

From:
To: [Portfolio Committee 3](#)
Subject: RE: Future development of the NSW tertiary education sector - Post-hearing responses - 8 September 2020
Date: Friday, 9 October 2020 2:52:12 PM
Attachments:

Dear Zulpha,

Please find attached the following:

- Transcript Pages from the Committee Hearing with minor amendments marked;
- CQU Research report referred to at page 33 of the transcript, and we refer you to the summary of key findings on page 5 and also at the top of page 15 of the report:
As can be seen in Table 6 students studying via the CUC Snowy Monaro and the GUC have achieved a grade average that is similar or above the CQU average for each unit. In many instances, such as EDCU11031, EDCU11032 and EDED11454, the Geraldton and Cooma students have achieved a grade average higher than both face to face students and distance students implying that the support provided through centre based tutorials with local tutors is an effective delivery option. Smaller class sizes provides tutors to get to know their students and cater for their needs. In this respect the results show that 'distance with assistance' is a model that works.
- Paper by Davis & Taylor referred to at page 33 in the transcript.
- 2020 Semester One Student Survey results with commentary referred to at page 33 in the transcript.

Please let me know if you would like anything further.

Kind Regards
Duncan

DUNCAN TAYLOR

CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER

Country Universities Centre – Winner of 2019 Australian Rural Education Award

RESEARCH EXTRACT



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Australia's community initiated regional study hubs: Equity for and access to initial teacher education

Country Universities Centre – Snowy Monaro

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28 February 2018

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Sincere appreciation to colleagues who have responded enthusiastically to our request to undertake this scoping study.

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Table of Contents

Overview.....	4
Summary of key findings	5
Background	5
Research approach	7
Methods	7
Findings.....	8
The community demographics.....	8
Partnerships model: doing the business	11
Initial teacher education: offerings and enrolments	12
<i>Course offerings & enrolments</i>	12
Comparative data: results per learning mode	13
Teacher accreditation: Tutors.....	15
<i>Motivation for tutoring</i>	16
<i>Future training, support & professional development for tutoring</i>	17
Conclusion.....	18
Emerging research directions.....	18
References	19

List of Figures

Figure 1: CQU's campus & study centre hubs as at October 2017.....	8
Figure 2: CUC Snowy Monaro new enrolment trend 2015-2017.....	14

List of Tables

Table 1: Demographic data.....	9
Table 2: Cooma schools within 80km Cooma.....	10
Table 3: CUC Snowy Monaro distance from other major universities offering teacher education.....	11
Table 4: MOU Costing agreement.....	12
Table 5: CUC Snowy Monaro enrolments at a glance as at December 2017.....	12
Table 6: Grade comparison per unit – selected high enrolment units only.....	14
Table 7: Survey distribution and response rates.....	15
Table 8: Age range – Tutors (respondents only).....	15

Overview

This report presents an extract of the findings from a scoping study aimed to establish a research framework for pre-service initial teacher education through CQUniversity's community partnerships with two regionally based study hubs: Country Universities Centres (CUC) Snowy Monaro¹ and Geraldton Universities Centre (GUC). These Centres represent a unique community-initiated learning and teaching model with no existing research investigating its effectiveness in terms of initial teacher education and impact upon schooling in regional, rural and remote communities.

To achieve this aim, the study has to date:

1. Mapped CQUniversity (CQU) pre-service teacher education students' enrolment, progression and graduation rates from inception of cohorts at CUC Snowy Monaro and Geraldton Universities Centre (GUC) to December 2017.
2. Developed demographic profiles of the communities serviced by CUC Snowy Monaro and Geraldton Universities Centre (GUC) respectively.
3. Identified future research foci and questions relevant for each community (Snowy Monaro/Cooma and Geraldton) specifically and Australia's community initiated regional study hubs more generally.

This scoping activity sought to answer the following questions:

1. What is known about the demography of both Cooma (CUC Snowy Monaro) and Geraldton communities serviced by CQU's pre-service initial teacher education courses?
2. What is the business model for this teacher education delivery partnership?
3. What types of pre-service initial teacher education courses are provided through CUC Snowy Monaro and Geraldton Universities Centre (GUC)?
4. What are the data trends for (a) enrolment, (b) progression and (c) graduation for each Centre?
5. What teacher education accreditation imperatives are impacting this delivery model?

This initial scoping study phase commenced 30 June 2017 and concluded 31 December 2017. Funding was provided by the School of Education and the Arts and the Centre for Regional Advancement in Learning, Equity, Access and Participation (LEAP) at Central Queensland University Australia.

This extract provides initial findings that pertain to the CUC Snowy Monaro. In some instances data from the Geraldton University Centre is provided to illustrate the wider comparative narrative being compiled for the study's full report funded by CQUniversity.

Summary of key findings

- Participation rates in initial teacher education are growing within the Geraldton and Cooma regions, meaning that increased professional capabilities will benefit the regions schools and the regional economy.
- The support structures that are embedded within the Universities Centre model enables students to succeed more so than if they were studying via the traditional distance mode.
- Professional capability within the localised schooling/educational sector is increased in that teachers are being provided with opportunities to increase their own teaching knowledge and skills.
- The regional teaching and learning hub model is a good fit for CQUniversity and visa versa.

¹ The Snowy Monaro centre located in Cooma was the first of the Country Universities Centres in regional New South Wales, Australia. Further centres are to be opened in regional New South Wales in 2018. Future centres will be referred to as *community owned regional study hubs*.

Background

Communities in regional Australia have long sought social and economic sustainability and growth. The problem has been to stem economic leakage of jobs and incomes while growing from within future generations of professionals to foster social sustainability, and if not economic growth, then at least a healthy vibrant local economy. In regional communities, including those rural and remote, teaching is one of the professions with distinctive opportunities and challenges (Kenny, Harreveld & Danaher, 2016). In such communities, contextual relevance and socio-cultural appropriateness in pre-service teacher education courses is essential (Ajayi, 2014; Darling-Hammond, 2009).

In Australia, sustainable regional, rural and remote communities may be supported by reform to the ways in which teacher education is delivered; especially when the relationship is reciprocal (White, Lock, Hastings, Cooper, Reid & Green, 2011). Reciprocity goes beyond pre-service teachers' practicum experiences or the mobility of teacher graduates if it is to actually impact social networks and economic sustainability. At the heart of this investigation is the reciprocal relationship initiated by two communities and responded to by a university offering teacher education. The recent development of the Australian regional study hubs model, and in particular those known as the Geraldton Universities Centre and the Country Universities Centre Snowy Monaro, which is part of the Country Universities Centres, stimulated partnerships for delivery of a unique model for pre-service initial teacher education.

There are currently 52 universities delivering pre-service initial teacher education courses throughout Australia. Approximately one third of them offer distance education as well as face-to-face delivery. Significantly, the pre-service initial teacher education delivery model investigated in this study did not begin with the university seeking partnerships with local shire councils. It began with the local shire councils seeking university partners for specific courses to be delivered through their resourcing mechanisms and infrastructure. CQUniversity Australia entered into memoranda of understanding for delivery of teacher education via online distance education with support, or as the Country Universities Centre Snowy Monaro has copyrighted, 'distance with assistance'.

The uniqueness of the Geraldton Universities Centre (GUC) and Country Universities Centre (CUC) Snowy Monaro lies in their different yet similar business models predicated upon strategic partnerships and multiple funding sources. GUC and CUC Snowy Monaro determine the locally generated provision of human resources and physical infrastructure so as to stimulate post-compulsory further education and lifelong learning opportunities, including but not limited to pre-service teacher education. For instance, other courses offered range from accounting to nursing, psychology to social work.

A noteworthy point in the nomenclature of this regional study hub initiative is the choice of the plural, universities, not the singular, university. It signals clearly that the communities wish to do business with whichever universities provide meaningful partnerships and in any one centre, a number of universities may be supporting students' learning. These Centres are visible products of powerful economic and political agenda operating in and through social relationships of members of those communities. If they do indeed win people's commitment and enthusiasm as the findings of this study suggest, then they are providing long-term security and serving the common good of those communities. In that sense, they are perhaps evincing a new spirit of capital accumulation through pre-service initial teacher education (Boltanski & Chiapello, 2007; du Gay & Morgan, 2013; Stiegler, 2014).

While CQUniversity had the online IT infrastructure to support both distance and face-to-face delivery, particular challenges were faced in the pre-service initial teacher education courses. The core question for CQU was how to deliver and assess across multiple state jurisdictions with Initial Teacher Education courses accredited with the Queensland College of Teachers (QCT). This highlighted the peculiarity of Australia's teacher education accreditation and

registration structure. Currently a national standards body, the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL), outlines the requirements and structure for accreditation of Initial Teacher Education courses and registration for teacher graduates. Yet the responsibility for implementation resides with each individual State and Territory, meaning that aspects such as entry and exit requirements, are determined by the accreditation authority. For the purposes of this initiative, this meant that CQUniversity was and is managing a maze of entry requirements, practicum placements, teaching requirements and registration requirements to ensure students can complete their courses locally and graduate with employment prospects in Western Australia and New South Wales respectively.

Research approach

This scoping study used a critical participatory action research (CPAR) process that is consistent with the aim and research questions (Kemmis, McTaggart, & Nixon, 2014; Zeller-Berkman, Muñoz-Proto & Torro, 2015; Zuber-Skerritt, 2016). Two cycles of research activity were approved for funding and CQUniversity's Human Ethics Research Committee approved the research approach and methods for data collection and analysis (Ref206687 from 31/08/2017 to 30/11/2018).

This report covers the activities of Cycle 1: Scoping Study, covering the period from September to December 2017. The next cycle (Cycle 2: Fieldwork) will be undertaken in 2018 and will consist of interviews and artefact collection at CUC Snowy Monaro and Geraldton Universities Centre.

Methods

The data collected for the Cycle 1 scoping study were both qualitative and quantitative. Data were sourced via the internet with statistics and reports in the public domain. Preliminary consultations were undertaken in August 2017 with the Director, Geraldton Universities Centre; and the CEO, Country Universities Centres NSW, the Chair, CUC Snowy Monaro, and the Manager of CUC Snowy Monaro. These consultations confirmed support for the study and provided focus to the choice of data to be collected. Three types of data were collected and analysed as outlined below.

1. Archival data

(a) CQU data on student enrolments progressions and graduations; teachers (numbers at each centre qualifications, units taught and grade averages); other archival artefacts pertinent to initial teacher education delivery via the partnership arrangements with CUC Snowy Monaro and GUC.

(b) Centre data to complement that of CQU.

2. Demographic data

(a) demographic data of each community (e.g. *Australian Early Development Census* data and *Australian Bureau of Statistics* (ABS))

(b) CUC Snowy Monaro and GUC websites and partnership websites e.g. Monaro Shire Council (CUC), Snowy Hydro (CUC); Geraldton Shire Council (GUC)

3. Survey data

An online survey undertaken with tutors from both Centres. This was not initially planned but became necessary when the CQU data sets did not provide information pertinent to issues regarding teacher education accreditation.

Data were analysed using both a quantitative and qualitative content analysis approach to the tables and statistics of enrolment and demographic data (Lock & Steele, 2015). Qualitative

contextual readings of the survey data were undertaken. The findings are represented in tabulated, graphic and diagrammatic form, with descriptive, explanatory and interpretive text.

Findings

The findings are now presented in five sections. First, a necessarily selective demographic overview of the community surrounding the CUC Snowy Monaro is offered through the lens of factors that may be impacting CQU's initial teacher education course offerings. Second, the partnerships model underpinning the ITE delivery is explained. The third section addresses issues of enrolment and progression through data sourced from CQU records. The fourth section compares student results per learning mode. Finally the findings report on an preliminary foray into the issue of accreditation, that is accreditation for the initial teacher education suite of courses that will lead to registration for graduates to teach in schools. The on-site tutors are pivotal to the successful delivery of these courses with their online distance education model facilitated through course and unit coordinators. Thus, the voices of the tutors were sought and are reported here.

1. The community demographics

CQUniversity is a comprehensive university within the Australian higher education system. It offers courses from Certificate I to Doctoral levels of the Australian Qualifications Framework. As well as substantial distance education offerings, a key feature of the University is its campus and study centre or hub model of delivery (see Figure 1 below).



Figure 1: CQU's campus & study centre hubs as at October 2017

As of October 2017, there were 13 campuses (8 regional and 5 metropolitan) across Queensland, New South Wales, Victoria, South Australia and Western Australia. In addition,

there were 8 study centre hubs: 3 in Queensland; 1 in New South Wales (with CUC Snowy Monaro); 4 in Western Australia (Broome, Karratha, Busselton and Geraldton with GUC); with more in the pipeline as negotiations with other regional communities continue. Students that enrol at CQUniversity reside in regional and rural locations, are traditionally first in family to attend university, are from low socio-economic families, are a mix of mature age and school leavers and are career changers. Many of our students are reported to hold one or more jobs whilst studying.

Cooma (Snowy Monaro)

Cooma is 397km south-west of Sydney and 116km south of Canberra. Census returns from 2016 show the population Cooma to be 6,742; while the population of the wider Snowy Monaro region was 20,218 (ABS, Census 2016).

In 2016, Cooma's unemployment rate was 4.7%, while the State of NSW reported 6.3%. Nationally the unemployment rate was 6.9%. The types of employment in which people were working included professional and white collar 53%; and blue collar 47% (ABS, 2016). This is comparable to the State (56%) and national (59%) proportion of the population working in professional and white collar jobs.

It can be seen from Table 1 that the proportion of the population who have graduated from tertiary education is half that of the State and national averages. Similarly the weekly household income is also significantly less than State and national averages.

Table 1: Demographic data

Demographics	Cooma Code 101031014 (SA2)	NSW state	National
Population	6742	7.5m	23.4m
Median age	45	38	38
Education – Bachelor degree or higher	12.5%	23.4%	22.0%
Internet connection from dwelling	73.4%	82.5%	83.2%
Indigenous (as % of population)	3.2%	2.9%	2.8%
Unemployment	4.7%	6.3%	6.9%
Household income (median weekly)	1009	1486	1438

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics – Census 2016

http://www.censusdata.abs.gov.au/census_services/getproduct/census/2016/quickstat/101031014?open=document

Demographic implications for initial teacher education

Schools

Schools in both regions are illustrative of the education 'industry' support that makes it possible for initial teacher education in both communities. The Snowy Monaro region is shown and discussed first. There are 15 schools within a radius of 80 km from Cooma. Of those, there is one public secondary, two independent K-12 schools, two K-10 (one independent and one public) and ten public primary schools. As shown in Table 2, schools are designated according to sector, level, and variables of co-education, faith-based or not, boarding or not. Students enrolled in pre-service initial teacher education at the CUC Snowy Monaro generally live within the 80km radius.

Table 2: Cooma Schools within 80km Cooma

Schools	Sector	Level	Co-Ed	Faith based	Boarding	Notes
Cooma North Public School	Public	Primary	Yes	No	No	
Cooma Public School	Public	Primary	Yes	No	No	
Berridale Public School	Public	Primary	Yes	No	No	36km from Cooma
Bredbo Public School	Public	Primary	Yes	No	No	39km from Cooma
Nimmitabel Public School	Public	Primary	Yes	No	No	45km from Cooma
Dalgety Public School	Public	Primary	Yes	No	No	50km from Cooma
Adaminaby Public School	Public	Primary	Yes	No	No	50km from Cooma
Jerangle Public School	Public	Primary	Yes	No	No	50km from Cooma
Michelago Public School	Public	Primary	Yes	No	No	64km from Cooma
Bemboka Public School	Public	Primary	Yes	No	No	76km from Cooma
Snowy Mountains Christian School	Independent	K-10	Yes	Yes	No	
St Patrick's School	Independent	K-10	Yes	Yes	No	
Snowy Mountains Grammar School	Independent	K-12	Yes	Yes	Yes	62km from Cooma
Jindabyne Central	Public	K-12	Yes	No	No	62km from Cooma
Monaro High School	Public	Secondary	Yes	No	No	

The significance of the notes showing distance from Cooma township is key because professional experience placements are undertaken at students' own expense and thus, they may be placed at any of these schools for variability in experiences, as required by accreditation. For secondary placements up to Year 12, there is a choice of three schools (Monaro High School, Jindabyne Central and Snowy Mountains Grammar School). Junior high school placements could be made at those three schools plus two other which offer education to Year 10 (Snowy Mountains Christian School and St Patrick's School). Currently, through the CUC Snowy Monaro, early childhood and primary initial teacher education is offered, however as shown in Table 2, there is scope for secondary pre-service initial teacher education to be offered in the future.

Other Universities

As noted in the background information for this report, CQUniversity is not the only university offering initial teacher education in Australia. The tables below reveal the major universities within the footprint of the Snowy Monaro (Cooma) Centre. At this stage in this scoping study, there are no inferences being drawn from these data, other than to present the options students have for undertaking teacher education studies.

Table 3: CUC Snowy Monaro - distance from other major universities offering teacher education

Major NSW universities offering teacher education	Distance from Cooma	Distance mode offered
University of Canberra	116 km	Yes
Charles Sturt University – Wagga Wagga	284 km	Yes
University of Wollongong	359 km	No
Charles Sturt University – Bathurst	391 km	Limited offerings
Australian Catholic University	397 km	No
Charles Sturt University	397 km	No – on campus Wagga Wagga (286km) / Bathurst (360km)
Macquarie University	397 km	No
University of Notre Dame	397 km	No
University of Sydney	397 km	No
University of New England	397 km	Yes
Southern Cross University (Lismore)	1000km+	Yes

In New South Wales, four of the 11 universities in Table 4 offer teacher education in the distance mode. This does not account for other universities in Australia—such as CQUniversity—that operate teacher education in the distance mode from other States and Territories.

At this preliminary analytic phase, the significance of the demographics lies in the nature of control exerted over initial teacher education in Australia. Nationally, the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) endorses professional standards for teachers at four levels of professional progression (graduate, proficient, highly accomplished, lead). The legal oversight of those professional standards lies within State/Territory jurisdictions. In other words, “all Australian ITE programs are accredited by state and territory teacher regulatory authorities using the nationally agreed Standards and Procedures” (AITSL, <https://www.aitsl.edu.au/deliver-ite-programs/understand-ite-program-accreditation>). As CQUniversity is a Queensland university, its initial teacher education courses are accredited with the Queensland College of Teachers (QCT). Thus in the delivery and management of these courses, it is the Queensland requirements that must be adhered to. Differences between the implementation of initial teacher education in Queensland and New South Wales, although not overtly significant, must be taken into account. Later in this report, findings from the tutors’ survey provide an early inkling into the complexity of this issue in the regional study hubs delivery context.

2. Partnerships model: doing the business

Business partnerships with CQUniversity for the delivery of initial teacher education commenced in 2012 (Geraldton) and 2015 (Cooma/Snowy Monaro) respectively. There is a legal agreement with each Centre’s Board. This legal agreement was in the form of a memorandum of understanding (MOU) that stipulated the provision of two types of distance education through the Centres: supported and unsupported. Table 4 provides a brief summary of the costing agreements for CUC Snowy Monaro.

Table 4: MOU costing agreement

MOU: Costing agreement
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cooma-based delivery staff (lead tutors) sourced by CUC, approved by CQU and paid by CQU. • CUC charge 60% EFTSL for supported students and 10% EFTSL for unsupported students. • 10% is for use of facilities – method of calculation not determined.

It is the supported distance, 'distance with assistance', that is the focus of the initial teacher education partnership model. The tutors are sourced by the Centres, then their qualifications and experience are approved by the Dean of CQUniversity's School of Education and the Arts. This is necessary under the requirements for course accreditation with the QCT for initial teacher education courses.

3. Initial teacher education: offerings and enrolments

This section reports findings in relation to course offerings and enrolment trends.

Course offerings & enrolments

The table below illustrates the range of initial teacher education courses offered and enrolments in supported distance at a glance as at December 2017. Undergraduate entry pathway primary and early childhood were offered through the CUC Snowy Monaro partnership up to that time. As noted in the table, also offered is STEPs, a tertiary education preparatory course that focuses on English, Maths and Science skill development, that students undertake if they have not met the Queensland entry requirements. Due to the small numbers (<20), data are presented in actual numbers of people/students.

Table 5: CUC Snowy Monaro enrolments at a glance as at December 2017

Code	Course	Admitted	In Progress	Withdrawn	Completed	STEPS prior	Avg Units completed	Avg GPA program
CC12	B. Education (Primary)	10	9	1	0	2	7	5.1
CC14	B. Education (Early Childhood)	6	4	2	0	0	10	4.7
	Total students	16	13	3	0	2		

Note: These CUC Snowy Monaro figures do not include 5 students registered from Young. Those students will be showing up in the CQU distance cohort figures in other tables.

As can be seen in Figure 2 below, enrolments in the Bachelor of Education Primary and Bachelor of Education Early Childhood at CUC Snowy Monaro commenced in 2015 with an initial intake of 11 students. Although a dip in enrolments occurred in 2016, enrolments grew in 2017. Most students at CUC Snowy Monaro are enrolled on a part-time basis generally undertaking 2 units per term (12 weeks per term). This enrolment was a purposeful decision so as to support students who were also working in paid employment within the community. However, this enrolment trend is changing as of the latter part of 2017 with many students taking on a heavier study load of 3 or more units. It should be noted here that the dip in enrolments in 2016 and 2017 can be attributed to the change in initial teacher education entry requirements by Queensland College of Teachers.

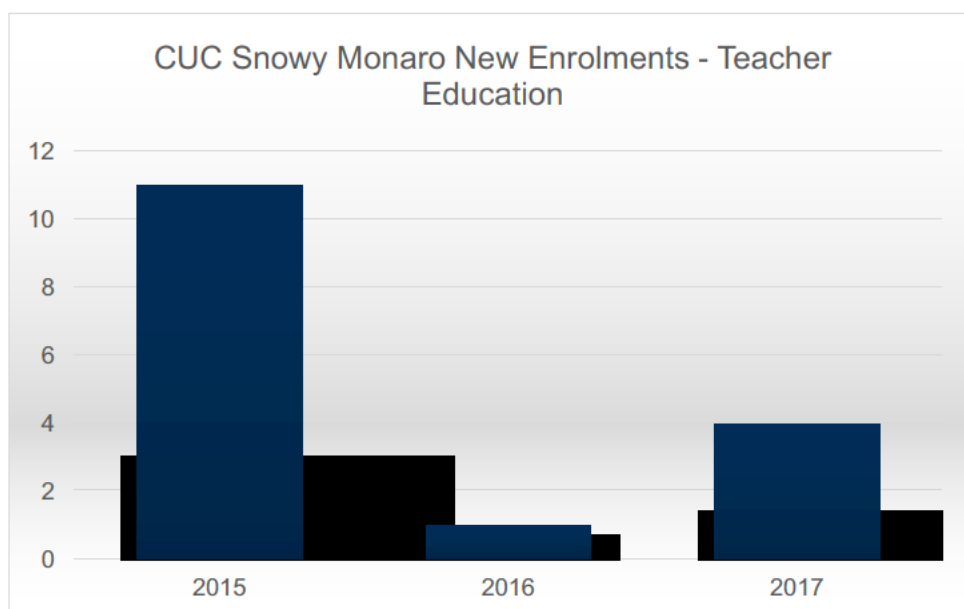


Figure 2: CUC Snowy Monaro new enrolment trend 2015-2017

4. Comparative data: results per learning mode

Unit results comparisons

A Bachelor's course in initial teacher education consists of 32 units of study and takes a minimum of four years to complete under accreditation structures. As noted in the demographics section of this report, initial teacher education is offered face-to-face on 7 of CQU's regional campuses, online (referred to as distance) and at the GUC and the CUC Snowy Morano. The following comparison provides a snapshot of the results from a select number of units that have been delivered by face-to-face and distance modes and at the GUC and the CUC. The comparison provides evidence of the effectiveness of the University Centre model in supporting its students. The comparative data show results for the period from 2015-2017, however some units may show only one or two years of results due to the part time nature of enrolments at the CUC Snowy Monaro.

Table 6 provides the results for eight Bachelor of Education units. The units that have been selected are representative of the results achieved by face-to-face students, distance students and students from the GUC and CUC Snowy Monaro. The units are also mandatory core units which allows for a more robust comparison.

Table 6 : Grade comparison per unit - selected high enrolment units only

Unit Code & Name	Year	Term	Total Students Enrolled	Passed	Failed	CQU Average grade	Distance Average grade	Face2Face Average grade	GUC Average grade	GUC enrolments	CUC Average grade	CUC enrolments
EDCU11031 Deve op & Learn through L fe	2015	1	250	199	51	4.76	5.13	4.44	5.90	10	4.60	5
EDCU11031Deve op & Learn through L fe	2016	1	211	187	24	4.99	4.89	5.10	5.86	14	5.00	2
EDCU11031 Deve op & Learn through L fe	2017	1	228	188	40	4.68	4.41	4.99	4.92	12	5.00	1
EDCU11032 Hea th & Phys ca Educat on	2015	1	199	180	19	5.34	5.08	5.50	5.88	9	NA	NA
EDCU11032 Hea th & Phys ca Educat on	2016	1	189	171	18	5.29	5.12	5.48	4.64	11	5.57	7
EDCU11032Hea th & Phys ca Educat on	2017	1	220	196	24	5.13	5.14	5.11	5.62	16	6.00	3
EDCU11033 Mu t terac es	2015	1	230	186	44	4.84	4.65	4.97	5.70	10	NA	NA
EDCU11033 Mu t terac es	2016	1	204	172	32	4.85	4.58	5.13	5.00	13	2.62	8
EDCU11033 Mu t terac es	2017	1	196	163	33	4.86	4.42	5.31	4.35	17	7.00	1
EDCU12040 B o og ca & Earth & Space Sc ences	2015	1	147	141	6	5.24	5.11	5.34	5.26	19	NA	NA
EDCU12040 B o og ca & Earth & Space Sc ences	2016	1	165	143	22	4.99	4.55	5.40	6.00	5	6.00	1
EDCU12040 B o og ca & Earth & Space Sc ences	2017	1	183	161	20	4.99	5.08	4.98	5.91	11	6.00	6
EDED11454 Educat on as a Profess on	2015	1	443	349	94	4.49	4.52	4.46	4.81	16	5.29	7
EDED11454 Educat on as a Profess on	2016	1	395	313	82	4.24	3.94	4.50	4.94	17	5.00	2
EDED11454 Educat on as a Profess on	2017	1	393	317	75	4.57	4.51	4.65	5.38	21	4.67	3
EDED11456 Commun cat on n Educat ona Env ronments	2016	2	197	167	30	4.71	4.49	4.97	4.67	18	4.85	7
EDED11457 Respond ng to D vers ty & Inc us on	2015	2	380	278	102	4.08	3.80	4.35	2.42	7	5.28	7
EDED11457 Respond ng to D vers ty & Inc us on	2016	2	360	288	72	4.21	4.16	4.24	4.00	15	NA	-
EDFE11038 PP 1 Introduct on to teach ng	2016	2	279	249	28	5.05	5.24	5.00	5.73	11	5.20	6

As can be seen in Table 6 students studying via the CUC Snowy Monaro and the GUC have achieved a grade average that is similar or above the CQU average for each unit. In many instances, such as EDCU11031, EDCU11032 and EDED11454, the Geraldton and Cooma students have achieved a grade average higher than both face to face students and distance students implying that the support provided through centre based tutorials with local tutors is an effective delivery option. Smaller class sizes provides tutors to get to know their students and cater for their needs. In this respect the results show that 'distance with assistance' is a model that works.

5. Teacher accreditation: Tutors

Previously in this report, we have noted the accreditation requirements for initial teacher education courses and the differential jurisdictional powers of AITSL on the one hand and State/Territory regulatory authorities on the other. One of the major issues impacting the supported distance delivery of these ITE courses is that of the knowledge and experience of those who teach and assess them.

Tutors play a significant role in the implementation of these courses. As part of the course accreditation process with the QCT, all staff teaching in an undergraduate Bachelor must be a registered teacher in their State, have a qualification that is a level above to the course they are teaching in, or alternatively hold the same level of qualification, but have relevant professional experience within the last ten years.

Since the commencement of the delivery of initial teacher education at the GUC and the CUC Snowy Monaro, a total of 29 tutors have been employed. In some instances the tutors have only taught one unit, whereas others have taught multiple units over a period of time. In order to hear the voice of those working directly with the preservice teachers, a survey was distributed to all tutors, past and present as shown in Table 7.

Table 7: Survey distribution and response rate

Survey	GUC	CUC Snowy Monaro	Total
Past/present tutors identified	22	7	29
Survey sent to	22	7	29
Survey responses	8	3	11 *
Unresponsive	15	4	18
Respondents interested in further discussion	7	2	9

* 9 of the 11 responses were returned by current tutors (as at December 2017). 9 of the 11 respondents are willing to speak further with CQU researchers.

The age range of tutor respondents is noted in Table 8. In terms of gender, 2 of 11 respondents were male, and 9 identified as female. Of the 11 respondents, 7 noted previous experience teaching adult learners across a variety of fields, with 3 of those noting experience in teaching student teachers and initial teacher education related courses. Further, of the 11 respondents, 4 noted previous experience teaching in an online environment, 3 of which were at the university level.

Table 8: Age range – Tutors (respondents only)

	30-34 yrs	35-39 yrs	40-44yrs	45-49 yrs	50-54 yrs	55-59 yrs
GUC	2	1	1	2	1	1
CUC	0	1	1	0	0	1

Survey findings are now presented in terms of two major categories: (1) motivation for tutoring, and (2) future training support and professional development for tutoring.

Motivation for tutoring

Tutors' motivation for tutoring has been collated under four categories: (1) preparing the next generation of teachers; (2) tertiary level teaching in home town; (3) professional development for self and school; (4) flexibility of work. Each is now presented with evidence from survey responses.

1) Preparing next generation of teachers

These tutors were cognisant that they were preparing the next generation of teachers.

This work is characterized by:

passion	<i>"In the tutorial role, I have the pleasure of working with students for the course of their four year degree and I am able to see the students progress and develop into confident teachers by fourth year. It's a privilege."</i> (Tutor A) <i>"I love teaching."</i> (Tutor B) <i>"I am passionate about education and it has been a joy to share this passion with the new generation of teachers."</i> (Tutor C) <i>"My passion for teaching in general. And the joy of being part of the journey of making great teachers who will then inspire kids to make a great future Australia."</i> (Tutor H)
and	
pleasure	<i>... because it is enjoyable working with future teachers</i> <i>...[I] "Enjoy working with pre service teachers."</i> (Tutor F) <i>"I enjoy helping and passing on knowledge and experience to the next generation of teachers."</i> (Tutor J) <i>"The opportunity to share my teaching experience with future teachers."</i> (Tutor I) <i>... [I] "wanted to work with students developing their skills prior to entering schools."</i> (Tutor G)

2) Tertiary level teacher education in home town

University level teaching and learning locally is worthwhile for three key reasons. First, these tutors *"want to work in the post school sector"* (Tutor B). Second, they *"love the concept of helping students stay in their home town and study"* (Tutor B) as this Centre is *"supporting the development of tertiary education in our region"* (Tutor D).

Third, there is now a *"link between my school and the university center"* (Tutor F).

The link between the Centre and 'my school' is especially important for preservice initial teacher education because of the necessity for practicum partnerships with schools for students' mandatory professional experience.

3) Professional development: self & school

This tutoring work provides personal professional development for tutors as well as enabling them to professionally develop other teachers. Tutoring is *"a job that keeps me up to date with the profession"* (Tutor J).

Again, this finding is illustrative of tutors' awareness of the importance for the profession of developing the 'next generation' of mentor teachers in schools to supervise students on-the-job professional experience activities. For Tutor D, this tutoring provided *"personal professional development."* At the same time, it also supported *"our school in promoting quality teaching and learning"* (Tutor D).

At another school, Tutor G is *"curriculum coordinator [...] and provide PD to staff regularly on the curriculum so thought it would also help me to refine my skills with current research and practice."* This tutor views tutoring as providing professional development not only personally, but also to a wider school community.

Significantly, this category depicts also the meshwork of relationships among the education profession in these communities that provides a multi-faceted complexity within which initial

teacher education is operationalised. Tutors are teaching university units while at the same time some of them are working in the same schools in which the university students are undertaking their professional experience placements.

4) Flexibility of work

Tutoring provides a “*flexibility of hours*” when on parental leave from school teaching (Tutor E) or while on maternity leave (Tutor J). There is a body of research into the work of tutors or ‘casual academics’ in the university sector, and if this finding proves to be significant for other tutors when the next phase of this study is undertaken, then further investigation of this issue will follow.

Future training, support & professional development for tutoring

From the data, three categories were constructed to encapsulate the future training, support and professional development that these tutors would value. They are presented in order of suggestions for (1) marking and moderation; (2) roles and expectations; (3) conducting tutorials; and (4) interacting with the wider teacher education community. In this section, there is no attribution to specific tutors.

1) Marking & moderation

Marking and moderation processes could be more easily understood if there was training in marking assignments and providing feedback to students. One tutor “*recently watched a zoom session about marking a specific assessment task [and] found this very useful*”.

Some tutors work with a number of university units, and across different ITE courses. Accordingly, they experience diverse differences among marking processes. For instance, this tutor found that “*the marking is also very different (i.e. each Coordinator has a different process) and it would be better if this was standardised and consistent across all units.*”

One tutor summed it up: “*there needs to be very clear guidelines in the marking and moderation process.*”

2) Roles and expectations

While the role of tutor may be defined legally as per terms and conditions of work, doing this work presents challenges in terms of understanding preservice teacher education students as learners, and the academic expectations within different courses and units.

One tutor would “*like to talk with lecturers about the content and quality of work presented and expectations.*”

Moreover, clarity of roles and expectations may be fostered via “*direct contact with CQU administration at initial sign up (perhaps as part of induction).*”

3) Conducting Tutorials

Tutorials are conducted face-to-face with teacher education students. Not all tutors have worked with adults as learners, and one would “*like to have in-servicing on presenting information effectively to adult learners.*”

Training for conducting tutorials with adults as learners could include: “*general tips about running tutorials*”; and “*tutorial structure and ideas for collaboration*”.

4) Ongoing interactive communication

Ongoing interactive communication opportunities for tutors may be facilitated through “*a possible Tutors Forum where tutors can just get any questions answered or linked to the right departments if needed*”. There was a request for “*seminars outlining current research in education; online even*”. Research seminars are offered regularly through CQU’s School of Education and the Arts, but it is not yet confirmed if tutors would have access to those notifications.

The practicum, or professional experience in early childhood, primary or secondary settings is an issue of current interest. Practicum placement processes are a major topic of interest that covers ...

mentor teachers	<i>I facilitate Mentor Teacher evenings to explain paperwork but I feel this could be better supported i.e. teachers are still finding the electronic paperwork submissions a challenge and it would be good to find out if there is a better way to approach this.</i>
professional experience	<i>Over the past two years, there have been new implementations for example the Professional Experience Recommendations, the GTPA and the LANTITE and I have had to keep on top of it all by asking questions by email, whereas, if I had been part of the Education Development day in Queensland I would have been more equipped and have more knowledge about these new initiatives which would make me more professionally knowledgeable for my students.</i>
placement officers	<i>I would like to talk to placement officers regarding practicum placements as I am the only one doing it here, and although I find ECE / Primary placements are easy in a regional town, I find placing secondary students difficult and would like more support in this area.</i>

Conclusion

These community collectives have credibility with their local constituents and nationally via further financial commitment from the Australian government for the expansion of the regional study hubs model. This scoping study has determined the significance of the Centres for stimulating regional development for local economies and community well being. The money that families spend to support a student in metropolitan areas could be kept within a community as an economic benefit to all. In terms of wellbeing, education is an engine room for communities. It provides learning pathways and networked connection to professions. In terms of CQUniversity's preservice initial teacher education courses, students can start with the STEPS enabling course, or enter directly after school or other work; then continue through to a completed Bachelor of Education. With an internationally recognised qualification, graduates may work anywhere in the world and/or work in their local communities.

Emerging research directions

As noted in the research approach section of this report, Cycle 2 of the research project will be undertaken in 2018 whereby students enrolled at a Universities centre will be interviewed about their perceptions and experiences of the centre and their course. Further artefacts and data will be collected. Importantly, graduates from the GUC will be contacted and interviewed in order to determine the impact of the Universities Centre model, as well as aspects of graduation destination and employment opportunities within the region. Schools and key community members will also be interviewed regarding the impact of the centres. Ultimately, from an initial teacher education context, a longitudinal study is needed to track students from course entry to exit and beyond.

Importantly, the economic advantage of this model needs to be researched, particularly as more centres are integrated into the community initiated regional study hub model. In this respect, research should include students who are studying by distance education, but are utilising the facilities and support programs throughout throughout their learning journey.

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Regional study hubs: Increasing student engagement to support regional students facing high first-year attrition risk factors. A Practice Report*

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Abstract

The Country Universities Centre (CUC) network of regional study hubs are an emerging tool for supporting regional students to achieve success in higher education. The CUC cohort of students, and regional students more generally, face several risk factors for first-year attrition including: external mode of study, over 25 years of age, part-time study load, alternative pathways to admission, and medium to low socio-economic status (SES). In addition, work-life balance, financial considerations, and access to technology all create barriers to study for these students. The CUC facilities and staff provide academic, administrative and pastoral support to students, as well as creating a learning community to facilitate student-to-student interactions. The positive effect of the CUC support is shown by means of a survey and student case studies.

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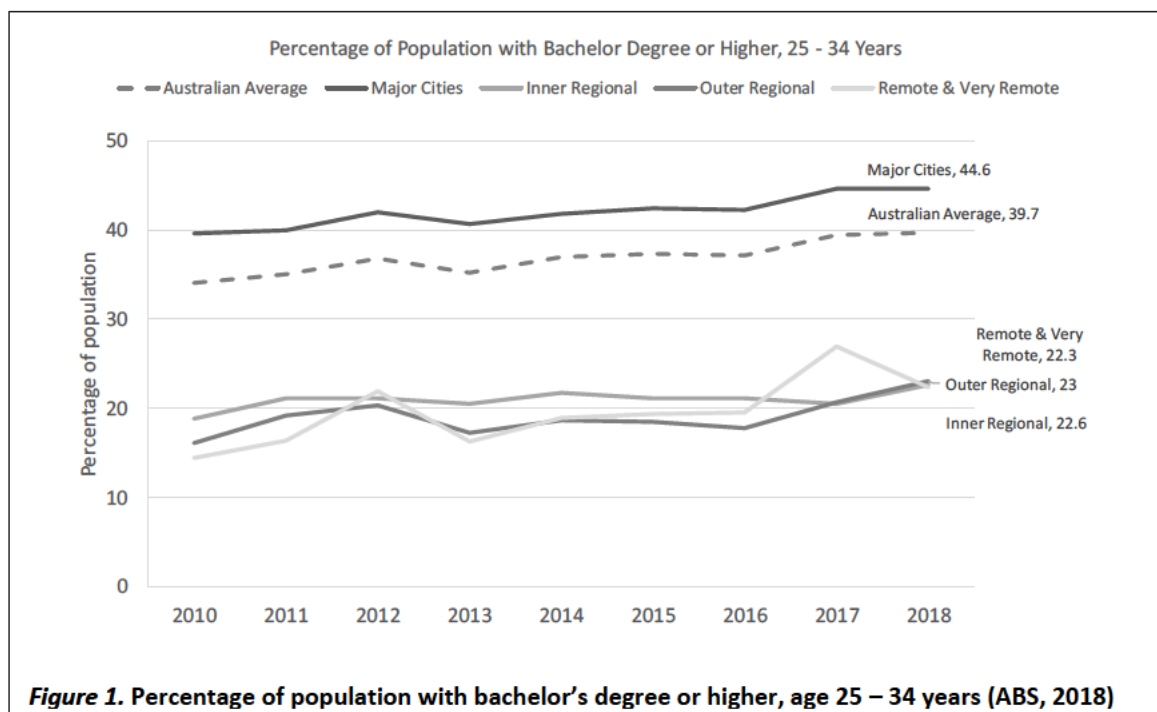
Introduction

Regional Study Hubs (RSHs) are an emerging tool developed to assist regional students to participate and succeed in higher education. Regional and remote Australians hold bachelor's degrees at approximately half the rate of metropolitan Australia. In 2018, 22.7% of people aged 25–34 years in regional or remote Australia had obtained a bachelor's degree or higher, compared to 44.6% in metropolitan areas (Figure 1). Following the *Australian Review of Higher Education* (Bradley, Noonan, Nugent, & Scales, 2008) the Federal Government set a target of 40% of all Australians aged 25–34 years to hold a bachelor's degree by 2025. Achieving this target is required to ensure that Australia remains internationally competitive, and that the workforce is prepared for the growing knowledge economy. As of 2018, this target has been exceeded in metropolitan areas but remains a distant goal for regional areas.

Background

The Country Universities Centre (CUC) is a community-owned network of regional study hubs. The hubs offer campus-like facilities to any student studying at an Australian university. The centres typically offer high-speed internet (100 Mb/s symmetrical), video-conferencing facilities, computers and printing, as well as tutorial spaces, and areas for social collaboration. Beyond the facilities, the CUC staff offer students' academic, administrative and well-being support. They also advocate events for the CUC centres that promote educationally meaningful activities to encourage student engagement and develop professional networks.

The CUC concept was initiated in the small NSW town of Cooma in 2013 by the local community. It was influenced by the Geraldton Universities Centre, which has operated since 1999.



The CUC centre in Cooma was supported by local business Snowy Hydro and the Cooma Monaro Shire Council. Initially there was no state or federal government support. The goals of the centre were to:

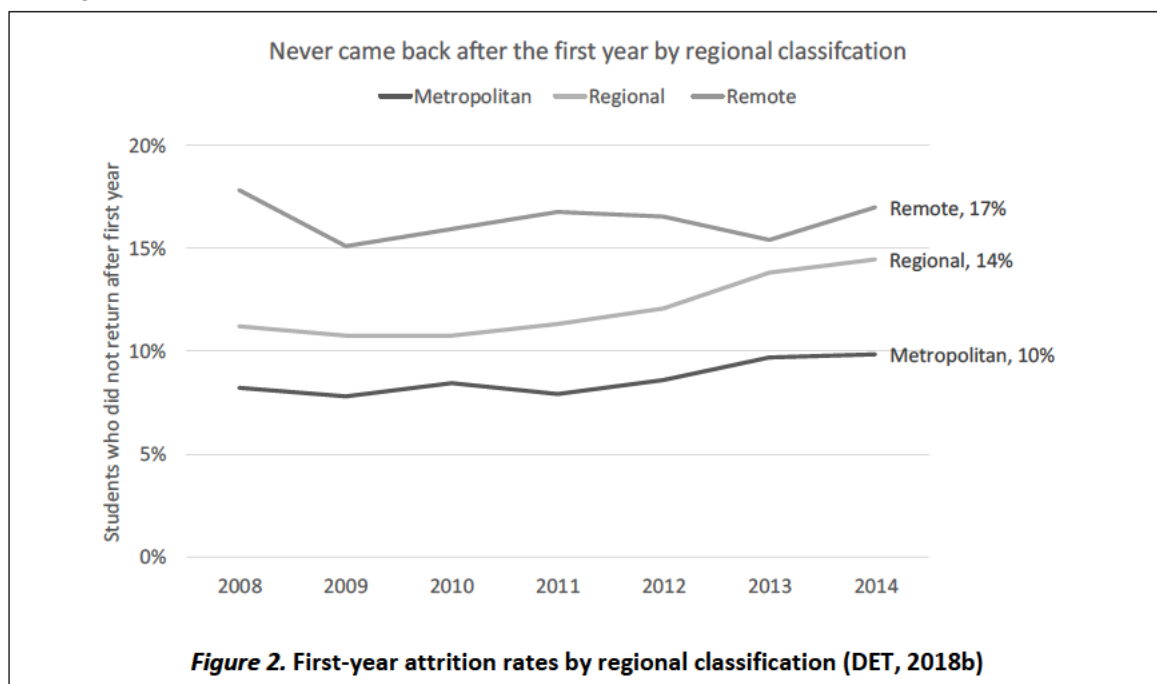
- create opportunities for youth to remain in the community and be successful;
- encourage local high value jobs for the growing knowledge economy;
- provide educational opportunities for professionals, partners and families coming to the area, and;
- encourage local academic and professional networks.

Following the success of the Cooma centre, the NSW state government provided funding to open a further five centres in NSW. In 2018, the Federal Government launched the Regional Study Hubs program, which further supported the growing network of CUC centres (Department of Education and Training [DET] 2018a).

In 2018, the CUC had three operational centres, located in Cooma (CUC Snowy Monaro), Broken Hill (CUC Far West) and Goulburn (CUC Goulburn), with a further four locations in planning stages. There were 292 students registered, of whom 67% were studying undergraduate degrees. Within the CUC student cohort, 98% of students are classified as regional or remote, with the remaining 2% usually comprised of metropolitan students on placement in our towns, such as medical students.

Regional students have higher first-year attrition rates than metropolitan students

At each benchmark for completion of a bachelor's degree (never came back after the first year; re-enrolled but dropped out; still enrolled at the end of the nine-year cohort period; completed) regional and remote students have poorer outcomes than metropolitan students (Figure 2, DET 2018b).



Whilst each aspect of lower bachelor completion rates deserves attention, this study focuses in on just one facet of this challenge: first-year attrition. In the most recent data (measured in the four-year completion rates 2014-2017) regional and remote students have a first-year attrition rate of 14% and 17% respectively, compared to just 10% for their metropolitan counterparts (DET 2018b). This project examines the mechanisms the CUC and regional study hubs use to support regional and remote students through the difficult first year of higher education and show how student engagement can be an effective tool in achieving this. Details of the CUC student cohort are presented below, with correlating national attrition trends.

First year attrition risk factors and the CUC cohort

Figure 3 compares the characteristics of Australian university students who did not return to study after the first year with the CUC student cohort. On the left of Figure 3 are the percentages of students in each classification or equity group who did not return after the first year of study, as reported in the Department of Education and Training (DET) 2017 Completion Rates for Higher Education Students (2005 – 2017 four year completion rates). On the right of the figure are the demographics of the CUC students with the same characteristics.

Mode of study

Most CUC students study externally through an Australian university, although some students do travel (considerable distance) to campus or use the centres during university holidays. One of the principles of the regional study hub concept is that the centres are located in regions where they are able to support students who do not have access to a university campus.

Mode of study is a significant risk factor for students not returning to study after the first

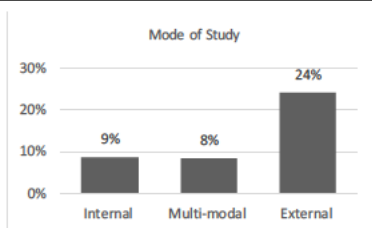
year. Students were two and a half times more likely to not return if they were studying externally (Figure 3a). In addition to increased likelihood of first-year attrition, external students were also more likely to take longer to finish their degree and have lower completion rates than other students (DET, 2017). The DET report into improving retention, completion and success in higher education recommends significant improvement and targeted investment in support for external students (DET, 2018b).

Age and type of study

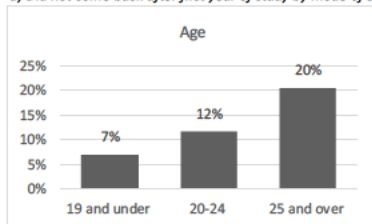
Students studying in regional and remote areas were more likely to be over 25 and studying part-time than their metropolitan counterparts (Figure 4) (ABS 2016). This trend is reflected in the CUC cohort, where 71% of CUC students are over 25 years old, and more than half are studying part-time (Figure 3c, 3e). Students over 25 had nearly twice the first-year attrition rate as their younger counterparts (DET 2018b). Students studying part-time were three times more likely to not return after their first year of study (DET 2018b). Statistical studies conducted by the DET (2017) identified type of study and age as the greatest influences on a student's completion rates, although the report suggests that age might be related to other factors, rather than being an issue in itself.

Basis for admission

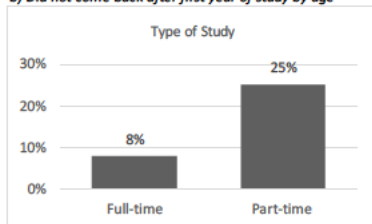
Nearly two thirds of CUC students enter higher education through pathways other than directly from secondary education (Figure 3g). This correlates with the higher age brackets of our students. Students who entered university through pathways other than secondary education were twice as likely to withdraw from study within the first year than students entering university directly from secondary education; 14% compared to 7% (DET, 2018 b).



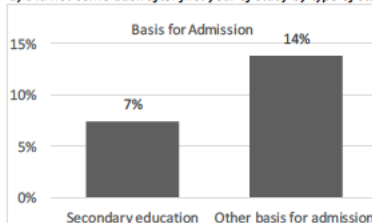
a) Did not come back after first year of study by mode of study



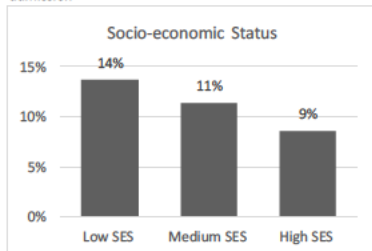
b) Did not come back after first year of study by age



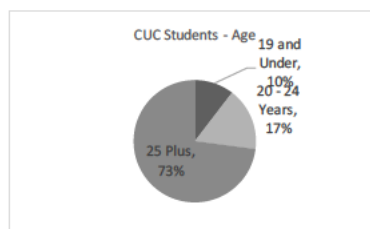
d) Did not come back after first year of study by type of study



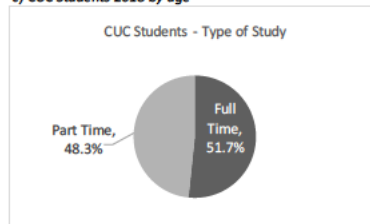
f) Did not come back after first year of study by basis of admission



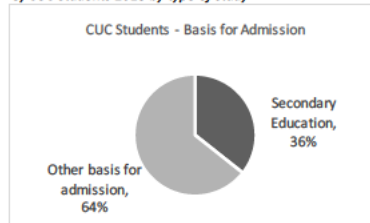
h) Did not come back after first year of study by ses



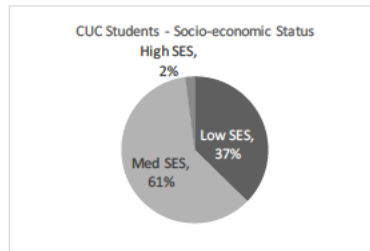
c) CUC Students 2018 by age



e) CUC Students 2018 by type of study



g) CUC Students 2018 by basis of admission



i) CUC Students 2018 by socio-economic status

Figure 3. Student characteristics compared to first-year attrition rates. Australian student figures are presented on the left side, with CUC students on the right.

Socio-economic status (SES)

CUC students studying in Goulburn and Cooma are classified as medium SES and students located in Broken Hill and surrounds are low SES (Figure 3i). Low and medium SES students are more likely to withdraw during the first year of study (14% and 11% respectively) than high SES areas (9%). The DET (2018a) acknowledged that low socioeconomic status does not necessarily mean low achieving, however many students who are low socioeconomic also share other characteristics associated with poor retention and lower completion rates, such as being mature-age and part-time. Cassells, Dockery, Duncan, Gao and Seymore (2017) identified a range of barriers to accessing higher education for low SES students, including lower expectation and aspirations for higher education, lower preparedness and less family support. They also suggest that low SES students are more likely to fall into other equity group categories.

Compounding effect of belonging to multiple equity groups

Belonging to multiple equity groups has a compounding effect on higher education completion rates: the more at-risk groups to which a student belongs, the lower the completion rates for a student becomes. Completion rates of regional and remote students who were over 25 years old and studying part-time dropped to 43.9%, compared to full-time metropolitan students, who had a completion rate of 78.7% (Edwards & McMillian, 2015).

Amongst the CUC cohort of students several first-year attrition risk factors are present, including mode of study, type of study, age, SES, and field of study. These factors combined indicate regional students and the CUC cohort have a high probability of not returning after the first year of study and are a group in need of

additional support to achieve academic retention and success.

Barriers to study for regional students

In addition to the quantifiable characteristics of CUC students, there are several other barriers to study that regional and remote students face. These factors are intertwined with the above equity factors.

Work/life responsibilities and financial considerations

The CUC cohort is dominated by mature-aged students, studying part-time. Many of these students have work and family responsibilities. The issue of financial difficulties is cited as the most common factor for regional and remote students who consider leaving university early, closely followed by health or stress, workload difficulties and study/life balance. Metropolitan students more often cited factors of choice and lifestyle (Edwards & McMillian, 2015). These financial constraints may lead to students prioritising paid employment over study, and time may be restricted by other roles, such as family and caring responsibilities (Devlin & McKay, 2017).

First-in-family

In the Goulburn and Far West centres, over half of CUC students are the first in their family to attend or complete higher education. While this is not reported in the student characteristics for completion or attrition rates, it has been identified as a barrier towards study. Issues faced by first-in-family students include lack of familiarity with the peculiarities of university life, and an absence of university specific cultural and academic capital in their families on which they can draw (Devlin & McKay, 2017). The choice to attend university can also be viewed as a departure from social norms

within their families, friendship groups and communities.

Technology

As most external courses these days are delivered online, access to high quality internet is vital. This has been recognised as a key equity issue for education in Australia (Devlin & McKay, 2017; DET, 2018c; Halsey, 2018; Pollard, 2017). The average internet speed in Broken Hill is 4 Mb/s, and in Narrabri, where a new CUC location is due to open in 2019, the average internet speed is only 0.2 Mb/s (Speednet, 2019). By comparison, the average internet speed for Sydney is 38 Mb/s. In addition to lack of access to high speed internet, the connection in regional and remote areas is often significantly more expensive, as fewer providers operate in regional areas, and those that do often only provide an 'off-net' service that is more expensive than metropolitan products.

Early signs of success in supporting our students

Student engagement has been proven to deliver positive outcomes for students, including persistence, satisfaction, achievement and academic success (Astin, 1984; Coates, 2005; Krause, 2005; Kahu & Nelson, 2018; Kuh, 2009; Thomas 2012; Trowler & Trowler, 2010). Kahu and Nelson (2018) introduced a framework to define four key mechanisms of student engagement; belonging, emotions, self-efficacy, and well-being. Aspects of this framework, specifically for mature-age distance learners, are discussed in more detail by Kahu (2014). The CUC has examined support mechanisms for our students through this framework. Aspects of student engagement for the CUC cohort have been measured by means of a student survey, collected at the end of each semester.

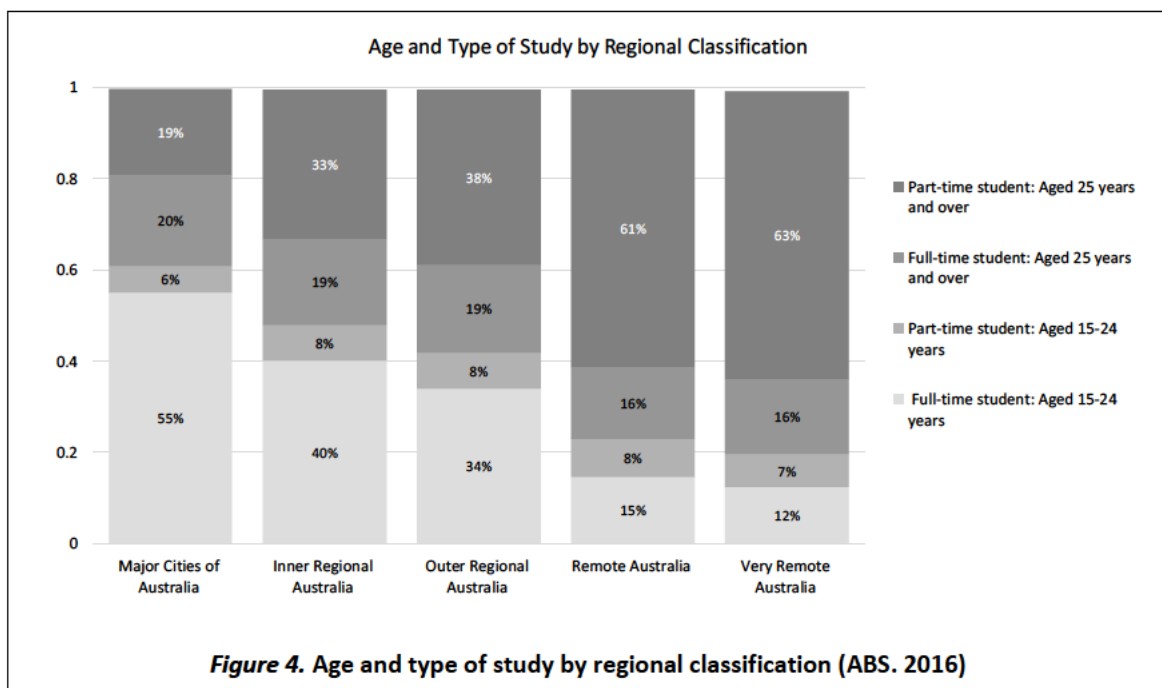
The student survey for Semester Two 2018 was completed by 143 students (approximately

49% of the student cohort). The survey was delivered online using Google Forms. The survey used Likert scales (based upon Quality Indicators for Learning and Teaching ([QILT] survey scales), multiple choice, or open text responses. The surveys were analysed by the CUC central team, including data validation and comparison to previous survey data. Testimonials were gathered from each surveyed student, and de-identified as appropriate. Questions around engagement were twinned to questions from the national QILT surveys, to allow comparison of CUC students to national averages.

Belonging

Sense of belonging is the first aspect of student engagement identified by Kahu and Nelson (2018). The sense of belonging is the student's subjective feelings of relatedness or connectedness to the institution, staff or other students (Thomas, 2012). Success for students transitioning into study can be facilitated through being a part of a learning community, and the sense of belonging that students feel because of this (Krause & Coates, 2008).

The presence of a CUC regional study hub in the community assists in bridging the socio-cultural gap between the student's existing environment and identity, and the university. Activities hosted by the centres, such as seminars and short-courses, assist in creating further connections between universities and the community. When surveyed about sense of belonging CUC students returned 81% positive results, compared to a QILT national average of 51%, and a QILT average for external, regional students of just 36% (Figure 5).



Kahu (2014) identified that student to student connections were the most important relationship in developing a sense of belonging for mature-aged external students. These students, who have busy lives, often with families and work commitments, may not seek a sense of belonging to the institution (Wyatt, 2011). When asked about opportunities to interact with local students, CUC students returned a 58% positive result, compared to the QILT national average of 56%, and a QILT external, regional student average of 21%.

The QILT results clearly show limited opportunities for regional students who are studying externally to interact with other local students, and a similarly low sense of belonging. The CUC facilities and staff create a learning community in regional areas, and opportunity for students to interact with other students. A testimonial from the most recent student survey summarises this:

[The best thing about the CUC is] ... the support from staff, connecting with other students in the same study situation. Before CUC I felt very isolated as an external uni student, it was hard for my family and friends to understand the demands of full-time external study so it was a breath of fresh air coming into the center [sic] and being welcomed and surrounded by people in the same situation!

Emotions

The second aspect of student engagement identified by Kahu and Nelson (2018) is academic emotions. In the context of the student engagement interface, positive emotions, such as interest in course content, led to motivation and enthusiasm, whereas negative emotions such as anxiety, boredom and frustration became significant barriers to learning and student engagement (see also Griffiths,

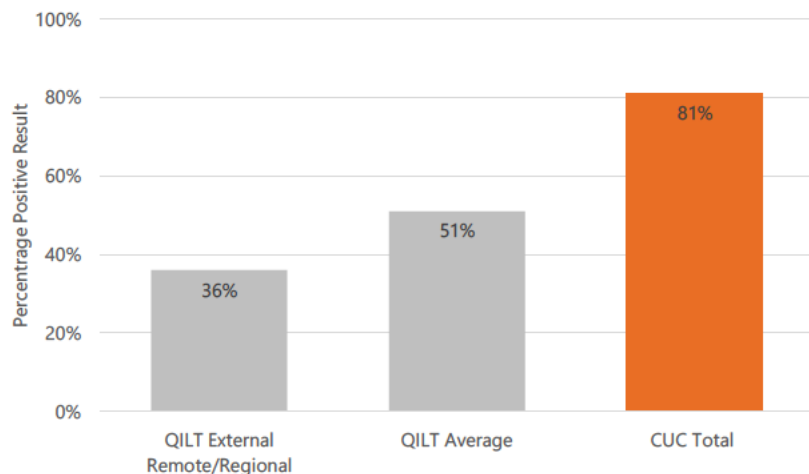


Figure 5. Sense of belonging, CUC survey results compared to QILT (QILT 2016)

Winstanley, & Gabriel 2005; Kahu 2014)). For the CUC cohort, frustration is often triggered by difficulties with technology, online university portals, and unfamiliar university administration processes or terminology. Unreliable or slow internet connections add to these frustrations:

... if the internet connection available is substandard (which it is where I live) the very method I am required to learn becomes the greatest frustration and hindrance on how well I can complete assignments.

The CUC tackles the issue of connectivity by providing a high-speed internet connection in every centre- typically 100 Mb/s symmetrical.

Anxieties and frustrations felt by students around navigating university portals or administration processes are addressed by support from the centre managers. A significant portion of this role includes assisting students in these tasks, especially for mature-aged students who may be new to study or returning after a significant break. Students were surveyed on receiving support to settle into study. The CUC students overall returned a 67%

positive result. The national QILT average was a 58% positive result, with a regional, external student average of 61%.

Self-efficacy

Self-efficacy is an individual's belief in their innate ability to achieve goals. Self-efficacious students are motivated and engaged in learning, which promotes confidence as learners. This motivation, engagement and confidence leads to academic success, which in turn, further increases engagement and confidence. Conversely, low self-efficacy can lead to reduced engagement and poor retention (Schunk & Mullen 2012). Kahu and Nelson (2018) suggest that self-efficacy may be one of the key mechanisms that could cause non-traditional students to be less engaged.

Self-efficacy is addressed by the CUC through student support from CUC staff, creating a learning environment where student-to-student interactions can take place and providing tools such as one on one tutoring to increase the student's academic capabilities and confidence in their abilities. The CUC student

survey (2018) revealed that 97% of CUC students felt the CUC helped to improve their academic results. This feeling of improvement is a positive signal that the CUC facilities, staff and learning environment positively contribute to student efficacy. Student testimonials further provided evidence:

Since joining CUC my grades have improved and I have maintained a distinction or higher. I have also been a lot happier in myself as I have a space where I can study, be supported and connect with other like-minded students in similar situations and this has motivated me to study.

An example of successful student support, addressing both negative emotions and self-efficacy, is presented through the case study of CUC Far West Student, Leise. This student is studying towards a Bachelor of Education by distance education, on a part-time basis. She is the first in her family to study at university level, over 25 years of age, and resides in a low SES region. She entered into study based on a previous qualification - a Diploma of Early Childhood. Her bachelor's degree is her first experience with online learning. During her first semester she experienced high levels of stress, difficulty coping with the workload and balancing study with life factors. She experienced diminished self-confidence through poor grades in first semester. Her academic issues included problems with structuring assignments and referencing, and difficulties navigating university portals. The CUC Far West Centre Manager and Academic Advisor were able to provide the student the following support:

- Assistance with study skills, including one-on-one tutoring;
- help navigating the university learning portal;
- assistance with planning, and discussing the number of units she may be able to practically take on each semester;

- pastoral care; and
- assistance in applying for extensions and special considerations where appropriate.

Leise improved her grades from almost failing in first semester and considering withdrawing from study, to gaining high-distinctions in second semester.

Student well-being

As discussed above, regional students cite financial difficulties, health or stress, workload difficulties and study/life balance as the most common reasons for considering leaving university early (Edwards & McMillian, 2015). For many regional students, attending university means relocation to a metropolitan area. In addition to the cost of relocation, there are increased costs of living (compared to regional areas), without the option available to many metropolitan students of reducing costs by residing in the parental home.

The CUC provides a supported study option for students who choose to remain in their regional town, whether for financial reasons, lifestyle, work or family commitments. These students can retain their existing support networks in their community, including family and friends. Additionally, centre managers can provide pastoral care to students and assist them in coordinating with further professional support such as counselling as required. A realistic understanding of study load can be vital for part-time students who are also balancing work and family commitments. Centre managers support students in understanding what this work load may be.

Conclusion

Regional study hubs have been demonstrated to improve student engagement for regional students facing high first-year attrition risk factors. For each of the four mechanisms of

engagement presented by Kahu and Nelson (2018) the CUC was able to improve student outcomes. Sense of belonging was facilitated by creating a space to encourage student-to-student connections, as well as hosting educationally purposeful activities at the CUC centres. CUC staff assisted students to resolve causes of frustration and anxiety through providing assistance with unfamiliar university processes and administrative tasks, and ensuring students are supported to settle into study. High-speed internet connections in the regional study hubs removed a further source of frustration for students where poor internet connections interfere with online study. Self-efficacy for students was improved through access to academic support and pastoral care. Student well-being was maintained by creating an opportunity for regional students to remain in their home towns, and retain their family, friendship and community support networks.

The CUC network provides a practical opportunity for regional students to remain in their home towns and still be successful in their studies. The facilities and support structures of the CUC and regional study hubs increase student engagement, which in turn will improve student retention and success. Further work will continue to monitor the impact of regional study hubs, including success in higher education, integrated workforce pathways and local high value jobs, and local academic and professional networks for regional towns.



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CUC Student Experience Survey



Summary of results
Semester One 2020

Introduction

The CUC operates at its best when we are responsive to the needs of our students. To create a regular channel for listening to our students, the CUC conducts a survey every six months. The aim of the survey is to inform areas of improvement in our delivery of service, and to document the impact of the CUC on our students. The CUC Student Experience Survey asks for feedback from student in six areas of our operations:

- General CUC
- Wrap around support
- Learning skills advisors
- Academic success
- Learning community
- Facilities and safety

The Sem I 2020 survey had 242 students complete the survey, out of a possible 760 students who registered with the centre. This is a 35% response rate, providing a representative sample size for results. Where possible questions have been twinned with national data to provide benchmarks for CUC performance. Other questions relate to key performance indicators, documenting early indications of progress in these areas. The results reported are “percent positive response”, calculated using the first two answers of a Likert scale with five possible answers, or where appropriate, a Likert scale with four possible answers.

Highlights:

91% of students believe the CUC has made it easier to stay, study or work in their community

90% of CUC students felt that using the CUC helped to improve their academic results.

87% are more likely to continue with their studies as a result of the help that they received from the CUC.



General

91% of students believe the CUC has made it easier to stay, study or work in their community

The CUC aims to provide opportunity, access and support for students to be able to study in their home community. The NSW Government has identified a key performance indicator of the CUC program to "support students to stay and work in their communities". It is hoped that this will enable our regional communities to retain higher proportions of young people and skilled professional workers. More than half of CUC students said that 'Being able to stay in my community to study' was one of the best aspects of the CUC.

[The best aspect of the CUC is] "Great facility with easy access and a non distracting environment to study; enabling me to stay and study in my community"

CUC Far West Student

98% of students are likely to recommend the CUC to others

This endorsement from our students is both a positive reflection upon the service and facilities of the CUC, but also an important tool to inform our communities about opportunities for studying higher education. Word of mouth remains the most common way that new students hear about the CUC and it also benefits aspiration building through positive local examples.

"The students at the centre inspired me to study"

CUC Goulburn Student

"The CUC is the most amazing facility for anybody that is studying externally. I have used the facility on many occasions and the ability to change my mindset to one of study and to utilise the quiet facilities that are ideal for studying. The staff provide support, workshops and are available to provide additional support when required. I am a passionate advocate of this centre and the service it provides and have recommended this facility to many people."

CUC Far West Student



Wrap around support and academic success

The CUC offers wrap around support to all our students. This includes support with general academic skills, university administration, technology, well-being and creating a learning community to facilitate peer-support. Our goals in the area of student support include: to "Support students to succeed at their studies" (NSW Gov KPI) and to "Increase in student achievement, efficacy, student engagement and progression" (VFFF KPI).

98% of students found our staff to be very or extremely helpful

The foundation of student support is to have a positive relationship with the CUC staff, including our Centre Managers and Learning Skills Advisors. Comments from students below capture the breadth of support offered by CUC staff.

"I would have not passed my HINQ100 if I had not had access to CUC Grafton and the girls, Mel and Kristen. My computer skills are extremely poor and they worked through each of my problems efficiently and with compassion"

CUC Clarence Valley Student

[The best thing about the CUC is] "The friendliness of the staff. Sometimes it's not academic support you need, it's a friendly face and a topical and casual conversation."

CUC Far West Student

The centre staff are all extremely welcoming, kind, helpful, generous, supportive and encouraging!

CUC Western Riverina Student

Nadine has been very welcoming and fosters a supportive environment which is also fun. Nadine always has time to help and I enjoy having a chat with her whenever I am at the centre.

CUC Snowy Monaro Student



84% of students received support to settle into study, if they needed it.

The first six weeks of study have been identified as a key risk period for students to drop out of study, particularly for our students who are new to study, or returning from a long break. Helping students to settle into study through this challenging period has been one of the student support goals across the CUC for 2020. The CUC team has been working to assist students to get organised, access the supports that are available to them, and understand the expectations of university study. A similar question on the national QILT surveys (2016) show that only 61% of regional online students indicated that they received support from their university to settle into study.

"This is the first Uni course I've ever undertaken as well as the first course online. Knowing we had this Centre in Griffith helped me decide to do it and the help that Erin gave me was invaluable. From my first enquiry to her help with the course choice to starting my study online she is really the reason it all fell into place."

CUC Western Riverina Student

"My one on one session gave me much clarity and direction as I am a brand new student and have not studied for many years and have never undertaken university study. The LSA was very encouraging, gave intelligent insight and helped me understand what I had enquired about."

CUC Clarence Valley Student

"This is my first semester, having only ever studied TAFE courses previously and I got distinctions in both of my subjects. I really believe this is due to the CUC support."

CUC Clarence Valley

90% of CUC students felt that using the CUC helped to improve their academic results.

This question is an important reflection of both academic achievements, as well as student confidence in their studies. We know that success in study is different for every student, with individual student stories showing some of these achievements:



"I have received my second Executive Deans Award and wholeheartedly believe that my results and success can be attributed to the support and help I receive from CUC staff."

CUC Goulburn Student

I returned to study with the expectation of getting pass results but because I have a dedicated study space and the support of Nadine I have been able to gain credits and distinctions providing me with a credit average.

CUC Snowy Monaro Student

"I received 2 distinctions, a credit and 3 high distinctions in assignments this semester and I think that is because of the CUC and the space it provides"

CUC Far West Student

"the only reason I got an HD is because of the help & support that I got from Penny & Bella"

CUC Goulburn Student

"I was able to achieve a couple of distinction marks, which I don't think I would have achieved without having a quiet and comfortable place to work, with the help and support of the CUC team. I feel much more focused and motivated at the center with no distractions or excuses. It's a home away from home!"

CUC Western Riverina Student

"I had a very difficult piece of assessment that I was incredibly nervous about. Just through utilising the CUC it greatly assisted my confidence and I received a good mark for it, which I feel strongly was improved through the support of my CUC "

CUC Goulburn Student

"Since joining CUC I feel that my results have improved quite a bit. Being able to spend time after work focusing on assignments and my studies in an area with 0 distractions has really helped me. Rather than at home, where I am surrounded by distractions!"

CUC North West Student



87% are more likely to continue with their studies as a result of the help that they received from the CUC.

"I would not have continued with my studies if I had not had access to CUC and the staff. I was always made to feel welcome. Nothing was ever a problem. This study is something I have wanted to do for many years and without the help and encouragement, I received I would not be continuing at UNE."

CUC Clarence Valley Student

93% of students who used the CUC stated that they were better able to focus on their studies due to the support and facilities of the CUC.

"Being able to utilize the workspace has allowed me to really focus mentally on 'study time' without distractions. Prior to utilizing the facilities, I was failing my courses. I now am doing really well in my courses."

CUC Far West Student

"CUC offers a place of a particular kind of excellent concentration where I can't find anywhere else in town. This facility has helped beyond words."

CUC Goulburn Student

"One of my assignments was awarded a Distinction and I have also received three Credits. I do not believe I could have achieved these results without the peace and quiet of the Centre."

CUC North West Student

"I got my first HD in one of my subjects and I think it was because I can concentrate better in the environment at CUC"

CUC Western Riverina Student



Learning Skills Advisors

Our Learning Skills Advisors (LSA) program was launched across the CUC network in March 2020. In the first semester of 2020 135 students, or 15% of our students, accessed a one-on-one session with their local LSA. 77 students who responded to the survey accessed our LSA services this semester, through workshops, one-on-one sessions or online content. Two questions around Learning Skills Advisors were twinned to the national QILT survey to benchmark our support against other regional students studying online.

89% of students who used the LSA program found their Learning Skills Advisor to be available

95% of students who used the LSA program found their Learning Skills Advisor to be helpful

We've strived throughout the design of the LSA program to ensure that support is available across evenings and weekends to accommodate our students who work or have caring responsibilities. Our dedicated team have gone above and beyond in being available to our students, especially during COVID-19 circumstances, and this is reflected in the student feedback. Comparable results from the QILT survey (2016) indicated that 68% of regional online students across Australia found their academic or learning advisors to be available. 66% of regional online students across Australia found their academic or learning advisors to be helpful.

[The CUC] provides valuable support to those of us studying externally and normally lack the support services our on-campus peers take for granted.

CUC Western Riverina Student

Students who worked with their learning skills advisor felt more confident and more motivated to tackle their studies. Comments from student show the positive relationship that student have developed with their local LSA, which has been especially important during the challenging circumstances that bushfires and COVID-19 have presented this year.

93% of students who worked with their LSA felt more motivated to tackle any aspect of their studies or their studies in general



88% of students who worked with their LSA felt more confident with any aspect of your studies or their studies in general

"One-on-one fantastic help with computer problems also emotional support when I was finding study just overwhelming due to Covid19."

CUC Clarence Valley Student

"I found the Learning Skills Advisor, Julia, to be extremely kind and helpful. She helped me learn how to structure my time and learn skills to write more effectively."

CUC North West Student

"The LSA was always available when I needed her to read assignments, recommend improvements and provide general advice whenever I needed it. They were also very supportive and understanding when I was under a lot of stress submitting last minute assignments."

CUC Western Riverina Student

"I was taught skills I thought I already had but didn't. Strategies I was taught to do with studying and exams has made me feel more confident in my studies."

CUC Goulburn Student

"the workshops provided are great. I feel like the one on one sessions really help me as I can ask questions and understand the assessment more in-depth. being able to have someone there to give you feedback really improved my ability to understand what is expected of me as a uni student."

CUC Western Riverina Student

Learning Community

Developing a sense of belonging and being part of a learning community can be critical component for students new to study to achieve success (Krauss and Coates 2008). The CUC works to foster a learning community for students where they can develop peer support networks and engage with other students in similar circumstances to themselves. This is



particularly important for our cohort of first in family students (49% of CUC students), who may not have access to additional support within their existing networks.

80% CUC students experienced a sense of belonging to the CUC

This question is aligned with the national QILT survey (2016), where only 36% of regional online across Australia students felt a sense of belonging to their university.

"I like being in a place where everyone is in the same situation as me and they "get" why I am frustrated, happy, sad etc. "

CUC North West Student

"It feels like a home away from home in a very supportive environment with unlimited options to utilise to improve your study."

CUC Clarence Valley Student

Kahu (2014) identified that student to student connections were the most important relationship in developing a sense of belonging for mature-aged external students. National QILT data (2016) shows that only 21% of regional online students had opportunities to interact with local students.

60% CUC Students felt they had been given opportunities to interact with local students

73% found opportunity to work in proximity to other students made it easier to feel motivated or supported in your studies

The CUC results in this area are reduced from previous surveys, and individual centres had significantly lower results than the average CUC result, suggesting this may be an area for improvement for the CUC in the future. It should be noted that COVID-19 arrangements significantly limited the student events and activities that the CUC has been able to run this semester.



It is a great environment to study in which allows me to really focus on the tasks I need to complete. Having other people there encourages me to study and also gives a sense of community.

CUC Western Riverina Student

"Having the opportunity to interact with both familiar and new students on a near-daily basis is a really great experience"

CUC Snowy Monaro

"I love the people: the students and staff."

CUC Snowy Monaro Student

"The CUC Far West does an amazing job of providing a campus-like experience to students studying remotely across many different institutions. It's unlikely that I would have met, and engaged with as many local university students if not for the centre. I find it hard to imagine what my off-campus student experience would be like without the CUC, but I know it wouldn't be as fulfilling. The CUC fills the gap that not having access to my actual university campus leaves."

CUC Far West Student

"Workshops were very helpful! I enjoy the group environment as I study externally online on my own."

CUC Far West Student

Facilities and safety

All questions around facilities returned outstanding responses from students, with at least 95% positive result for each of the questions around facilities and safety.

99% of students rated the quality of technology in the centre, including desktop computers, printing or video conferencing as Excellent or Good.

95% of students rated the quality of the internet connection in the Centre as Excellent or Good.



Each CUC centre offers students access to desktop computers, printers, scanners and video conferencing facilities. The internet connection in each centre is often the fastest internet available in our towns, with 100mpbs symmetrical connections available in each centre. A study earlier this year by Stone and Davis (2020) found that poor internet connectivity, whether because of location or financial constraints, can be prohibitive to being able to participate in university study.

"Having access to the centre has helped me progress through my degree as it's a quiet space, easily accessible, computers and high speed internet."

CUC Far West Student

[the best thing about the CUC is the] "internet access as I live in a black spot for the internet."

CUC Goulburn Student

The internet in our centres played a particularly important role during COVID-19 circumstances, with most university exams moving to online formats:

"I was anxious during the semester about sitting timed and/or proctored exams at home as a result of the COVID shutdown. The thought of failing a proctored exam as a result of my home internet dropping out concerned me greatly. The reopening of the centre during the trimester enabled me to focus on my studies rather than worrying about "what if", and enabled me to sit my exams in a less stressful environment. I was surprised at how comfortable I was with my statistics exam and am in no doubt the ability to sit my exams at the CUC Far West directly contributed to my exam success and grades of HD, D, and D."

CUC Far West Student

There have also been other unique reasons that our students have valued the dedicated study facilities provided by the CUC

"Over summer-Leeton in the summer reaches over 40 degrees, a temperature at which electronics start malfunctioning without sufficient air-conditioning, which we don't have at home. So CUC enabled me to study over summer and complete my assessments, which would not have been possible otherwise. These services are essential for supporting rural Australians to higher education."

CUC Western Riverina Student



99% of students rated the cleanliness of the centres as Excellent or Good.

A strong theme identified through previous CUC student experience surveys have shown that students value highly the cleanliness of our centres. Student comments in these surveys propose that the clean spaces created a "designated study sanctuary" for students.

CUC staff have paid particular attention to the cleanliness of Centres during the COVID-19 circumstances, with increased hygiene measures in place at all centres.

[The best thing about the CUC is that is it a] "clean, quiet space to study with lovely staff and other local students."

CUC Western Riverina Student

98% of students rated the quality of the study areas, common areas and amenities at the CUC Centre as Excellent or Good

Students were also asked about any improvements or changes to any aspects of the facilities or available technology they would like to see at the CUC. Unique recommendations have been made at each centre, without any significant trends emerging between or within centres. Individual responses recommended items such as additional comfortable chairs, larger desks and vending machines.

99% of students felt safe in their CUC Centre?

In addition to risk assessments and maintenance of safety at our centres, we feel it's important to also listen to our students and ensure that they feel safe in the CUC environment. During Sem I 2020 99% of students felt safe or extremely safe in the CUC Centres. One student who responded as feeling "unsafe" has indicated in the comments that additional security lights and cameras would be preferred for after-hours use of the centre. A new option for parking cars very close to an exit at the centre for students who use the centre late at night has been implemented to further address this concern. No concerns around COVID-19 risks to safety were raised by students, suggesting that sufficient hygiene and social distancing was implemented in all centres.



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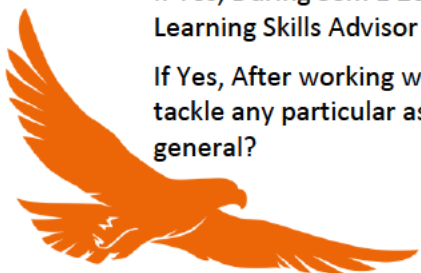
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Number of responses	All Centres 265	CUCCV 30	CUCG 42	CUCFW 71	CUCWR 68	CUCSM 28	CUCNW 26
Facilities							
Please rate the cleanliness of the CUC Centre facilities and amenities in Sem 1 2020	99%	100%	100%	100%	97%	95%	100%
Please rate the quality of the internet connection in the Centre	95%	96%	93%	100%	87%	96%	100%
Please rate the quality of technology in the centre, including desktop computers, printing or video conferencing etc	99%	100%	96%	98%	100%	100%	100%
Please rate the quality of the study areas, common areas and amenities at the CUC Centre	98%	96%	98%	98%	100%	96%	100%
How safe do you feel in the CUC Centre?	99%	100%	98%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Wrap Around Support							
How helpful did you find the CUC staff?	98%	100%	95%	98%	99%	100%	100%
If you needed it, to what extent did you receive support from CUC Staff to help you to settle into study	84%	70%	79%	83%	84%	95%	91%
Did you access any of the Learning Skills Advisor services this semester? This might include workshops, one-on-one sessions or online content	77 Students	7 students	10 students	25 Students	15 Students	8 Students	12 Students
If Yes, During Sem 1 2020, to what extent have you found your Learning Skills Advisor to be available?	89%	100%	90%	92%	80%	87%	92%
If Yes, During Sem 1 2020, to what extent have you found your Learning Skills Advisor to be helpful?	95%	100%	100%	96%	94%	88%	91%
If Yes, After working with your LSA, did you feel more motivated to tackle any particular aspect of your studies, or even your studies in general?	93%	86%	100%	96%	86%	100%	91%



If Yes, After working with your LSA, did you feel more confident with any particular aspect of your studies, or even your studies in general?

88% 86% 100% 92% 80% 75% 91%

Academic Success

I felt that using the CUC helped to improve my academic results

90% 80% 83% 98% 89% 85% 92%

I am more likely to continue with my studies as a result of the help I have had from the CUC

87% 85% 84% 88% 85% 95% 96%

I feel that I have been able to better focus on my studies due to the support and facilities of the CUC

93% 85% 87% 96% 95% 91% 100%

Learning Community

At the CUC Centre during Sem I 2020, to what extent have you experienced a sense of belonging to the CUC?

80% 65% 65% 89% 77% 86% 96%

At the CUC Centre during Sem I 2020, to what extent have you been given opportunities to interact with local students?

60% 46% 52% 63% 62% 47% 80%

Did having the opportunity to work in proximity to other students make it easier to feel motivated or supported in your studies?

73% 52% 56% 77% 79% 70% 96%

General

Has the CUC made it easier for you to stay, study or work in your community?

91% 85% 86% 93% 93% 96% 93%

How likely are you to recommend the CUC to others?

98% 100% 97% 99% 98% 100% 96%

