



Every Queensland
community deserves
to be a liveable one

11 April 2023

Professor Mary O’Kane AC
Chair, Australian Universities Accord Panel
Australian Government Department of Education

Dear Professor O’Kane

RE: LGAQ Submission – Australian Universities Accord Discussion Paper

The Local Government Association of Queensland (LGAQ), as the peak body for Queensland’s 77 councils, welcomes the opportunity to provide feedback to the Australian Universities Accord Panel regarding the challenges and opportunities facing the Australian higher education sector.

Overall, the LGAQ and Queensland councils support the intent of the Federal Government’s commitment to establish an Australian Universities Accord for driving better alignment between higher education and national needs.

Queensland councils are dedicated to improving the liveability of their local communities and that includes ensuring those communities have access to education and training opportunities to help grow and retain local workforces now and into the future.

Local leaders in Queensland believe that rural, remote and Indigenous communities deserve quality opportunities to pursue study opportunities without the need to relocate as people living in regional Queensland are less than half as likely to gain a bachelor qualification compared to their metropolitan counterparts.

Existing initiatives to improve higher education access have failed to increase the participation rates of regional Australians, which have remained stagnant at around 20 per cent for over 30 years.

These initiatives are often prescribed to regional communities by either government or universities, rather than being community owned, operated, and supported.

One such initiative, however, is proving to be a success and that is the rollout of Regional University Centres (RUCs).

RUCs have emerged as a key initiative to help support local communities to grow and retain skilled workers.

Supported by funding from the Federal Government, the centres are making a valuable contribution to regional Queensland communities by improving access to higher education.

The Country Universities Centre (CUC) - the body that has championed the rollout of RUCs across the country - has utilised funding under the Federal Government’s Regional University Centre Program to establish centres in Roma, St George and Dirranbandi with two more centres due to open in Cooktown and Mt Isa.



The CUC model is designed and developed by regional people for regional people and their communities to provide equitable access to higher education.

It is both a grassroots and agile model. Each centre is owned (often a repurposed council asset like a library etc.), governed, and driven by its local community through an independent Board of Directors.

This framework provides for place-based learning solutions. The CUC can respond quickly to the unique higher education challenges and needs of local communities. The RUC program's supports regional students to access tertiary education, to have more positive experiences during their studies, and to achieve positive post-graduation outcomes.

The RUC program has been shown in previous research to have success in supporting regional students to access tertiary education, to have more positive experiences during their studies, and achieve positive post-graduation outcomes. Improving the take up rate and the successful completion rate of education in regional, rural, and remote areas of Australia. Additionally, they are also supporting the supply of local labour into the very tight labour markets of many of the state's regions, where employers of all stripes – including state and local government agencies – are competing fiercely for workers in short supply.

Supporting and working with RUCs will be an important and effective strategy for the government to help ensure the flow of skilled staff needed to deliver key services locally. Local availability of tertiary education is highly effective in delivering labour supply in regions – research work conducted for the Regional Universities Network (RUN) found that seven out of 10 RUN graduates will go on to work in a regional area, compared to about two out of 10 graduates nationally.

Currently, the RUCs in regional Qld are supporting more than 500 students enrolled in tertiary studies. These 500 students represent an important contribution to the pipeline of local labour supply in regional Qld in the near to medium term – particularly in the towns where the RUCs are located.

Some 80 of these students are enrolled in Health courses (most of these courses being in Nursing and Midwifery), while there are also 40 students who are enrolled in Education courses – with the greatest number of these students studying Early Childhood and Primary Education.

The students in these courses represent a pipeline of workers who will be able to deliver services locally where there is high (and growing) demand – in the key sectors of Health Care and Social Assistance and Education and Training. The National Skills Commission projects that over the five years to 2025, these two sectors will account for the first and third-largest increases.

At the LGAQ's Annual Conference in 2022, councils from across the state voted overwhelmingly in favour of the LGAQ seeking a financial commitment from the Federal Government to support the establishment of more centres to cater for regional, rural and remote regions experiencing the need for retaining, developing, and attracting a skilled workforce.

The local place-based models RUCs provide are proving successful in not only stopping leakage of young workforces to capital cities but also in making regional communities more liveable while meeting the region's future workforce needs.

Regional and rural communities deserve quality opportunities to pursue their dreams without their community needing to relocate.

The desired outcome sought by councils in Queensland is for the Federal Government to invest and expand in the Regional University Centres Program's proven success. and to make a commitment to cater more for rural and remote regions tertiary education.



Providing improved access and conditions to those in communities who may be otherwise disadvantaged by their distance to complete higher education, vocational and further studies.

The LGAQ therefore strongly urges the Panel to consider the merits of the RUC program as part of its deliberations.

Should you require any further information, please do not hesitate to contact Nathan Ruhle – Acting Manager for the Intergovernmental Relations via email Nathan_Ruhle@lgaq.asn.au or telephone: (07) 3000 2261.

Your sincerely



Alison Smith

CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER
