

# 2022



Country  
Universities  
Centre

OVENS MURRAY

## ANNUAL REPORT





Our mission is to provide regional people with the space and tools they need to create a vibrant and more prosperous future for themselves and their wider community.

We wish to acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land, the Taungurung, Wavereoo and Dhudhuroa, and Bpangerang people who walked these lands, where our sites are located, for generations. We pay our respects to elders past, present and emerging.

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# Message from the Chair

John Joyce

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On behalf of the CUC Ovens Murray Board, I am pleased to present the 2021-22 Annual Report.

CUC OM was established on the back of extraordinary vision and the enormous efforts of individuals within our region. The aim was to ensure a new model of university education delivery could occur across the 3 geographical sites of Wangaratta, Mansfield and Corryong in the far north east of the region.



The Rural City of Wangaratta (RCoW) highlighted in its 21/25 Council Plan an objective to: “Advocate for the provision and growth of locally available tertiary education opportunities that are in line with industry needs.” It then developed partnerships with Towong and Mansfield Councils and their communities to expand the vision and create 3 dedicated sites in the region.

The RCoW dedicated staffing resources to develop the initial application in conjunction with Charles Sturt University (CSU) and harnessed community input to progress the application to a successful outcome. After 3 years of hard work, we are now 12 months into the establishment phase of that vision.

From this initial work, the CUC OM has been formed and has established itself as a champion of education for the region, and the culmination of this work has seen the provision of a community facilities that are already making a considerable difference to regional students of higher education.

Many thanks need to go to Celeste Brockwell (RCoW Economic Development Director), Susan Benedyka (Chair of the inaugural working group to develop the application), Ilena Young from CSU and our local Federal member, Helen Haines MP, who advocated strongly for the project and the then Department of Education, Skills and Employment (DESE).

I must also acknowledge the support and guidance that we have received from CUC Central through many of its staff but particularly Duncan Taylor who has used his years of CUC experience to get us to this exciting phase of our development. I also wish to acknowledge the support and work that GOTAFE has provided in order to accommodate our Centre, at present in a temporary location but working hard to achieve our dedicated “home base”.



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Whilst CUC OM began in Semester One 2022, a board comprising independent directors has been working alongside the three councils, CUC Central and the Commonwealth Government since June 2021.

In order to comply with the obligations of the funding agreement, a company limited by guarantee was registered (9th Feb 2021), which was required to be governed by an independent board of directors. It is my privilege to chair this board, which comprises people of extraordinary wisdom, experience, insight and energy. Over the course of this reporting year, the board has established and implemented the appropriate mechanisms and tools of governance to ensure appropriate oversight. Our board has a primary responsibility to ensure that CUC OM operates in a manner that will provide a sustainable, high quality educational facility that is accessible and available to students now and into the future. In short, our goal is to provide our people with access to university education. To do this, the CUC OM Board has identified 5 key outcomes that we are strategically addressing: student success, regional impact, interconnectedness, local knowledge and sustainability.

We look forward to reporting our progress in these areas in the ensuing years. Finally, and in closing, I wish to recognise the outstanding efforts made by our Centre Manager, Mark Van Bergen. Mark's passion for education and advocacy for our students ensures that all those who come into our centre are supported to overcome any obstacles and barriers to their completion of studies. Mark and his teams' work has been integral to the success of CUC OM in its first year and has shown great skill in establishing his team and leading them towards our vision of

**"A local, safe space for lifelong learning, where individuals engage in higher education and gather to explore their interests while surrounded by people who support their learning."**



Mansfield



Wangaratta



Corryong

# Centre Managers Report

## Mark van Bergen

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I commenced my role as the inaugural Centre Manager of CUC Ovens Murray in October 2021 and what an amazing nine months it has been. I am pleased to report that CUC Ovens Murray has three sites open and supporting students in Corryong, Mansfield, Wangaratta and surrounds.



My key goals have been to establish functioning CUC sites in our three communities, which involved overseeing the roll out of equipment, security, technology and procedures to get the CUC facilities operational. This was not without its challenges post-covid of supply (both materials and personnel), and costs. The support of the Mansfield Adult Community Education Centre (MACE) led to the Mansfield site opening its doors first to students at the end of February. Our Corryong facility was partially operational from March, supporting students 3 days/week during office hours. The security system and access for students has now been installed, enabling student access from 7am to midnight, 7 days/week. Thanks to the Towong Shire Council for their support of the Corryong facility. The Wangaratta location followed in late April. With the generous support of GOTAFE, we were able to commence operations in an interim location, Building F at the Docker Street campus, whilst the re-design and re-tendering process at Cusack House continues. At the end of Semester One, we were supporting 21 students across the three sites. Already this semester we have surpassed that number.

Another key component in establishing the centres has been recruiting staff to support our regional students. We have been fortunate to have employed knowledgeable, supportive and community focused staff. We have six staff across our three locations, each bringing a wealth of experience and enthusiasm to their role. In Corryong and Mansfield, we have Education Coordinators providing that first port of call for students and establishing connections in the community, and we also have Learning Skills Advisors (LSA) that provide one-on-one academic support and workshops to students in Corryong and Mansfield. We have an LSA in Wangaratta and a Centre Administrator who provides administrative support across the three locations, as well as being the welcoming face in Wangaratta and holding the fort whilst I am out and about.

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Meeting people across North East Victoria and creating connections with a broad range of industries and community organisations has been a real highlight for me. It has been great to move from a concept that was 'coming soon', to a fully operational Country Universities Centre with three operational sites in the Ovens Murray. I look forward to further developing our relationships with schools, education providers, local businesses, industry bodies and community groups to support and create future opportunities that builds and retains our local talent.

We are thankful for the support and funding we receive from the Department of Education, Skills and Employment as part of the Regional University Centres program. We were excited to have received Federal funding for the Eastern Australia Regional University Centre Partnership in May, to nurture the aspirations of young people in regional communities to go to university. The Partnership is a collaboration of 25 universities and 16 Regional University Centres across Queensland, NSW, ACT and Victoria led by the CUC and the University of Technology Sydney (UTS).

The Project will utilise the Commonwealth funding to work on a coordinated, community-led approach to widening university participation and school outreach, partnering with local communities to co-design innovative programs that address their unique community challenges in nurturing local aspiration and supporting access to higher education. We are looking forward to working with local schools and communities on the co-design of outreach programs to widen participation in higher education in our communities.

Finally, thank you to the CUC-Ovens Murray Board of Directors (past and present) for their support and guidance in establishing the Country Universities Centre in the Ovens Murray. We look forward to developing our presence in the community and providing support to many more students in the coming years.





# Our Story

The Country Universities Centre's origins were in the establishment of the Cooma Universities Centre in 2013, designed to provide improved supported higher educational opportunities in that town of approximately 7,000 people.

In 2017, the NSW Government invited the Cooma Universities Centre to develop a proposal to expand its model of higher educational support to further regions in NSW. By the end of 2019 eight Country Universities Centres had been established across NSW. Since then, the CUC has continued to expand with the support of the Australian Government's Regional University Centre Program and NSW Government. In 2022, the CUC network has grown to include 13 Centres across Queensland, New South Wales, and Victoria.

We are driving change in regional education by empowering the Ovens Murray community to fulfil their potential through higher education. We opened our doors to students in 2022, creating local, safe spaces for lifelong learning in Wangaratta, Corryong and Mansfield. Where individuals gather to explore their interests and engage in higher education, surrounded by like-minded people who support them to remain curious.

## **What we do**

CUC Ovens Murray is a dedicated learning and study space that supports any student, studying any course, at any Australian university. Students can connect with like-minded people and engage in a learning community while they study locally. We are focused on supporting the academic success of students and ensuring they have the tools to succeed in their higher education journey.



**Alex Thompson**

Bachelor of Applied Science

Charles Sturt University



# Partners

Essential to the success of the CUC Ovens Murray has been the support of our partners, including the Commonwealth Government, university partners, local government and community partners.

## Government and Community



### Foundation for Regional Rural and Renewal (FRRR)

The FRRR is supporting the CUC through its not-for-profit fundraising account.



**Australian Government**  
**Department of Education**

### The Australian Government

The Australian Government is investing more than \$74 million to assist in the establishment and operation of community-owned, Regional University Centres at sites across regional Australia. CUC Ovens Murray is a successful recipient of the Commonwealth's Regional University Centres Program and gratefully acknowledges the support received to date.



### Vincent Fairfax Family Foundation

CUC Ovens Murray acknowledges and thanks the Vincent Fairfax Family Foundation (VFFF) for its support. Funding has been used alongside local Centre funds to support our successful Learning Skills Advisor to support CUC students.



### Country Education Foundation

Country Education Foundation (CEF) and CUC collaborate to create and promote opportunities for regional students in areas of education, increasing aspirations, and community engagement.



### Mansfield Adult Community Education (MACE)

CUC Ovens Murray is supported by MACE with a dedicated space within their facility in Mansfield.



### Goulburn Ovens Institute of TAFE (GOTAFE)

GOTAFE have provided the ongoing use of a facility located within the Docker Street campus.



### Towong Shire

Three modular buildings at the Corryong Innovation Space have been provided by the Towong Shire to accommodate the CUC Ovens Murray.



## University Partners

The CUC has formal partnerships with the following universities:

### University of New England (UNE)

As Australia's oldest provider of distance and online education, the expertise of UNE has been highly valued by the CUC. Sharing of knowledge between UNE Support Staff, CUC Centre Managers and LSAs has provided a valuable resource for CUC students and developed an enhanced understanding of the challenges online regional students face.

### CQUniversity

The CUC and CQUniversity have a shared mission in supporting regional students to succeed, irrespective of where they live. The university has been a close partner of the CUC since its establishment and continues to provide expertise and support to students across the CUC network.

### Charles Sturt University (CSU)

IN a collaboration between industry, community and university, the CUC is offering content specialised tutoring to assist CSU Bachelor of Nursing students registered with a CUC. The tutoring style is student-led, with students given the agency and flexibility to work with the tutor on the challenges they face in their personal learning. In 2022, CSU expanded their partnership with the CUC.

### University of Technology Sydney (UTS)

UTS have partnered with the CUC to develop the Regional Partnerships Project Pool Program (RPPPP). This program brings together 25 universities and 16 Regional University Centres to design tailored school outreach programmes for the local community.

### Federation University

This partnership provides the framework for future collaborations to share knowledge, expertise, and support students across the CUC network.

### University of Southern Queensland

The CUC and USQ have begun exploring ways to partner together to allow students to have broad access, choice, and flexibility in their higher education pursuits.

# CUC Ovens Murray Students

SEMESTER 1, 2022



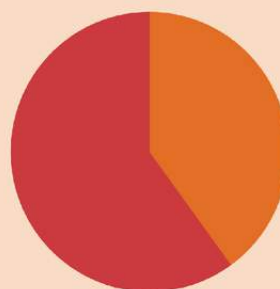
**60%**

are the first in their family to study

**9** different universities

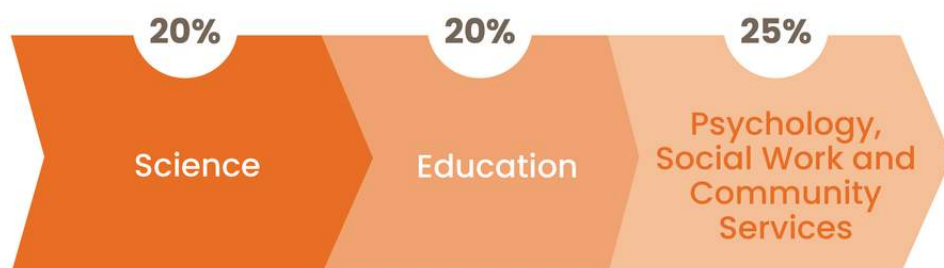


**60%**  
study full time

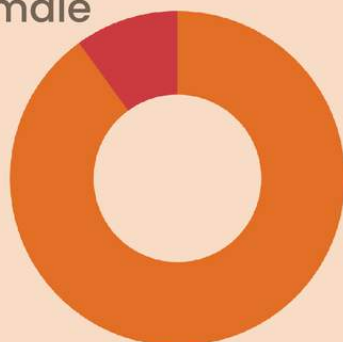


**40%**  
study part time

**TOP** Areas of Study



**10%**  
male



**90%**  
female



**90%**  
students are over the age of 25



# Student Support

## Here for our students

CUC students choose to study a diverse range of courses from over 40 different Australian universities. The CUC has responded to student needs and created an innovative model that can support any student, studying any course, at any Australian university.

The wrap-around model of student support provides face-to-face academic, wellbeing, technology, and administrative support in addition to what each student's university already provides.

These extra layers of support are crucial for many students who study with the CUC. Regional online students are often at greater risk of attrition. Many students are from low SES backgrounds, are the first in their family to attend university, or have caring and multiple other responsibilities. The CUC offers a free and welcoming place to study with flexible and personalised face-to-face support within a local learning community. This empowers students to enrol in the degree of their choice from any Australian university with the knowledge they will be supported locally.

The focus on face-to-face support provided by CUC staff is highly valued by students. In the 2022 Student Experience Survey, 92% of students indicated they are more likely to continue with their studies because of the help they received from the CUC, while 87% of CUC students experienced a sense of belonging to the CUC, and 99% of students found the staff to be very or extremely helpful.

CUC Ovens Murray supports students at all our sites, with the provision of Education Coordinators at Mansfield and Corryong locations and a Centre Manager and Centre Administrator in Wangaratta to support students registered with CUC-OM. Learning Skills Advisors are employed across the three sites, offering workshops and one-on-one academic support to students.

”

I can study from my home town of Mansfield with resources and support of a typical uni student rather than the isolation that occurs with online study.

”

Being able to study in the CUC space has given me the time away from the distractions I needed. The facilities available are amazing, and it's great to be able to feel confident studying online in a rural area.

# 2022 Year in Review

## A time for growth

We are very grateful for the fantastic support from various Ovens Murray organisations and the significant effort made by many people to make the Country Universities Centre Ovens Murray a reality.

## Key Milestones

- **February 2021**  
CUC Ovens Murray Ltd becomes a Registered Australian Company, Limited by guarantee. Received ACNC registration.
- **June 2021**  
Received signed Conditions of Grant.
- **September 2021**  
Inaugural AGM held.
- **October 2021**  
CUC Ovens Murray Centre Manager starts
- **February 2022**  
Recruitment of Centre staff.  
CUC Ovens Murray opens its Mansfield site.
- **March 2022**  
Recruitment of Learning Skills Advisors.  
CUC Ovens Murray partially open in Corryong.
- **April 2022**  
CUC Ovens Murray opens its Wangaratta site.
- **June 2022**  
CUC Ovens Murray fully operational in all three locations. 7am-midnight, 7 days/week







# Highlights of 2022

## Three sites open

CUC Ovens Murray is supporting students in the Mansfield, Corryong and Wangaratta communities.

## Community engagement

Dinner discussions, school visits and industry meetings across the region.

## Recruitment of staff

CUC-OM employs seven staff to support students and develop connections across our three communities.

## Supporting students

The main highlight has been supporting students from a range of institutions, courses and starting points.



# Celebrating our Students

## Our greatest achievements



**Kathryn Ruddick**  
**Master of Arts (Art in Public Space)**  
**RMIT**

"I was happy to learn about CUC in Mansfield. Whilst we have good internet at home, and great online support with RMIT, I think it's valuable to be able to meet other local higher education students. It helps to know we're not alone, so we can cheer each other on. Working in the same space helps sometimes with accountability. I really appreciate having professionals like Jane and Courtney to offer support if needed."



**Jessica Watson**  
**Bachelor of Occupational Therapy**  
**Charles Sturt University**

Jessica is a third year Occupation Therapy student who utilised the CUC Ovens Murray in Corryong during her eight week placement. Jessica used the centre afterhours to complete her assignments and use the video conferencing facilities to check in with her work placement supervisor regularly.

"The CUC provides me with the facilities to be able to do my studies as well as support for my uni assignments, in an accessible and welcoming environment."





# University of Central Australia Centre OVENS

[www.cucovensmurray.edu.au](http://www.cucovensmurray.edu.au)

Bringing degrees  
closer to rural and  
remote Australia



**Isabelle Cottrell**  
Bachelor of Medical  
Radiation Science  
(Diagnostic Imaging)  
Charles Sturt University



# Student Success

## Graduate Student Story



### Alicia Follett

**Bachelor of Psychological Science (Honours)**  
**Deakin University**

"My home internet is significantly impacted by tourist usage. The CUC centre gives me the confidence that I will be able to attend live lectures and supervision meetings, without connection issues or having to borrow office space from friends with businesses."


CUC Ovens Murray has been proud to support Alicia with her studies. She has been a regular visitor to the CUC-OM in Mansfield and we wish her well as she completes her final assessments.





# Community Engagement

Our community are our biggest supporters



The Centre has engaged with local industry, schools, and organisations. The success of this Centre depends on the support from our local community.

## Local schools

CUC Ovens Murray staff have engaged with the schools in our communities, meeting with principals' and key staff, as well as presenting to senior students and answering their questions about higher education. We are engaging schools through our Regional Partnerships Project Pool Program (RPPPP) grant, to co-design with universities and schools new and innovative programs to nurture aspirations for higher education. Staff have also attended careers fairs and information nights.

## Industry engagement

Industry engagement is high on our list of priorities. To spread the word about the Centre, our students, and the support we offer. To this end, the Centre has visited and hosted a number of key personnel from a range of industries from health, education, disability services, allied health, youth and family support, local government, employment support, early childhood, entrepreneurship, finance, agriculture support and tourism to name a few.

## Local organisations

The CUC Ovens Murray has established connections and partnered with a number of local organisations. The Centre Manager has joined and participates in the North East Careers network and the Benalla Future work steering committee. The CUC Ovens Murray has been visible and active in supporting community events across Corryong, Mansfield and Wangaratta.

# Bringing degrees closer to regional, rural and remote Australia.

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Ovens Murray

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