlighting opportunities to support aspirations and remove attainment barriers. Biannual data sharing has informed targeted outreach and support initiatives. Collaborative efforts like the Peak Pathways program have demonstrated the potential of coordinated, place-based strategies to enhance educational engagement and success in regional communities.



CUC attending La Trobe Bendigo Campus Open Day 2024

# LA TROBE UNIVERSITY AND COUNTRY UNIVERSITIES CENTRE



## CASE STUDY 1

### Moving forward

Moving forward, the partnership will focus on:

- Delivery of the Peak Pathways Program across Mansfield, Corryong, and Wangaratta.
- Finalising La Trobe's Regional Growth and Innovation 2030 Strategy, embedding collaboration with Regional University Study Hubs.
- Co-designed professional development opportunities for CUC staff leveraging La Trobe's expertise.
- Systematising data sharing to refine partnership priorities.
- Flexible campus access, enabling CUC staff to work from any La Trobe campus.
- Expansion of the Nexus Program in collaboration with CUC Mallee.
- Pop-up La Trobe staff placements at CUCs to provide in-person support and deepen partnership understanding.

### Conclusion

The partnership between La Trobe University and the Country Universities Centre exemplifies an effective model for expanding higher education access in rural and regional Australia. By aligning institutional expertise with locally grounded engagement strategies, the partnership has widened participation, enhanced student support, and contributed to broader regional development objectives. Its continued evolution offers a replicable framework for sustainable, place-based educational partnerships with long-term impacts on regional education and workforce development.



*La Trobe Student Ambassadors introducing Wangaratta High students to the CUC partnership*



## CASE STUDY 2

## UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN QUEENSLAND AND GOONDIWINDI REGIONAL UNIVERSITY CENTRE

The University of Southern Queensland (UniSQ) has been actively supporting Regional University Study Hubs since their inception, working to improve educational access and student success in regional areas. UniSQ is committed to being a university of choice for students across the region and delivering outstanding student experiences and outcomes. At the core of this is the provision of intentionally designed flexible student experiences that extend learning and include diverse curricular and co-curricular opportunities for all students. This case study examines the partnership between UniSQ and the Goondiwindi Regional University Centre (RUC), focusing on how collaborative efforts between a university and a Regional Hub can enhance student engagement and outcomes.

### Partnership Approach

The partnership between UniSQ and the Goondiwindi RUC is built on a foundation of shared goals, mutual trust, and a commitment to student success. Rather than taking a top-down approach, the collaboration emphasises co-designed solutions that respect the local context and the unique challenges faced by regional students. UniSQ worked closely with RUC staff to ensure that students saw the Regional Hub as an extension of their university experience rather than a separate entity. This approach helps to foster a sense of belonging and connectedness among students, reinforcing the idea that higher education is accessible and supported within their own community.

A key element of the partnership was proactive student outreach. UniSQ's Student Success Advising (SSA) Team reached out directly to students in the Goondiwindi region

through phone calls and emails, introducing them to the resources available at the RUC and encouraging them to engage with the Regional Hub. Following this initial outreach, UniSQ staff visited the RUC to strengthen connections through in-person engagement. This face-to-face interaction played an important role in establishing relationships with staff and students, helping them feel supported and valued as part of both the university and their local learning community.

### Supporting Student Success

The collaboration between UniSQ and the Goondiwindi RUC led to tailored student support strategies. UniSQ's SSA Team worked closely with Regional Hubs staff to understand the specific needs of students in the region and to develop targeted interventions. Many students expressed a desire for stronger peer connections, support with balancing study and personal commitments, and assistance in navigating university processes. The partnership responded by refining advising services, ensuring that students had access to academic guidance, career support, and mental health resources, that were relevant to their circumstances.

The physical resources available at the Goondiwindi RUC also played a crucial role in supporting students. Study spaces, video conferencing facilities, computing resources, internet, and after-hours access provided students with an environment conducive to learning. UniSQ recognised the importance of these facilities and actively encouraged students to make use of them, reinforcing the Regional Hub's role as a key support structure for regional learners.

## UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN QUEENSLAND AND GOONDIWINDI REGIONAL UNIVERSITY CENTRE



### CASE STUDY 2

The partnership also extended beyond direct student support, with UniSQ contributing to professional development initiatives for Regional Hub staff. In October 2023, UniSQ co-facilitated a two-day professional development event for staff at Country Universities Centre (CUC) and independent RUCs in Queensland. This established a basis for further professional development initiatives, including a professional development workshop with the CUC network in May 2024 and the provisioning of UniSQ library access for staff at various RUSH locations. Supporting Regional University Study Hubs with professional development opportunities has strengthened collaboration across multiple Regional Hubs and enhanced the capacity of them to support students effectively.

### Outcomes and Impact

Listening to the voices and feedback of local students and sharing leadership with the RUC established a shared vision that ensured a sustainable partnership based on trust and reciprocity. The partnership between UniSQ and the Goondiwindi RUC has led to measurable improvements in student engagement, with more students utilising the Regional Hub and engaging with university support services. The proactive outreach efforts and in-person engagement activities helped students build stronger connections with their university and the local Regional Hub, leading to a more positive learning experience.

### If you build it, will they come? Student Success Advising at a Regional Un...

**The Objective**

- Assisting UniSQ students in Goondiwindi to engage with available support for learning facilities

#### The Intervention

- Contact every UniSQ student in Goondiwindi
- Encourage use of RUC to support learning
- Assist with scholarship applications

#### The Outcomes

- ✓ 36% of students registered with RUC
- Students attended in person academic

#### The Problem

- 0 Students using RUC Facilities
- 0 Students aware of RUC
- 0 Students aware of RUC
- 0 Students aware of RUC
- 0 Students aware of RUC

#### The Benefits

- ✓ Developing a sense of belonging
- ✓ Access to resources to support learning
- ✓ Academic skills development
- ✓ Improved work/life balance





## CASE STUDY 2

## UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN QUEENSLAND AND GOONDIWINDI REGIONAL UNIVERSITY CENTRE

Beyond individual student outcomes, the partnership has strengthened the role of the Goondiwindi RUC within the community, reinforcing the value of locally based higher education support. The success of this model has informed UniSQ's broader engagement strategy with other Regional Hub locations, demonstrating the importance of sustained university-community collaboration in supporting regional students.

### Future Directions

Following the successful outcomes of this partnership and other effective RUSH initiatives across UniSQ, an internal RUSH Working Group was established in October 2024. This group aims to ensure a coordinated strategy for supporting Regional University Study Hubs and optimising resource allocation to foster sustainable long-term partnerships.

Plans include enhancing in-person engagement with geographically proximate Regional Hubs, developing cohort specific supports for First Nations students, and expanding professional development opportunities for RUSH staff.

### Further Reading

More information on the UniSQ and Goondiwindi RUC partnership and the actions that contributed to positive outcomes can be found within these peer-reviewed resources:



[Student success advising at a Regional University Centre: University of Southern Queensland](#)



[Can long distance relationships work? Insights from a partnership with a Regional University Centre](#)



Goondiwindi staff working alongside UniSQ Student Success team

## THE EASTERN AUSTRALIA REGIONAL UNIVERSITY CENTRE PARTNERSHIP

Since 2010, the Higher Education Participation and Partnerships Program (HEPPP) has been central to efforts aimed at widening participation in higher education. The program's partnership component was introduced to increase the number of undergraduate students from low-socioeconomic backgrounds through collaboration with key stakeholders, including schools, TAFE, and universities. However, despite years of sustained government investment, research has shown that outreach activities have remained concentrated in metropolitan schools, leaving regional, rural, and remote (RRR) communities underserved. These gaps have contributed to persistent disparities in higher education attainment, as reflected in the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) data, which shows significantly lower bachelor's degree attainment rates outside major cities.

With over 90% of new jobs projected to require post-school qualifications by 2050, increasing access to higher education is critical for meeting workforce demands and ensuring equitable opportunity. Current models indicate that a significant proportion of future university students must come from underrepresented groups, particularly regional and remote areas. The Eastern Australia Regional University Centre Partnership (EARUCP) was established to directly address these structural barriers. Through a collaboration of 15 Regional University Study Hubs (RUSH) and 23 universities, co-led by the University of Technology Sydney (UTS) and the Country Universities Centre (CUC), EARUCP represents a place-based, community-led model of widening participation.



### CASE STUDY 3

*"UTS's partnership with the Regional University Study Hubs has been a powerful and authentic collaboration, rooted in our shared commitment to educational equity and community-driven approaches. Together with the Country Universities Centre Central team, we have worked to break down systemic barriers, empowering regional communities to lead initiatives that reflect their unique needs and local context. This partnership embodies our shared values of social justice and equity, fostering trust, respect, and a unified mission to create lasting, transformative change"*

– Sonal Singh, Executive Manager, Student Equity,  
University of Technology Sydney



## CASE STUDY 3

## THE EASTERN AUSTRALIA REGIONAL UNIVERSITY CENTRE PARTNERSHIP

### A Shift from Traditional Models

EARUCP operates through the Regional Partnerships Project Pool Program (RPPPP), which offers a new approach to higher education outreach. Unlike previous models that often relied on institution-driven initiatives, this framework prioritises place-based partnerships between universities and RUSHs, ensuring that communities have ownership over local education strategies. The initiative moves beyond hierarchical or transactional partnerships, instead emphasising reciprocal knowledge exchange, shared leadership, and institutional neutrality.

Rather than universities designing outreach programs in isolation, EARUCP enables universities, Regional Hubs, and communities to co-create programs that respond directly to local needs, aspirations, and challenges. This shift acknowledges that regional students do not lack aspiration, but instead require greater access to navigational skills, information, and support networks to translate their goals into action. The partnership also recognises the role of RUSHs as trusted community anchors, which play a connector role between universities, schools, and local industries.

### Building Sustainable Partnerships

Sustainable partnerships require more than goodwill; they are built on shared vision, trust, and structured collaboration. To ensure a strong foundation, EARUCP partners engaged in an appreciative inquiry workshop, asking:

***"If sustainable partnership is both our goal and a necessary condition for EARUCP's success—what does it look and feel like?"***

Through this process, partners identified five core pillars that underpin effective collaboration:

- Trust – Genuine relationships built on mutual respect and reliability.
- Reciprocity – A partnership model where each party contributes and benefits equally.
- Shared Values and Purpose – A commitment to long-term, community-driven educational change.
- Open Communication – Transparency and regular engagement across all stakeholders.
- Mutual Respect – Recognising local expertise and community leadership as integral to success.

EARUCP is designed to evolve along the Cross-Sector Collaboration Continuum (Austin, 2000), which moves from transactional partnerships, where resources are simply exchanged, to transformational partnerships, where deep and sustained collaboration leads to systemic change. EARUCP partners actively work toward higher levels of convergence, where universities, RUSHs, and communities co-create and implement long-term strategies rather than engaging in short-term outreach efforts.

### Implementation and Key Achievements

Recognising the importance of local knowledge in shaping effective interventions, EARUCP facilitated a community-led co-design process during its first phase. Across 21 communities, 32 workshops were conducted by 16 RUSHs, engaging over 638 participants and 99 schools across Queensland, New South Wales, and Victoria. These consultations



## CASE STUDY 3

## THE EASTERN AUSTRALIA REGIONAL UNIVERSITY CENTRE PARTNERSHIP

provided rich qualitative data, highlighting key areas where students and communities needed greater support. Rather than focusing on raising aspirations, the feedback underscored the need to increase expectations by equipping students and families with the skills, networks, and resources to navigate the higher education system.

The findings aligned with existing research on widening participation and identified five priority areas:

- Nurturing Aspirations – Recognising that regional students already have aspirations, but may require support to navigate pathways effectively.
- Skill Development – Equipping students with academic preparedness, digital literacy, and decision-making tools.
- Parental and Influencer Engagement – Providing structured support for parents, teachers, and mentors to help students navigate higher education.
- Careers Education – Strengthening awareness of study pathways and employment opportunities beyond metropolitan centres.
- Community Engagement and a Culture of Learning – Embedding higher education as a shared community priority, not just an individual pursuit.



Regional University Study Hubs and University partners co-designed ways of working to develop pillars of partnership



## CASE STUDY 3

## THE EASTERN AUSTRALIA REGIONAL UNIVERSITY CENTRE PARTNERSHIP

### Strengthening Collaboration and Capacity

To sustain and expand the impact of EARUCP, partners developed systems and processes to embed collaboration into their everyday work. Regular forums, capacity-building workshops, monthly meetings with the project team, and cross-sector knowledge-sharing initiatives have reinforced a culture of continuous improvement and shared learning. These efforts are further supported by the UTS Partnerships Engagement Framework, which provides tools to assess and strengthen partnership effectiveness over time.

Universities and RUSHs also engaged with a partnership evaluation tool, co-developed with university and community partners, and administered through an ethically approved process at UTS. The tool aligns with Carnegie Community Engagement Pillars and the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), ensuring that the measurement of partnership impact reflects both institutional and community priorities.

### Lessons Learned and Future Directions

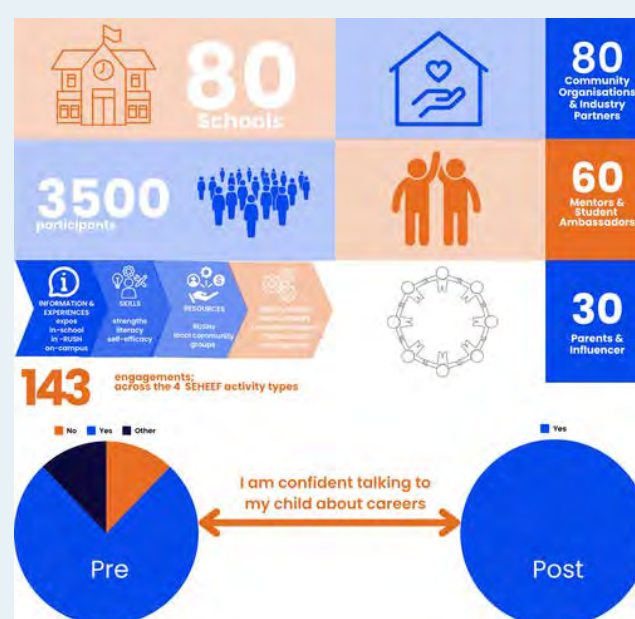
The EARUCP model represents a significant shift in how university outreach is conceptualised and implemented. Rather than universities driving widening participation efforts alone, the initiative demonstrates that partnerships based on community leadership, institutional neutrality, and long-term collaboration lead to more meaningful and sustainable outcomes.

One of the strongest takeaways from the partnership process has been the importance of flexibility and adaptability. Regional education ecosystems are diverse, and a one-size-fits-all approach does not work.

The willingness of universities to step outside institutional boundaries and engage in genuine co-creation has been key to EARUCP's early success.

Moreover, open communication and the role of personal connections have been crucial to strengthening partnerships. Face-to-face engagement, structured collaboration, and shared decision-making have helped bridge historical gaps between universities, Regional Hubs, and communities.

As EARUCP continues to evolve, its commitment to co-designed, place-based strategies will remain central. By shifting the focus from short-term outreach to long-term systemic change, EARUCP is not only increasing access to higher education but also fostering a culture of lifelong learning in regional, rural, and remote communities.



Snapshot of EARUCP Progress Data 2024

## MACQUARIE UNIVERSITY AND WUYAGIBA BUSH UNI



### CASE STUDY 4

The partnership between Wuyagiba Bush Uni and Macquarie University demonstrates a successful collaboration aimed at expanding higher education opportunities for Aboriginal students of Arnhem Land, northern Australia.

Established in 2018 through the vision of local Elders Dr CW Daniels, Dr K Rogers and Dr H Rogers, the Wuyagiba Bush Uni is run by Wuyagiba Bush Hub Aboriginal Corporation on the Traditional Homeland of the Warndarrang people of the Mambali/Numamurdirdi tribe. The program provides an on-Country, two-way learning model that incorporates Indigenous knowledges with academic skills into university-level micro-credentials.

Macquarie University, through A/Prof Emilie Ens, has played a pivotal role in this initiative through the co-development of culturally responsive curricula, course accreditation, and providing support for student transitions to Macquarie University in Sydney.

The program has seen 80 students complete the Wuyagiba Bush Uni micro-credentials, with 39 students enrolling in Bachelor degrees

at Macquarie. In 2023, the first student supported by the Bush Uni graduated from Macquarie University. In doing so, Melissa Wurramarrba closed a 36-year bachelor-level higher education gap for the South East Arnhem Land region.

The Wuyagiba Bush Hub Aboriginal Corporation, governed by Minggirringi (Traditional Owners) and Djungayi (Traditional Managers), provides decision-making authority that upholds Indigenous knowledge systems and self-determination. Key enablers of this partnership include strong Indigenous leadership and governance, ensuring the program remained community-led, culturally responsive and maintained the visions of communities. Macquarie University's involvement is built on a longstanding relationship with the community, where trust, mutual respect, and co-designed academic offerings enable a sustainable and responsive education model.

The two-way curriculum approach is another key enabler, interweaving local cultural knowledges with academic coursework,



Commencement of the teaching session at Wuyagiba Bush Uni 2024



## CASE STUDY 4

## MACQUARIE UNIVERSITY AND WUYAGIBA BUSH UNI

reinforcing Indigenous identity while developing university-level skills. The development of accredited cultural units, such as ENVS1500 Caring for Country and Culture and ENVS1501 Indigenous Science, ensures that Indigenous knowledges are recognised at a higher level. Wrap-around student support, including accommodation, meals, travel, and mentorship from Elders, further contributes to high retention and completion rates. These elements create an educational space where students can thrive without compromising cultural responsibilities, and can maintain connections to family and culture.

The success of this partnership demonstrates the impact of culturally responsive, place-based higher education.

By prioritising Indigenous control, co-designing curricula, and embedding strong institutional support, the collaboration between Wuyagiba Bush Uni and Macquarie University has empowered students to pursue further education and leadership roles within their communities. This model offers valuable insights for expanding higher education access in other remote Indigenous regions, reinforcing the importance of long-term partnerships built on trust, shared decision-making, reciprocity and cultural integrity.

### Further Reading



['We need to run our own communities'](#)





## CASE STUDY 5

## CHARLES STURT UNIVERSITY AND TAREE UNIVERSITIES CAMPUS

Established in December 2020, the partnership between Charles Sturt University (CSU) and Taree Universities Campus (TUC) was developed to improve access to higher education for Mid Coast NSW, specifically focusing on Bachelor of Nursing students. Recognising the significant barriers students face in rural and regional areas—including geographic isolation, financial constraints, and balancing study with work and family commitments—this collaboration developed a place-based solution tailored to support local nursing students. By addressing these challenges, the partnership expanded educational opportunities and contributed to workforce shortages in the region's healthcare sector.

### Partnership approach

The Bachelor of Nursing program in this partnership enables students to complete their studies while remaining in their local community. They access coursework online through CSU's distance education platform, attend residential schools at CSU's Port Macquarie campus, and undertake clinical placements in nearby healthcare facilities. This model reduces the need for relocation, lowering financial and logistical barriers while offering local work-integrated learning opportunities. By supporting students to train locally, the program increases the likelihood that graduates will remain in the region, strengthening the local healthcare workforce.

### Strength in collaboration

The collaboration between CSU and TUC leverages the unique strengths of each partner. CSU provides the academic framework, course delivery, and access to clinical placement networks, ensuring

students receive high-quality education and practical training. TUC complements this by delivering critical student support services through locally embedded Student Support Officers. These officers play a vital role in assisting students to navigate the academic and practical components of the program, offering guidance on study challenges, placement requirements, and strategies for managing work-life balance. The presence of locally based support ensures that students feel connected and supported throughout their educational journey, significantly enhancing retention and engagement.

Governance and leadership structures have been essential to the success of the partnership. A formalised agreement outlines the roles and responsibilities of both partners, providing a clear framework for operations and decision-making. The leadership teams at CSU and TUC collaborate regularly to ensure the partnership remains responsive to student needs and community priorities. Practical program elements, such as orientation sessions to introduce students to the program and twice-weekly debriefing sessions during clinical placements, have fostered a positive learning environment. These initiatives address the unique challenges nursing students face in regional areas, creating an environment where they can succeed academically and professionally.

### Impact and outcomes

The impact of the partnership has been significant for the students and the broader community. Since its inception, more than 40 Bachelor of Nursing students have graduated through this collaboration, with 31 securing employment in local healthcare settings. The program has achieved an impressive



## CASE STUDY 5

## CHARLES STURT UNIVERSITY AND TAREE UNIVERSITIES CAMPUS

retention rate of 97%, a testament to the effectiveness of the tailored support systems in place. The partnership has provided a sustainable pipeline of locally trained nurses for the Mid Coast region, directly addressing workforce shortages in hospitals and healthcare facilities. This success underscores the value of a place-based approach to higher education that aligns institutional capabilities with regional needs.

While the partnership has delivered substantial benefits, it has also faced challenges. Staff turnover within both organisations has occasionally disrupted communication and continuity, highlighting the importance of robust documentation and flexible processes to ensure the partnership's stability. Despite these obstacles, the collaboration has demonstrated resilience, with both partners maintaining their shared

commitment to supporting regional nursing students. Plans are underway to expand the partnership, with proposed initiatives including simulation-based learning opportunities and additional local residential schools to enhance the student experience and program delivery further.

*"I think real success will come when our university partners really show that they value us and that they can see we're making a difference. That we're collaborating with them and not competing."*

– Research Participant



Abby Barnett is one of 11 nursing students who recently graduated from Charles Sturt University with support from Taree Universities Campus  
Source: <https://www.education.gov.au/newsroom/articles/regional-university-study-hub-supporting-growth-local-healthcare-sector>.



## CASE STUDY 6

## CURTIN UNIVERSITY AND GREATER SOUTHERN UNIVERSITIES CENTRE

Established in 2022, the partnership between Curtin University and the Great Southern Universities Centre (GSUC) enhances higher education access in Albany. Initially focused on supporting Bachelor of Science – Nursing students in the Enrolled Nurse to Registered Nurse (EN to RN) program, it has since expanded to assist all Curtin students in the region and drive broader university engagement, aspiration outreach, and work-integrated learning initiatives.

### Objectives of the Partnership

The GSUC Board, operating under Regional Development Australia (RDA) Great Southern, identified the need for a locally available EN to RN pathway as part of its broader education strategy. Securing funding for a Regional Hub enabled the establishment of this initiative, providing a structured environment for students to access higher education without the need to relocate. Recognising the demand for locally supported nursing education, Curtin University worked with GSUC to implement the program, with the first Albany intake commencing in 2022. Since then, the program has experienced steady growth, approaching a full cohort in 2025.

### Partnership Approach

The partnership operates as a dynamic collaboration designed to optimise support for students while fostering sustainable engagement between the university and the region. GSUC functions as a 'virtual campus' for Curtin University, working closely with student enrolments, course and unit coordinators, student support teams, and senior management to maximise Curtin's presence in the region. While GSUC does not

deliver course content, it plays a critical role in assisting Curtin's regional delivery through venue bookings, facilitating access to course-specific resources, coordinating promotional events, and connecting students with support services.

A key component of the collaboration is the integration of GSUC key staff into Curtin University's Learning Management System (LMS). This access allows GSUC staff to assist students with enrolment and progression, improving reporting capabilities for unit and course coordinators. Additionally, GSUC provides on-the-ground coordination of events such as information nights, student workshops, and trial initiatives aimed at fostering regional participation in higher education. The success of this model has positioned GSUC as a valued local partner, strengthening Curtin University's regional engagement.

### Actions Implemented

The partnership is formalised through a service level agreement, with biannual meetings between both parties to review progress and strategic planning. Additionally, regular communication is maintained between the GSUC Centre Coordinator and Curtin course leaders to ensure smooth semester transitions, support student orientation, and address emerging issues.

### Key initiatives include:

- **Course-Specific Support for Nursing Students:** GSUC coordinates information sessions for prospective EN to RN students, co-delivered with Curtin University and offering insights into program structure and support services.



## CASE STUDY 6

## CURTIN UNIVERSITY AND GREATER SOUTHERN UNIVERSITIES CENTRE

- **Student Engagement and Academic Support:** GSUC organises workshops tailored to regional students, including online learning preparation, exam skills, and university roadshows. These sessions develop essential academic skills while strengthening student connections to university support networks.
- **New Initiatives for Regional Engagement:** The 2025 Regional Changemakers Program brought local and metropolitan students together to develop sustainable tourism solutions informed by the Denmark community, demonstrating the potential for place-based learning.
- **Professional Development and Institutional Collaboration:** GSUC staff trained with Curtin Learning Advisors in Perth to enhance student support capabilities and participated in the 2024 WA Regional Higher Education Exchange, fostering collaboration with other WA universities.
- **Work-Integrated Learning and Placement Opportunities:** GSUC leverages its regional networks to facilitate student placements, particularly in health and education, resulting in multiple students securing local opportunities.

### Outcomes and Impact

The partnership has significantly improved student participation and retention in regional higher education. Since 2022, the EN to RN program has grown from an initial cohort of four students to fifteen in 2025. Other Curtin-supported programs have also expanded, with enrolments in ECU-WAAPA's Diploma of Music increasing.

The first cohort of Registered Nurses graduated in 2024, contributing directly to the regional healthcare workforce, while the

Regional Changemakers Program piloted in 2025 fostered collaboration between university students and local communities.



#### Media Statement

The Great Southern Universities Centre is celebrating the first of its registered students to graduate from the Curtin University Enrolled Nurse to Registered Nurse conversion course.

Great Southern UniCentre - May 16, 2024

Student feedback highlights the value of peer connections and dedicated study spaces in supporting academic success. EN to RN students consistently report that studying together at the Regional Hub has been essential to their progress, with many graduates returning to mentor new students.

Beyond student outcomes, the partnership has expanded Curtin University's regional engagement, securing new placement opportunities for Graduate Diploma of Education students and supporting pathways for Indigenous students through collaborations with Curtin's Centre for Aboriginal Studies.

### Challenges and Lessons Learned

Managing numerous regional initiatives requires careful resource prioritisation to



## CASE STUDY 6

## CURTIN UNIVERSITY AND GREATER SOUTHERN UNIVERSITIES CENTRE

ensure sustainability. Curtin's broad engagement has increased collaboration demand, making coordination and resource sharing essential to sustainable long-term success.

### Future Directions

The partnership will continue to expand in key areas:

- Exploring local delivery models for Allied Health courses.
- Supporting Curtin's MBA program in Albany.
- Assisting in the establishment of the Katanning Study Hub (opening in 2025).
- Strengthening connections between local schools and Graduate Diploma of Education students to facilitate placements.

Following the success of the 2025 "Getting Started with Online Learning" workshop for EN to RN students, it will now be delivered annually. Further collaboration with Curtin's Student Success team is also planned to develop a training resource for Hub staff, ensuring continued professional development and knowledge-sharing.

The partnership between Curtin University and the GSUC demonstrates an effective regional higher education collaboration. By integrating institutional expertise with local engagement, the partnership has improved access to higher education, strengthened student support, and contributed to workforce development.



Albany Western Australia © Sam Jeffs via Canva.com



## CASE STUDY 7

## CENTRAL QUEENSLAND UNIVERSITY AND SPENCER GULF STUDY HUB – ROXBY DOWNS

The Roxby Downs Early Childhood Pilot Project was developed through a collaboration between Uni Hub Spencer Gulf (Uni Hub), Roxby Downs Children's Centre (the Centre), BHP, and CQUniversity Australia (CQU) to address a shortage of early childhood educators in the community. The project provided local residents with an accessible pathway to gain a Certificate III in Early Childhood Education and Care, while also ensuring the Centre could meet staffing requirements. By working together, these partners developed a locally driven solution that not only addressed immediate workforce shortages but also built a long-term pathway for education and employment in the region.

The partnership with CQU was established out of necessity; this was particularly relevant for students requiring a VET qualification to enter in Early Childhood sector. It was established during early conversations, the main challenge was going to be access to VET in a RRR community. It is well known that RRR communities have limited access to VET which in turn limits and hinders growth in these communities. Emeritus Professor John Halsey's report (Halsey 2018) into VET, highlights the ongoing challenges experienced in accessing VET.

Several Registered training organisations including a public funded RTO were approached to provide training to students in Roxby Downs, unfortunately no South Australian RTO were willing to invest in the project, citing distance and ability to observe students in the workplace as the main barrier. CQU were able to address this through virtual observations, competency conversations and student assessments. CQU's approach to the project not only meant students for this

project could complete the qualification while working (earn while you learn) at the centre, but community outside of the project could now access VET qualifications in Roxby Downs, therefore contributing more broadly to the economy and workforce shortages experienced in Roxby Downs.

### A Collaborative Approach

Strong partnerships were central to the project's success. The Centre identified the need for more trained educators, and Uni Hub—already embedded in the community—helped shape a response that aligned with local workforce challenges. BHP supported the initiative by providing funding, while CQUniversity worked with Uni Hub to strengthen engagement across stakeholders and to adapt its training model for remote learners. The collaboration focused on practical solutions, ensuring students could complete their qualifications in a way that worked for them and their community. Uni Hub provided on the ground support for both learners and the centre to adapt to a new way of course delivery. The need for virtual observations was embraced, and the centre's practices were modified to incorporate a new way of assessing students. By having a group of students commence together, it meant that students not only received support from stakeholders but also from their peers, building relationships with each other both at work and in the community, which led to greater community understanding and cohesion, particularly for students from Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) backgrounds.



## CASE STUDY 7

## CENTRAL QUEENSLAND UNIVERSITY AND SPENCER GULF STUDY HUB – ROXBY DOWNS

### Flexibility and Problem-Solving

The partnership extended beyond program delivery, with regular collaboration between Uni Hub, the Centre, CQU, and BHP to navigate challenges as they arose. This included adjusting training delivery to accommodate local needs and ensuring participants could balance study with work and family commitments. Community engagement was a priority, with information sessions and one-on-one discussions helping prospective students understand what was involved before committing to the program. Once enrolled, students had access to structured support, mentoring, and a local study space, ensuring they felt connected and confident throughout their learning.

### Building Long-Term Workforce Pathways

The project has already had a measurable impact, with more qualified educators now employed at the Centre, reducing waitlists and improving childcare access for families in Roxby Downs. It has also helped raise awareness of local education pathways, encouraging more people to consider careers in early childhood education. The success of this model has led to ongoing discussions about expanding and continuing the program, reinforcing the value of partnerships in creating sustainable workforce solutions.

The program has encouraged an existing early childhood workforce to upskill to a Diploma and or a Bachelor of ECEC, creating a sustainable pipeline of educators with the centre and enhancing career growth and prospects. The project's success also means the centre will be in a position to meet the needs of the SA Government policy for 3 year old Kindy.

As a long-standing partner in supporting Regional University Study Hubs (RUSH), CQUniversity has played an important role in expanding education access across regional communities. The university's commitment to inclusivity, accessibility, and community-driven education was reflected in its willingness to adapt its training model to support the Roxby Downs cohort. This project highlights how place-based partnerships can strengthen local education and employment opportunities, creating long-term benefits for remote communities.

The Roxby Downs Early Childhood Pilot Project serves as a model for how place-based partnerships can bridge workforce gaps, strengthen local education opportunities, and create long-term employment pathways in rural, regional, and remote areas. Raising the education aspirations of young people and the broader community.

### Further Reading



["Empowering Remote Communities Through Education: The Roxby Downs Early Childhood Pilot Project"](#)



## CASE STUDY 8

## OPEN UNIVERSITIES AUSTRALIA AND COUNTRY UNIVERSITIES CENTRE NETWORK

### Background and Purpose

The collaboration between Open Universities Australia (OUA) and the Country Universities Centre (CUC) began through discussions in forums related to the University Accord. It quickly became clear that both organisations shared a common belief: education has the power to transform lives—both on an individual level and within families and communities.

Recognising this, OUA and CUC saw an opportunity to collaborate, with the understanding that by working together, their services could complement each other, and those of their partner universities to potentially enhance support accessible to regional Australians: in accessing a broad range of study options; receive guidance on those study options; study remotely and be supported to remain within their community; and have a connection to place and belonging through their local centre.

### The Initial Challenge and Collaborative Vision

While alignment on purpose was clear from the outset, the shared desire was to identify ways to collaborate through trial and experimentation to support shared goals. It was recognised that services delivered locally, and tailored to meet the specific needs of students, would improve their chances of success.

Several meetings took place to explore potential collaboration opportunities. Ultimately, the two organisations identified the following goals :

1. Enhance Support for Regional and Remote Learners: Ensure that learners in these areas have access to and awareness of higher education options and support services available to them.
2. Capture Learnings for Broader Impact: Experiment with varied methods of support and capture learnings that could be shared across the broader RUSH network and to the sector overall, as appropriate and valuable to do so.

### Elements of the collaboration

Through aligned purpose and initial discussions regarding the nature of the collaboration, the partnership developed a level of trust which allowed transparency of intentions and identified shared measures of success. This will continue to be reviewed and refined, should the experiment demonstrate value and therefore be continued or expanded upon.

OUA and CUC formed a working group with shared resources from both organisations to agree the pilot initiatives. The working group meet frequently to progress through ideation and implementation. Shared tools were used to enable easy flow of communication and creation of shared assets.

OUA also hosted an online information session with Centre Managers from the CUC network and sought expressions of interest to participate in the pilot. Additional sessions were held between the pilot centres and OUA student advisors to refine details of how they would collaborate.



## CASE STUDY 8

## OPEN UNIVERSITIES AUSTRALIA AND COUNTRY UNIVERSITIES CENTRE NETWORK

OUA took the time to learn about the distinctiveness of each Centre and its community by visiting several locations and holding online meetings, which enhanced our understanding of the needs and uniqueness of these communities.

OUA has begun to share details of the pilot with their university partners and the CUC has socialised the collaboration across the CUC Network, both the Centre Staff and the CUC Boards.

### Pilot Program – Q1 2025

The first phase of the collaboration is a pilot program underway for Q1 2025 and is designed to test the effectiveness of their combined efforts in supporting students from regional and remote areas. Review and refinement of the pilot is scheduled for Q2 2025

### Conclusion

Whilst OUA and CUC are still in the early stages of the collaboration, it's success to date can be attributed to several key factors: a shared purpose and common beliefs; mutual commitment to combined expertise and resources, agreed guiding principles, and the time invested in building both understanding and relationships over the course of 9 to 12 months. These elements have been essential in creating a strong foundation for working together effectively.



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