



Country
Universities
Centre
OVENS MURRAY

2025-2026
ANNUAL
REPORT

COUNTRY UNIVERSITIES CENTRE – OVENS MURRAY



We acknowledge Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders as the traditional custodians of all lands throughout Australia. We recognise and respect the connection to their land, cultural heritage and community, and we pay our respects to their Elders past, present, and emerging.

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Message from The Chair

On behalf of the CUC Ovens Murray Board, I am delighted to present the 2025-2026 Annual Report.

CUC Ovens Murray was established in 2021 through the enormous efforts of a group of committed people and agencies within our region, with the aim to make tertiary education more accessible through supported study hubs in Wangaratta, Corryong and Mansfield.

In just 4 years since opening in 2022, CUC Ovens Murray has assisted over 700 of our region's university and TAFE students to study in-place,

to find placements with local employers, and now we are seeing graduates take up local roles in our skilled workforce, many in areas of regional skill shortage in the health and education sectors.

I have been privileged to continue as Chair during 2026 and offer my deepest thanks to the skilled and generous individuals who have served on the board alongside me. During the year John Joyce and Erin Miskelly retired from the board. Special thanks to John who was the founding Chair. John stayed on to establish the risk and governance subcommittee and led the development of our new centres policy.

Jacqui Bramwell

Chair



The Board were very grateful for Erin's professional expertise in governance, and her work with us to develop our risk management framework.

We welcomed to the Board, Lynda Meredith from Mansfield and Trevor Hammersley from the Corryong region. Lynda and Trevor are both experienced board directors and they have generously opted to contribute their expertise to the risk and governance subcommittee.

Message from The Chair

We continue to build our key partnerships at each of our Centre locations and thank our key partners for their continued support. They are in Wangaratta, the Northern Victoria Institute of TAFE (GOTAFE) and Rural City of Wangaratta, Towong Shire in Corryong, and the Mansfield Adult Community Education (MACE) in Mansfield.

We thank Snowy Hydro for their continued support and welcome Gentari Solar for their support which enabled 4 student bursaries this year. The interest from our students in these was exceptionally strong, and the recipients all demonstrated how a bursary will assist them to complete their studies.

We are proud that CUC Ovens Murray is recognized by both CUC Central and the Federal Department of Education as a 'go to' example of an established Centre, one with a great track record of student support and success,

a CUC which engages with our local schools and builds aspiration in our young people to consider careers which require a university degree, and is recognized by RDA Hume as a key contributor to regional workforce development and uplift by growing our own professionals.

Thanks to the efforts and achievements of our Centre Manager, Mark van Bergen, and your team for your continued passion and commitment to students and tertiary education in our region.



CUC Ovens Murray - 2026 bursary recipients. Thanks to the generous support of Gentari Australia

A close-up portrait of a woman with short, wavy brown hair, wearing a black graduation cap and a red and black graduation gown. She is wearing blue-rimmed glasses and smiling at the camera. The background is a blurred outdoor setting with green foliage and a dark fence.

"The CUC was an absolute gem of a find and we are so lucky to have this space locally to study in. Having a quiet space away from the mayhem, job lists and interruptions of home was so appreciated."

Lauren Bittner
Master of Mental Health
La Trobe University

Centre Manager Report

The past year has been transformative for the Centre, marked by substantial growth with registrations surging.

We supported over 300 students in both semester two 2025 and semester one 2026, and visitations per month are also the highest they have been, with an additional 1800 student visits in 2025/26 compared with the previous 12 months. CUC Ovens Murray reached another milestone this year, now having had over 700 students register with us.

Across Corryong, Mansfield and Wangaratta, our centres are supported by an experienced and exceptional staff team. Positive feedback through the Student Experience Survey about our staff, along with strong student use of Learning Skills Advisor support throughout 2026, demonstrates the important role our staff play in helping regional students feel connected, capable and supported in their higher education journey.

Our successes in 2025/26 are a culmination of the dedication and support also of our Board, partners, community champions and the students who remain our strongest advocates. As local people supporting local students, we are building aspiration, participation and pathways into tertiary study, while helping to address regional workforce needs.

Mark van Bergen

Centre Manager



We have been able to continue to grow our 'Peak Pathways' with support from our university partners, La Trobe and RMIT, to deliver a campus visit and a STEM Roadshow to our partner schools in 2026. This will continue with funding extended through to the end of 2027.

Awareness of CUC Ovens Murray across our communities continues to strengthen, supported by the relationships we have built and the outcomes now being seen across the region. With several years of operation behind us, we can point to clear evidence of the difference the Centre is making for regional students and their communities.

I also wish to acknowledge the CUC Ovens Murray Board for its ongoing leadership, advice and commitment. Amazing staff that support students and their community. Most importantly, I commend our students, who inspire us with their determination to achieve their education goals.



CUC Network

(photo: Connor Ashley 2026)

Who We Are

The Country Universities Centre began with the establishment of the Cooma Universities Centre in 2013, created to offer enhanced, supported higher education opportunities in the regional town of Cooma, home to around 7,000 people.

CUC Ovens Murray is a dedicated learning and study space that supports any student, studying any course, at any Australian university or vocational education training provider. 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.

Strategic Plan 2024-27

Our Vision

A local space for lifelong learning, where people can engage in higher education, explore interests and remain curious in a supportive learning community.

Our Mission

Empowering our communities to realise higher education aspirations by bringing degrees closer.

Our Values

Equity

We believe everyone should have access to higher education regardless of where they choose to live or other life circumstances.

Respect

We acknowledge and respect individual differences, experiences and aspirations in our students, our team and our communities.

Learning

We create opportunities for regional students to develop their curiosities, skills and capabilities.

Inclusivity

We connect a community of learners, so everyone feels a shared sense of belonging in a safe and inclusive environment.

Goal 1 – Student Success

To enable student success within a safe and inviting environment.

Goal 2 – Regional Impact

To have a positive impact within our communities.

Goal 3 – Interconnectedness

To become interconnected with, and central to, our communities.

Goal 4 – Local Knowledge

Local community aspirations inform the development of CUC Ovens Murray.

Goal 5 – Growth

To deepen, diversify and enrich a culture of learning in the Ovens Murray region.



Top Highlights

Peak Pathways – Widening Participation

01

CUC Ovens Murray, in conjunction with our university partners RMIT and La Trobe, designed a coherent “Peak Pathways” branded series of activities that are engaging to students at upper primary/lower secondary. These in-school workshops allow age appropriate student exploration in small groups around individual strengths and interest and how this can connect with future study, local industries and employment, and career/job pathways. In 2025/26 our programs were delivered to over 1000 students across 15 schools in our region. We have strengthened our programs by building in a university campus visit to La Trobe Wodonga campus to students in the year following Peak Pathways activity delivery, to help ‘demystify’ university for students. We were also able to deliver a STEM Regional Roadshow to our Peak Pathways communities in June, thanks to our partnership with RMIT and support of Gentari Australia.

Career Seminars

02

With the support of local tertiary providers La Trobe University, Charles Sturt University and GOTAFE, CUC Ovens Murray held community Seminars on Education and Health.

These events gave current and prospective students an opportunity to hear about education and health pathways, what these roles really involve and what employers look for. It provided attendees with honest conversation and the chance to ask their own questions to the education providers, as well as key personnel from schools, council, hospitals and health services.

Students – more registrations, visitations and graduations

03

Student engagement continued to build strongly in Semester One 2026, with registrations at CUC Ovens Murray increasing by 22% compared with Semester One 2025. This is an excellent result for our region, reflecting the growing number of people being supported to access, participate in and complete higher education qualifications closer to home. Increased student usage and visitation also strengthens the sense of community within our study hubs and helps reduce the isolation that online study can sometimes bring. Student visitation reached a new milestone in March 2026, with more than 600 visits recorded across our study hubs in that month alone. Alongside this growth in registrations and visitation, student graduations demonstrate the lasting impact of CUC Ovens Murray in supporting learners to achieve their goals and contribute to their local communities.

2025/2026 Snapshot

When country people can access education that's genuinely fit for purpose, affordable, local, and on their own terms, they don't just build their own futures, they strengthen every part of the communities they call home.

305 Students

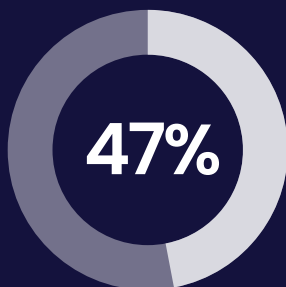
15+

Different areas
of study

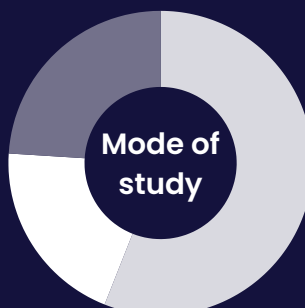
60+

Higher
Education
Providers

Top Areas of Study



are the first in
their family to
study



66% of students
study fully online
24% have mix of online
and on campus.
20% are on campus

52%
study
full
time



48%
study
part
time

1% non-binary

79%
female



20%
male



Student Services

With the support of their local CUC regional, rural and remote students can follow their dreams when it comes to study. The CUC has responded to student needs and created an innovative model that allows choice by supporting any student, studying any course, at any Australian Tertiary Education Provider.



The wrap-around model of student services provides face-to-face academic, wellbeing, technology, administrative support in a learning community 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 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 responsibilities and multiple other commitments. The CUC offers a free, safe and welcoming environment to study with flexible and personalised face-to-face support. The CUC understands that students are individuals that need a variety of services to meet their needs so that we meet students where they are in their education journey.

2025/26 Review

A time for growth

We are here for you

- 07 • July – Education Seminar held, networking event with local course providers and education leaders.
 - 08 • Aug – Peak Pathways expanded to include a university campus experience for students.
 - 09 • Sep – Mansfield Careers Expo organised by CUC Ovens Murray with over 200 students.
 - 10 • Oct – CUC Ovens Murray purchases a vehicle to support hub visits and outreach.
 - 11 • Nov – Peak Pathways program showcased at Widening Participation Forum in Canberra.
 - 12 • Dec – Gentari Australia fund four \$2,500 bursaries for students and the delivery of a STEM roadshow to our three communities.
-
- 01 • Jan – Upgrade to database, training and enhanced data collection and reporting.
 - 02 • Feb – CUC Ovens Murray attends numerous 'Open Day' events with partner institutions.
 - 03 • Mar – Four CUC Ovens Murray student bursaries granted from over 60 applications.
 - 04 • Apr – Widening Participation funding extension secured to continue Peak Pathways.
 - 05 • May – Health Careers Seminar held, networking event with local course providers and local health service leaders.
 - 06 • Jun – STEM Roadshow delivered to our three communities by the RMIT diversity in STEM team.



Student Experience Survey

The findings presented here reflect the experiences of students who completed the survey. With fewer than 10% of students participating, the results should not be considered representative of all CUC students. However, the consistency of themes across responses provides useful insight into the aspects of the CUC experience that participants value most and where further improvements may be possible.

Participating students told us that

Dedicated Study Space

was the main reason they attended their local CUC

"I am overwhelmed with the quality of the site's facilities, the fantastic staff - I honestly could not ask for more."

"The facilities are great for studying, and the staff are very approachable. The Learning Skills Adviser is invaluable."



Among survey participants, 97% reported they felt safe and welcomed at their CUC



The majority of survey respondents said the CUC helps improve their academic performance



Most respondents reported that the presence of a CUC makes it easier for me to stay, study or work in my community



A high proportion of respondents said the presence of a CUC contributed to their wellbeing

2025-2026 Alumni

Emily Landgren

Bachelor of Education
(Early Childhood)
Swinburne Online

Anne Willett

Bachelor of Early Childhood Education
Australian Catholic University

Thomas Mitten

Graduate Certificate in Project
Management
James Cook University

Lauren Bittner

Master of Mental Health
La Trobe University

Arisa Herry

Bachelor of Early Childhood Education
Australian Catholic University

Xander van Bergen

Bachelor of Science
Monash University

Hannah McLeod

Graduate Certificate in Addictive
Behaviours
Monash University

Kristal Byrne

Graduate Certificate in Midwifery
Diagnostics and Prescribing
Edith Cowan University

Jessie Polkinghorne

Bachelor of Nursing
Charles Sturt University

Siobhan McMahon

Diploma of Education
Southern Cross University

Patricia Milne

Bachelor of Arts (Fine Arts)
Curtin University

Hamish Buchan

Certificate III in Electrotechnology
GOTAFE Wangaratta

Karen Hemsley

Certificate IV in Training and
Assessment
CBD College

Kirsty Parsons

Master of Medical Sonography
Adelaide University

Jacinta Parmeter

Graduate Diploma in Psychology
University of New England

Melissa Land

Master of Psychology (Clinical)
Federation University

Government and Community Support

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

The Australian Government

Since 2018, the Australian Government has committed over \$210 million to assist in the establishment and operation of community-owned, Regional University Study Hubs at sites across regional Australia. CUC is a successful recipient of the Commonwealth Regional University Study Hubs Program and gratefully acknowledges the support received to date.

Northern Victoria Institute of TAFE

Providing the ongoing use of Building F located within the GOTAFE Docker Street Campus in Wangaratta.

Towong Shire Council

The three modular buildings at the Corryong Innovation Space are provided by the Towong Shire Council to accommodate CUC Ovens Murray.

Mansfield Adult Community Education (MACE)

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



University of New England

CUC and UNE have a revenue producing service level agreement to support UNE students. The partnership is focused on enhancing support for students studying with CUC, promoting and executing support activities, such as courses, conferences or lectures delivered through CUC centres and the exchange of research and other materials of common interest.

University of Technology Sydney

CUC and UTS have a revenue producing service level agreement to support UTS students. The partnership is focused on developing, supporting, and evaluating outreach and widening participation programs, and enhancing support for students studying with CUC.

Federation University

CUC and Federation University have a revenue producing service level agreement. CUC works with the Federation student support teams, including facilitating University visits to CUC centres, promotion of Federation events through CUC channels, and collaborating in the provision of quality and consistent service delivery to students.

La Trobe University

La Trobe University and the CUC have a revenue producing service level agreement to support La Trobe University students. The partnership is focused on increasing regional, rural and remote communities understanding of La Trobe University programs and pathways to widen participation, and to increase support for existing La Trobe University students studying with CUC. CUC Ovens Murray has also partnered with La Trobe University to design and deliver our 'Peak Pathways' Widening Participation program to schools across our region, which included campus visit to La Trobe University Wodonga in 2026.

RMIT University

CUC Ovens Murray has also partnered with RMIT University to design and deliver our 'Peak Pathways' Widening Participation program to schools across our region. RMIT led the evaluation of the program. The partnership also delivered a STEM Roadshow in 2026 to our three communities.



University Centre

2026

OVENS MURRAY

Bringing
degrees

"Having the CUC in my local town is incredibly important to me — I honestly don't know what I would do without it. It provides a welcoming and quiet study environment away from home, which makes a huge difference to my focus and motivation."

Emily Landgren
Bachelor of Education (Early Childhood)
Swinburne Online

adidas

Meet the Board



Jacqui Bramwell

- **Board Chair**
- Finance
- Strategy and Engagement
- Centre Manager performance/ops plan



Dr. Trudi Ryan

- **Deputy Chair**
- Strategy and Engagement Chair
- Centre Manager performance/ops plan



Melissa Watkin

- **Treasurer**
- Finance Chair



Prof. Kate Auty

- **Board Member**
- Governance and Risk



Georgina Ridley

- **Board Member**
- Strategy and Engagement



Lynda Meredith

- **Board Member**
- Governance and Risk Chair



Trevor Hammersley

- **Board Member**
- Governance and Risk

Departing Board Members



John Joyce
(March 2026)



Erin Miskelly
(May 2026)



Dr. Werner Vogels
(October 2025)



Drew Twigg
(October 2025)



Kylie Richards
(October 2025)

Get in touch

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