

The background features a close-up photograph of yellow flowers, possibly daisies, with some in focus and others blurred. This image is overlaid with large, semi-transparent geometric shapes in orange, dark blue, and light grey. The orange shapes are primarily in the top-left and bottom-left corners, while the dark blue and light grey shapes are in the top-right and bottom-right corners respectively.

20

ANNUAL
REPORT

25



Country
Universities
Centre

BASS COAST

*"CUC lets me have a
community and an
environment to study
and be myself."*



**Grace, Undergraduate
Certificate in Teaching
Education Studies,
Curtin University**

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



Martin Keogh
Chair

It is with great pride that I present the Chair's Report for the 2024–2025 financial year. This has been a year of consolidation, growth, and increasing recognition of the vital role CUC plays in expanding higher education opportunities across our region.

The 2024–2025 year has been one of consolidation, growth, and increasing the profile of the Country University Centre (CUC) Bass Coast as a vital driver of regional higher education. In March, we proudly celebrated a milestone of 200 students, reflecting the strong and growing demand for supporting local students. Our vision remains clear — to provide a space where regional students feel supported, connected, and empowered to succeed without leaving their communities. This success is underpinned by our dedicated Centre Manager and team, whose tireless work in academic support, guidance, and student connection continues to strengthen our inclusive learning community.

The Board continues to uphold strong governance and extends sincere thanks to outgoing Director Jan Child and Treasurer Danny Luna for their dedicated service. We also warmly welcome Christian Stefani and Carolyn Simonds to the Board. Together with our staff, students, and partners, we remain committed to ensuring higher education is accessible and transformative for our region — fostering opportunity and growth for years to come.

Reaching 200 students is more than just a number—it affirms the heart of our mission. We've always believed in creating a space where regional students feel supported, connected, and empowered to succeed without leaving their communities. It means a great deal to us all to know that our care and commitment is making a meaningful difference in their lives."



Martin Keogh
Board Chair

Centre Manager Report



Sarah Bourke

Centre Manager

We are local people supporting students to remain in the region, promoting aspiration and participation in higher education to meet regional workforce needs.

This year, we proudly celebrated our fourth birthday — four years of growth in our learning community. Our journey has been shaped by the dedication of our Board, staff, students, and partners who have contributed to the success of CUC Bass Coast. Since opening in March 2021, we've supported 493 regional students in their pursuit of higher education, with 115 graduates achieving significant milestones in their academic and personal journeys. At the heart of these achievements remains our mission: to provide equitable access to higher education for people in our region. Our story is one of community. CUC Bass Coast is locally led and governed by an independent Board, proudly part of the broader Country University Centre Network. Each Centre is unique, embedded in its local context and designed to meet regional needs through place-based learning.

Fundamental to this mission is creating a space where students feel connected and supported. As local people supporting local students, we are building aspiration, participation, and pathways into higher education, while responding to regional workforce needs. We recognise the growing importance of pathway programs in supporting students to take their next steps — and we take pride in walking alongside each individual as they progress toward their goals. I wish to acknowledge the dedication of the CUC Bass Coast staff and student ambassadors, whose commitment ensures the Centre remains welcoming, professional, and student-centred. I also thank our Board for their support and leadership, and our community partners for their collaboration. Most importantly, I commend our students, who inspire us every day with their determination to achieve their educational goals.

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

Our Story Degrees Closer



CUC Bass Coast 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.

Since 2021, CUC Bass Coast has supported 493 students to achieve their higher education goals.

*"The the real beauty of a place like
CUC is it brings people together,
encouraging one another to further
themselves through higher education.
That sense of community is really
something special."*

Mary-Clare,
Current PhD Student,
Monash University

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

The Australian Government is investing more than \$150 million to assist in the establishment and operation of community-owned, Regional University Centres at sites across regional Australia. CUC is a successful recipient of the Commonwealth's Regional University Centres Program and gratefully acknowledges the support received to date.

Foundation for Regional Rural and Renewal (FRRR)

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

Partnerships: Government & Community

Partnerships

Federation University

The partnership centres on delivering Federation University's Bachelor of Nursing program locally, enabling students to study and complete placements without leaving the region. This collaboration directly responds to regional workforce needs in healthcare and provides an accessible tertiary pathway for local people.



South Gippsland Bass Coast Local Learning & Employment Network

The collaboration is centred on building aspiration, awareness, and access to higher education for young people across the Bass Coast and South Gippsland regions, including our annual scholarship guide, speed careers conversations and careers expos.

RPPPP Partner Universities

Partnerships with Swinburne University of Technology and the Australian Catholic University (ACU) have been instrumental in delivering the FutureBound program. Funded by the Regional Partnerships Project Pool Program (RPPPP), these universities have provided expertise, resources, and engagement opportunities for local tertiary pathways.



Bass Coast Health

Our partnership is aimed at strengthening local education and workforce pathways in the health sector, through placements, mentoring, and exposure to university-level health studies, creating clear pathways for students interested in nursing, allied health, and other medical fields.





The FutureBound program engages students from local schools in activities that demystify university life, build aspiration and encourage early career and pathway exploration.

"The earlier we can be having conversations with young people about potential career pathways the better. These pathways can help students find some purpose and set goals while developing skills into the future."
- Local Teacher

Widening Participation

FutureBound Program

The Regional Partnerships Project Pool Program (RPPPP) has provided valuable opportunities to address gaps in widening participation across regional, rural, and remote areas. Through this initiative, the Futurebound program has been developed to address accessibility to higher education pathways in our region the program helps to build student confidence, connect them with our student ambassadors and other role models to learn about being a regional student to understand the possibilities of tertiary study without leaving their community.

To date over 2200 students have participated in the program. At the heart of FutureBound's success is the engagement of student ambassadors as local role models, making higher education more visible, relevant, and achievable across Bass Coast and South Gippsland.



Here For Our Students

With the support of CUC regional, rural and remote students can follow their dreams when it comes to study. CUC Bass Coast continually responds to student needs, creating 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, digital literacy and 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 at our Centre.

Regional students are often at greater risk of attrition. Many students are the first in their family to attend university, or have caring responsibilities and multiple other commitments. We offer a free, safe and welcoming environment to study with flexible and personalised face-to-face support.

CUC Bass Coast understand that students are individuals that need a variety of services to support their needs so that we meet students where they are in their education journey. We have seen a significant increase in engagement in mentoring and academic literacy support sessions, reflecting our role not only as a place of study, but as a genuine learning community.

"The student ambassadors visiting today helped me gain a bit more knowledge on what I enjoy and got me thinking about what I might like to do in the future."
- Bass Coast College Student

Student Services



CUC Bass Coast Student Experience Survey

Key Findings

96%

of students felt safe and welcomed at CUC BC



said the presence of CUC BC makes it easier for me to stay, study or work in my community

89%

96%

said the CUC helps improve their academic performance



94%

said the presence of our Centre contributed to their wellbeing



“Feeling connected and part of a learning community”

was the main reason students attended their local CUC



Everyone is super helpful and kind. As soon as I walk in someone is saying hello and asking how my studies are going its a really positive environment

Current Student

This place makes me feel like i can do it. I love having a place that i can study with focus and without distractions.

Current Student





Year In Review

A Time For Growth

This year CUC Bass Coast strengthened its position as a leader in higher education in the region. More than 200 students from 41 universities engaged with the Centre, reflecting a strong demand for our local, supported study centre. The student cohort represented a diverse mix of school leavers, career changers, and mature learners, demonstrating the value of a community-based model that enables people to study close to home.

Partnerships remained central to CUC Bass Coast's success. Collaboration with schools, universities, TAFEs, local councils, and community organisations enhanced educational engagement and awareness of tertiary pathways. Through initiatives such as FutureBound and collaborative careers events, the Centre continued to raise aspiration and provide practical insights into university life. Engagement with local government and industry partners supported workforce development, particularly in the health, education, and care sectors, helping address critical regional skills needs.

Supported through the Regional Partnerships Project Pool Program (RPPPP), FutureBound expanded its reach, engaging more than 2,200 students across Bass Coast and South Gippsland. Delivered with Swinburne University, Australian Catholic University, and the South Gippsland Bass Coast Local Learning and Employment Network (SGBCLLEN). The program builds confidence, connects students with local role models, and shows that tertiary study is possible without leaving the community.

These achievements reflect a year of growth and meaningful impact, reinforcing CUC Bass Coast's vital role in creating accessible, locally supported higher education pathways.

Student Growth & Engagement

CUC Bass Coast continued to see strong student enrolments, with over 200 students registered across 41 universities. Students from diverse backgrounds, including school leavers, career changers, and mature learners, accessed our facilities, reaffirming the demand for regional study support. Engagement in workshops, mentoring, and academic literacy support sessions grew, reflecting the Centre's role not only as a place of study, but as a genuine learning community.

Community Partnerships

Our partnerships with local schools, universities, TAFEs, and community organisations have strengthened. Through programs such as Future Bound and collaborative careers events, we have worked to nurture aspiration and increase awareness of higher education pathways. We also deepened relationships with local government and industry, particularly in areas of workforce development, addressing regional shortages in health, education, and allied trades.

National and Regional Advocacy

The Centre contributed to the broader Country University Centre network's advocacy efforts, ensuring that the needs and voices of regional students were represented at both State and Federal levels. The recognition of Regional University Study Hubs within the Federal Government's higher education strategy continues to validate the model.

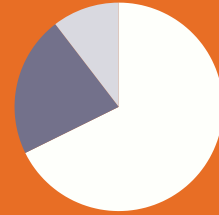


2025 Highlights

2025 SNAPSHOT



50%
are the first in
their family
to study



21%
postgrad

10%
tertiary
pathways

65%
undergrad

493 STUDENTS



40+
UNIVERSITIES
& NUHEPS

60%
study
full
time



40%
study
part
time

TOP AREAS OF STUDY

47%

Health

11%

**Psychology,
social work &
Community
Services**

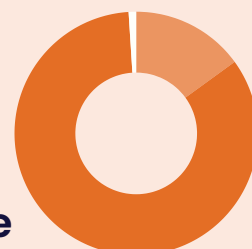
15%

Education

20+
different
areas of
study

1% non-binary

84%
female



15%
male

*"To have to go somewhere else
and find a place to live, rent and
still keep it together to get your
study done was quite challenging.
CUC has provided a calm,
accessible space that I'm able
to study and thrive in."*



**Simon,
Diploma of Counselling,
Australian Institute of
Professional Counsellors**

Celebrating Our Students

Our greatest achievements



Shanah

Bachelor of Primary Education
Curtin University

Currently studying a Bachelor of Primary Education, Shanah was inspired to become a teacher after working in Education Support at a specialist school. Now in her third semester and studying full-time, she juggles a very full house, with five kids at home all the time, and a blended family of nine. "It feels like a lot on a day-to-day basis, but looking back, it's gone really quickly," she said. "A friend told me the best thing he ever did was sign up at CUC, so I came straight here." And it's made all the difference. "I've met quite a few people here. Everyone is easy to talk to, and the staff are amazing — so nice and helpful. I've had help with a few assignments, and it's really improved my assessments. It's completely supportive and non-judgmental."

After beginning with a Certificate IV in Health Foundations, Shawn built up the confidence to pursue her dream of becoming a midwife. With the support of a government upskilling incentive and a scholarship through Bass Coast Health, she's been able to balance work, study, and family life — all while following her passion. "I love learning about the things I'm really interested in, and CUC is so positive and supportive. Everyone's friendly, and you're surrounded by like-minded people." Shawn says she always recommends "the big orange building" to anyone she knows who's studying, and she's already referred a few friends who've gone on to study too! From initially doubting her abilities, to becoming a role model for her kids and community, Shawn's story is a beautiful reminder to believe in yourself and never give up on your dreams.



Shawnté

**Graduate Certificate in Diabetes
Management and Education**
Flinders University

Celebrating Our Students

Our greatest achievements



Gabby

Graduate Certificate in Child and Adolescent Mental Health
Victoria University

After completing her Bachelor of Occupational Therapy at ACU, Gabby transitioned into mental health and went on to complete a Graduate Certificate in Mental Health. "CUC was a game changer for me," Gabby shares. "Studying 100% online while working full-time was tough at home, but CUC gave me a quiet, dedicated space with all the resources I needed. The buddy system and flexibility really set me up for success." When asked what her advice would be to others considering study, she said: "Explore online or mixed learning options and consider part-time study. Grad Certs are such an accessible way to grow professionally while balancing life and work." Gabby is currently studying a Graduate Certificate in Child and Adolescent Mental Health to further support her work.

After working in mental health and completing a Master of Counselling, Sophie noticed a rise in the complexity of mental health issues during COVID, along with limited local referral options. This inspired her to return to study a Bachelor of Psychological Sciences.

"I enjoyed learning about the whole discipline, scientific models and frameworks that I could put into practice." Soph says one of her biggest lessons was learning to trust the process, especially when things felt unfamiliar or challenging. When she moved to Bass Coast in 2019, Soph hadn't heard of CUC until a colleague mentioned it. "It was a physical space that I could just study, it meant that home was home and CUC was my dedicated study space."



Sophie

Bachelor of Psychological Science
Swinburne University

"One of the real values of a place like the CUC is that it provides choice and support for students to pursue their higher education journey from the region, without having to necessarily move away from home."

Rees

**Doctor of Philosophy PhD in
Media and Communications**
RMIT University



Growing up in Wonthaggi and a former student at Bass Coast College (formerly Wonthaggi Secondary College), Rees is an example of what's possible when students from regional communities are supported to pursue their passion. "Even though I've spent much of my career in Melbourne, the focus of my PhD was always the Bass Coast," said Rees. "It explored our connections to place, and how our communities, personal histories, and the land are deeply intertwined. Being able to research and write about this region while being here physically and having access to a dedicated study space at CUC was extremely helpful.

Rees encourages other regional students to embrace higher learning in whatever form it takes. "I got a huge amount of fulfilment and joy out of it," he said. "It was also a slog at times. But that's where the value of a place like CUC gave me a structure, framework, and a support network that kept me accountable and on track." Rees' story shows that learning doesn't have to stop after high school or an undergraduate degree. It also speaks to the broader mission of the CUC, which is to make higher education more accessible and viable for regional students, across all stages of life.

Kim

Master of Learning Intervention – Specific Learning Difficulties

University of Melbourne

After completing a Bachelor of Education (Primary), Kim returned to study to pursue a deep passion for supporting students with specific learning difficulties. Enrolling in the Master of Learning Intervention at the University of Melbourne allowed her to specialise in an area close to her heart. “I loved the content of my degree, and the practical placements were a real highlight,” Kim shared. Her learning journey began after taking a break from teaching to raise her young children. Studying part-time over three years, Kim balanced her family responsibilities while steadily working toward her goal.

“Graduating has given me the opportunity to re-enter the workforce with the qualifications to do what I love.” “CUC was a game changer for me! I had full-day weekend workshops, and it was hard for my husband to take the kids out for that long. The library was closed, and community spaces cost money. The breakout rooms at CUC were exactly what I needed.” When asked what advice she would give to others considering study in a rural or regional area, Kim says: “Higher education gives you opportunities and choices. If you have the capacity, it’s well worth it, and having a quiet, well-resourced facility like CUC makes it achievable.”



2025 ALUMNI

CUC BASS COAST

Carolyn Bailey

Certificate IV in Cyber Security
Homesglen Institute of TAFE

Greg Eddy

Graduate Certificate in Secondary Mathematics
Deakin University

Sandon Birt

Diploma of Nursing
TAFE Gippsland

Vicki Eddy

Graduate Certificate in Secondary Mathematics
Deakin University

Cassidy Bowman

Occupational Therapy
Federation University of Australia

Nanette Gale

Bachelor of Nursing
Federation University of Australia

Alex Burke

Nutrition and Sports Exercise Science
Deakin University

Emma Graham

Bachelor of Education (Early Childhood and Primary)
Federation University of Australia

Alex Charlton

Bachelor of Biomedical Science
Australian Catholic University

Meg Hynes

Bachelor of Science
Monash University

Leearna Couty

Bachelor of Food and Nutrition
La Trobe University

Elenor Kane-Di Paolo

Bachelor of Education (Secondary)
La Trobe University

Holly De Garis

Bachelor of Physiotherapy
Federation University of Australia

Marci Katz

Master of Teaching (Primary)
Curtin University



2025 ALUMNI

CUC BASS COAST

Alison Kent

Bachelor of Nursing

Federation University of Australia

Nikole Schellekens

Master of Mental Health

La Trobe University

Elisha Lindsay

Occupational Therapy

Federation University of Australia

Shawnte Smith

Graduate Diploma of Midwifery

Federation University of Australia

Issacc Milanovic

Bachelor of Nursing/Paramedicine

Australian Catholic University

Madeleine Stuchberry

Master of Arts

Deakin University

Michael Reda

Bachelor of Nursing

Federation University of Australia

Sophie Thorn

Bachelor of Psychological Science

Swinburne University of Technology

Danielle Rowe

Diploma of Nursing

TAFE Gippsland

Dylan Westaway

Doctor of Philosophy

Charles Sturt University

Simon Gilliland

Certificate III in Individual Support

TAFE Gippsland

David Binch

Certificate III in Individual Support

TAFE Gippsland

John Reid

Bachelor of Education (Primary)

Swinburne University of Technology



2025 ALUMNI

CUC BASS COAST

Edward Allis

Bachelor of Arts
Macquarie University

Eleanor Hammil

Bachelor of Occupational Therapy
Monash University

Gabby Bloch

Graduate Certificate in Mental Health
La Trobe University

Danielle Lorkin

Bachelor of Nursing
Federation University of Australia

Ella Chawckley

Bachelor of Occupational Therapy
Monash University

Kim Northover

**Master of Learning Intervention –
Specific Learning Difficulties**
University of Melbourne

Nicholas Gartland

Master of Forensic Behavioural Science
Swinburne University of Technology

Rees Quilford

PhD Media and Comms
RMIT University

Simone Green

Bachelor of Occupational Therapy
Monash University

Tanya Rererakis

Certificate IV in Design
Chisholm Institute

Kelly Hamilton

**Diploma in Sports Aquatics and
Recreation**
TAFENSW

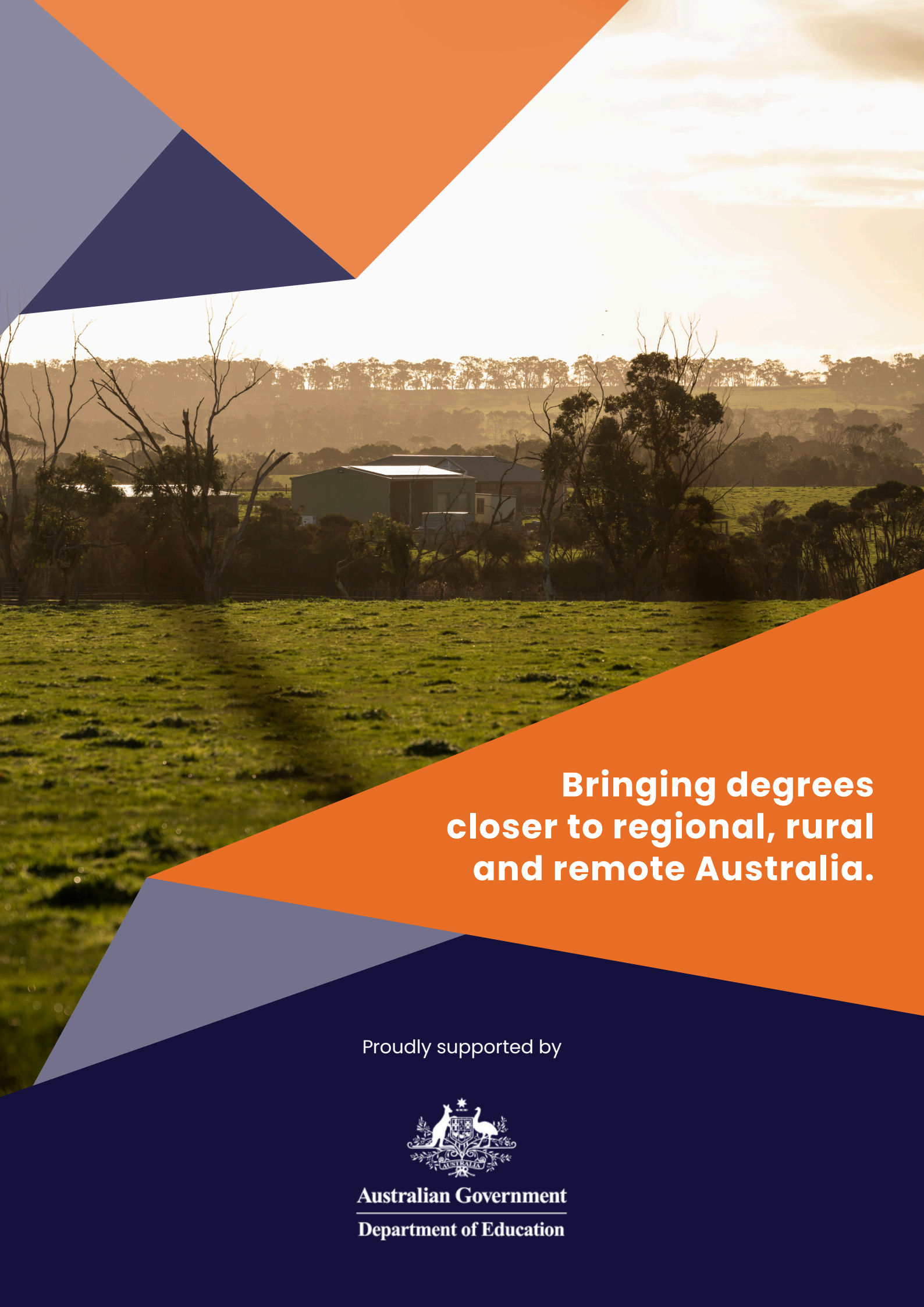
Bianca Wilson

Bachelor of Occupational Therapy
Monash University

"CUC provides a safe space to study where I can focus on my learning, feel comfortable and like I have the resources available to get my study done."



Ryan
Undergraduate Certificate in
Teaching Education Studies,
Curtin University



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closer to regional, rural
and remote Australia.**

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