



20

ANNUAL
REPORT

25



Country
Universities
Centre

SOUTHERN SHOALHAVEN



OUR VISION A vibrant place of learning

Where people of the Southern Shoalhaven access tertiary education to enable lifelong learning that expands knowledge, changes lives and builds community.

OUR PURPOSE Bringing degrees closer

Empowering local people and communities to succeed in education and realise their dreams.



Yaradban

to soar/fly over

By Murramarang Yuin Artist Leanne Brook, 2021

bundjanj dharanj bagandha murramarang yuwinjnggul
We remember we stand on Murramarang Yuin Country

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Message from The Chair



Libby Davies AM

The Country University Centre Southern Shoalhaven stands as a testament to the transformative power of education within our local community.

Here students experience an environment that expands knowledge, changes lives and strengthens community bonds.

It is an honour to be involved in the Centre's continuing development and growth, ably led by a committed and inspirational board and staff team.

Established with values that prioritise empowerment, inclusion and support to realise the goals of Belong, Illuminate, Connect and Grow, the Centre provides meaningful educational pathways, allowing individuals to pursue their aspirations without leaving their home region.

These guiding values find tangible expression in the thoughtfully designed space in Ulladulla, a dedicated place of learning equipped with advanced technology and robust support systems.

The Centre serves as a vital hub, facilitating learning and fostering connectivity with relevant tertiary institutions. It is more than just a physical facility, it is a place where local residents are empowered, feel connected and respected, and find a genuine sense of belonging. By addressing and reducing barriers to tertiary education, the Centre enables greater access and participation for all.

Reflecting the rich diversity of the Southern Shoalhaven region, the Centre welcomes students of all ages, genders, and backgrounds. It accommodates a wide range of study modes and disciplines, supporting learners from undergraduate through to postgraduate levels.

During the financial year 2024–2025, a total of 219 students registered and made active use of the Centre as they pursued their educational goals.

The achievements of these students are a source of great pride. However, such progress would not have been possible without the steadfast financial support from both the Federal and State governments, whose continued commitment ensures the ongoing journey of CUC Southern Shoalhaven. Appreciation is also extended to CUC Central for the ongoing support vital to advancing this national network of innovative tertiary learning hubs. We also acknowledge the centre's strategic academic and community partners whose input is invaluable to the centre's ongoing success.

Our strategic framework focuses our considered intent to ensure we identify the actions to deliver the outcomes to further realise our goals. Progress is evidenced in this report as is the resolve of governance and management to sustain the organisation into the future. CUC Southern Shoalhaven's operations are guided by expert and collaborative endeavours that exemplify best practice in governance and management.

In acknowledging the success of the Centre and its growth to date I pay tribute to the outstanding and inspirational work of the Board and staff team.

I particularly acknowledge and pay tribute to the immediate past Chair, Wayne Dedden and those from the Board who stepped down during the year, Violet Green and Gina Haddad. Wayne's outstanding leadership, his generous contribution of time and commitment, paved the way for the organisation to successfully position itself as a highly regarded and inspiring community asset within the Southern Shoalhaven. Gina and Violet assiduously contributed to strategic governance through perceptive and considered input to enhance discussion and decision making.

The contribution of the board members has strengthened the governance of CUCSS and helped to ensure a strong and viable organisation underpinned by a sound and effective strategic framework and evolving, well developed policy and practice.

As we move forward supported by an effective, hardworking and integral staff team ably led by our Centre Manager, Adam, and strengthening national network, I commend this Annual Report to those interested and involved in supporting and strengthening this critical, innovative model providing opportunity and access to support those in regional areas realise their educational aspirations and strengthen our regional communities.

Centre Manager Report



Adam Gowen

As Centre Manager of Country Universities Centre Southern Shoalhaven, I'm pleased to present our annual report for the 2024/2025 financial year, highlighting continued growth and community impact since our December 2021 opening.

STUDENT GROWTH & DEMOGRAPHICS

CUCSS maintained strong registration levels with 219 students registering in the 2024/2025 Financial year. Since inception over 350 unique students have been supported.

At the time of writing our student community includes 42% of students that are the first in their family to undertake university study, and 10% of our total student population identify as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people. Primary study areas remain Health (34%), Education (20%), and Psychology/Social Work/Community Services (17%), directly addressing critical needs in our local region.

KEY ACHIEVEMENTS

MyStrengths Program:

- The inaugural MyStrengths Program delivery achieved outstanding results engaging 200+ local Year 8 students.
- Program received excellent feedback from participants and community partners.
- Subsequent delivery in 2025 has now commenced.
- Exemplifies collaborative partnership success, involving UOW, ANU, UC, and numerous community partners.

Events:

- Maintained Wellness Wednesdays and Student Connect Seminars including Community of Practice events and 3 Minute Thesis presentations.
- Held the well attended Community Careers and Education Showcase and Parents Night initiatives.

Organisational Development:

- Comprehensive Team building and Values framework development work undertaken, resulting in enhanced team cohesion and organisational clarity.
- Staff retention stable, appreciation to Amy Lawry who has moved on to other work opportunities after three years of service.
- Ulladulla Local Aboriginal Land Council Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) in place and developed to include the Dhurga room naming project for finalisation in late 2025.
- MOU development with Business Milton Ulladulla (BMU) – Local business chamber.

CHALLENGES ADDRESSED

Student Wellbeing:

- Organisational and community support enhanced following the tragic passing of a student in 2024.
- Support included ongoing grief/postvention services and enhanced mental health resource promotion.

Operational Capacity:

- Growing demand has stretched physical and staffing resources, requiring careful resource management and planning

LOOKING FORWARD

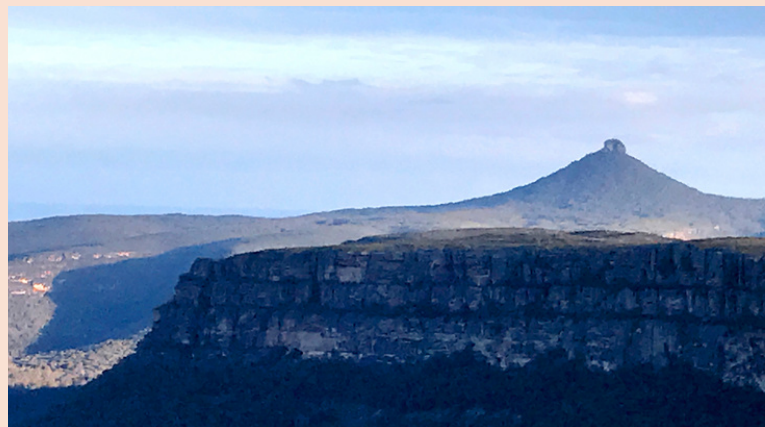
2026 priorities focus on sustainability planning, capacity building, partnership realisation, service enhancement, and Reconciliation Action Plan implementation. Ongoing projects include the Dhurga Language Room Naming Project and comprehensive marketing strategy rollout.

Acknowledgements

Our achievements reflect continued Australian and NSW Government support, our enduring affiliation with CUC Central, our dedicated university and community partnerships, and exceptional staff and board commitment. Special recognition goes to our outgoing inaugural Chair Wayne Dedden for his years of exemplary service and unquenchable passion.

CUC Southern Shoalhaven has demonstrated resilience and growth throughout 2025. Despite challenges, we've maintained increasing student numbers, expanded community engagement and delivered high-quality services. Our commitment to empowering local communities through supporting access to higher education remains unwavering.

With strong partnerships, dedicated staff, and continued government support, we're well-positioned to meet evolving community needs and to make an ongoing positive contribution to the development of our region.



2025 SNAPSHOT



42%

are the first in
their family
to study at
University level



10%

of students identify
as Aboriginal
and/or Torres
Straight Islander

219 STUDENTS



50+

Universities
& Non-University
Higher Education
Providers

54%
study
full
time



46%
study
part
time

TOP AREAS OF STUDY

34%

Health

20%

Education

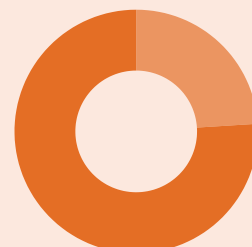
17%

Psychology,
social work &
Community
Services

15⁺

different
areas of
study

76%
female



24%
male

The Country Universities Centre model 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.

Our Story Degrees Closer



CUC Southern Shoalhaven 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.

A woman with long brown hair, wearing a brown short-sleeved button-down dress, is smiling and standing in a modern office environment. She has her left hand on her hip. The background shows large windows, indoor plants, and office furniture. The image is framed by orange and dark blue geometric shapes in the corners.

"I have become increasingly confident in speaking up and I know that my ideas are valued at CUC. "

Amanda Telley
Bachelor of Education
University of New England

OUR CORE VALUES

Empowerment

We exist to empower local people to reach their full potential

Connection

We continually seek opportunities to nurture relationships & collaboration

Equity

We break down barriers to education, providing fair and just opportunities for our community

Respect

We lead with compassion and integrity, considering all perspectives with empathy and understanding

Belonging

We create space where people feel safe and welcome



The success of this Centre depends on the support from our local community.

The Centre has engaged with local industry, schools, and organisations at events throughout the year.



MOU Signing – September 2024

Ulladulla Local Aboriginal Land Council CEO Leanne Brook attended to sign the MOU with CUCSS Board Member Paul Goodwin, and CUCSS Centre Manager Adam Gowen. Students, CUCSS partners and community attended. Student feedback thanked CUCSS staff for the opportunity to participate in events like this, that were informative and an experience they had not had before, with First Nations representatives from the local community.



Parents Open Night – June 2025

We partnered with Ulladulla High School (UHS), to create an event just for parents of UHS students. Catering was provided by a local business and a total of 60 parents registered and attended the night. There were stalls from the Australian Defence Force & Regional Defence Network, TAFE NSW, Macquarie University – Walanga Muru, UOW, UC, ANU, Charles Sturt, University of New England & Shoalhaven Education Fund.

UHS Careers Expo – June 2025

CUCSS had 3 staff on the planning committee of this event in partnership with Ulladulla High School, and around 10 other local community organisations. On the event day we had a stall where mentors and staff lead conversations with students on strengths and values and their importance for career pathways.

Community Engagement Events

"I would like to take this opportunity to give you and your fellow workers some positive feedback.

I attended the very first open night at the Country Universities Centre (CUC) Ulladulla on Wednesday 4th June 2025 and found it very informative and useful as I assist my daughter who is entering her final years of schooling next year.

I think that these open nights are crucial in spreading the word of what you can provide and with your continued commitment in supporting the people and students of this town is highly commendable.

I hope that with positive feedback like this, that there is an opportunity for the CUC and staff to conduct one of these nights at least once a year in Ulladulla.

Keep up the good work and thank you for allowing me to leave you this feedback."

-Ulladulla High School Parent

Community Events We Attended:



Ngulla NAIDOC Festival – July 2024

CUCSS assisted Walking Together with the planning, and delivery of this event with staff present at the event assisting with logistics. Staff attended numerous planning sessions, and hosted some of them at our Centre. CUCSS also donated the cost of the event flyers, and assisted with distribution of these.

UHS Graduation and Awards Ceremony – December 2024

Adam presented our scholarship award, and Sophie attended in support of students.



Business Milton Ulladulla Networking Events – Year Round

We attended many lunches & breakfasts across the year that both Adam and Sophie have attended for networking and promoting events we are a part of.

Milton Show – March 2025

CUCSS Staff attended and spent the day participating in activities and talking to community members and organisations present.

Here For Our Students

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.



Student Community

During the 24/25 financial year, our Community Engagement Officer Sophie Linehan has facilitated 24 events attracting participation from over 70 students in activities focussed on networking, wellbeing and community engagement. Students adapted to the new event format and demonstrated leadership by planning and presenting their own events, sharing their insights and expertise. Through these experiences they enhanced their presentation and networking skills while building new relationships and lasting memories.

Our online student community Link.Tree had over four thousand clicks, indicating a high traffic usage of student engagement with information on student events and support services for our Centre. Our online booking platform was launched in August 2024, and students can now view study room availability online and can book their study sessions with ease and peace of mind. Students now have online and in person resources, tailored to life as a regional student in the Southern Shoalhaven, and interactive social media updates to keep them informed.

Students have more opportunities to participate in our local community through networking events in and out of the Centre, making important connections for life beyond study. We hear many students express the importance of this Centre for social connection and belonging, through events with each other, universities, the local high school and local organisations. Not only have we helped students develop their own unique community, but we have also connected them to important relationships to further assist their studies and careers.



LSA With Dr. Brendan Riddick

The Learning Skills Advisor (LSA) Sessions have continued to grow during the last 12 months. There are an increasing number of students booking appointments and it is becoming increasingly common for students to book regular, sometimes weekly sessions. Students booking online appointments either via email or using MS Teams have also remained constant this year. This is important for students who cannot physically attend the centre on Tuesdays or Wednesdays. The overall profile and visibility of the LSA services at the centre has grown significantly over the last 12 months and we anticipate that this trend will continue.



Joby Hendriks

Tertiary Preparation
University of Canberra

Getting into University would've been far more tricky had it not been for UC prep as I never got my high school certificate.

I hope to be able to go into a contemporary music course in a University down in Melbourne and make my way into the music industry.

This centre has assisted me a lot as I've studied for upcoming assignments, received help from Brendan Riddick (Learning Skills Advisor) with an essay, as well as using the wifi for music networking.

It's a relaxed atmosphere with helpful staff and the facilities are exceptional. I'm excited to see what the future will bring.

MyStrengths Program

MyStrengths is CUCSS's widening participation program, launched in partnership with Ulladulla High School in 2024. MyStrengths empowers Year 8 students with knowledge about their individual strengths and personal values through sharing stories and building relationships with local people from our community, well supported by project manager Carly McTavish.

In the 2024-25 Year, MyStrengths:

- Empowered 204 Year 8 Students with knowledge about their personal strengths and values.
- Provided 15 local university students with meaningful work opportunities as Mentors
- Partnered with 16 local organisations and businesses.
- Hosted Year 8 at 8 face-to-face program sessions
- Partnered with 3 universities.

The Outcomes:

- After participating in the MyStrengths Program, there was a 20% increase in Year 8 students who strongly agreed with the statement "I'm aware of the study or employment pathways I need to take to reach my future goals"
- After completing the MyStrengths program, confidence in understanding personal values more than doubled for half of the Year 8 cohort.
- Students who 'strongly agreed' and 'agreed' with the statement "I feel confident making career and study related decisions" increased by 17% after participating in the MyStrengths Program.

MyStrengths via Eastern Australian Regional University Centre Partnership, (EARUCP) is funded through the Regional Partnerships Project Pool Program (RPPPP); an initiative of the Australian Government Department of Education. EARUCP is co-led by UTS and CUC Central, in partnership with Universities and Regional University Centres across Queensland, Victoria, ACT and New South Wales. EARUCP values meaningful, sustainable partnerships and reciprocal knowledge exchange between Regional University Centres, Universities and regional and remote communities.



"My 14-year-old son had never considered university before his first MyStrengths session. He and his (tradesman) dad would always make fun of me studying for my degree – uni wasn't something my son wanted to be associated with. But after meeting one of your uni student mentors Tom, my son now has a new goal of going to uni to become an electrical engineer.

Tom went to Ulladulla High and was someone that my son could relate to, which broke down those barriers for him and changed his impression of a university student."

– Bachelor of Business student, CUCSS & parent to MyStrengths participant.



"MyStrengths has empowered my 14-year-old daughter to better understand herself. She brings her values into so many facets of her life now, especially when faced with difficult decision making.

She has been navigating tricky relationships with peers and moving on from situations where she has found they don't align with her own values. This has enabled confidence led decisions and better outcomes for her rather than avoidance or social compliance resulting in feelings of isolation and anxiety. "

– Parent of MyStrengths participant.

**Thank you to our university partners for their support of the
MyStrengths Program.**



Australian
National
University



UNIVERSITY OF
CANBERRA



UNIVERSITY
OF WOLLONGONG
AUSTRALIA

Our Social Enterprise



The Hive: Flexible Workspace

Income for The Hive in the 24/25 financial year was over \$39,000, achieving a 49.3% increase in revenue from the previous financial year, and an 80% growth in clients, and 589% growth in bookings. We currently maintain a 5-star rating on google reviews and have one permanent client. Our Hive clients are included in our community events, connecting organisations to our students and local community. This income stream supplements government funding to enhance the ongoing sustainability of the Centre.



Essential to the success of the CUCSS has been the support of our partners, including the Commonwealth and State Governments, university partners, 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. CUCSS is a successful recipient of the Commonwealth's Regional University Centres Program and gratefully acknowledges the support received to date.

NSW Government

The NSW Government has supported the CUC Network through multiple funding grants exceeding \$18 million, which has facilitated its successful expansion. The NSW Government's Higher Education Strategy focuses on increasing participation in higher education, CUCSS is proud to assist the government to achieve this by supporting people in our region to pursue higher education in their local community.

Foundation for Regional Rural and Renewal (FRRR)

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

Partnerships: Government & Community

Partnerships: Universities & Institutions

Facilitated through our affiliation with CUC Central

University of Technology Sydney (UTS)

A strong relationship built on shared widening participation and equity goals, with collaboration central to the EARUCP program.

University of New England (UNE)

Ongoing collaboration to support regional, rural, and remote students in their higher education journeys, building on UNE's long history as a leader in distance and online education.

Federation University

A committed partner working alongside Centres to deliver outstanding services for students in their communities.

La Trobe University

Collaborating under a five-year Regional Growth and Innovation Strategy to increase the number of regional students studying on campus, in hybrid mode, and online.

Open Universities Australia (OUA)

Sharing a commitment to supporting online students in regional, rural, and remote areas, formalised through an MOU between CUC Central and OUA. OUA has invested in staff training and development to help students identify the best pathways for their future learning



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Auditor's Report

CUC SOUTHERNSHOALHAVEN LTD

For the year ended 30 June 2025

Opinion

We have audited the accompanying financial report, being a special purpose financial report, of CUC SOUTHERN SHOALHAVEN LTD (the company), which comprises the assets and liabilities statement as at 30 June 2025, the income and expenditure statement for the year then ended, notes comprising a summary of significant accounting policies and other explanatory information, and the certification by directors.

In our opinion, the accompanying financial report of CUC SOUTHERN SHOALHAVEN LTD, is in accordance with *Division 60 of the Australian Charities and Not for profits Commission Act 2012*; including:

(i) Giving a true and fair view of the registered entity's financial position as at 30 June 2025 and of its financial performance for the year then ended:

(ii) Comply with Australian Accounting Standards to the extent described in Note 1 and *Division 60 of the Australian Charities and Not - for Profit Commission regulation 2013*.

Basis For Opinion

We have conducted our audit in accordance with Australian Auditing Standards. Those standards require that we comply with relevant ethical requirements relating to audit engagements and plan and perform the audit to obtain reasonable assurance whether the financial report is free from material misstatement. An audit involves performing procedures to obtain audit evidence about the amounts and disclosures in the financial report. The procedures selected depend on the auditor's judgment, including the assessment of the risks of material misstatement of the financial report, whether due to fraud or error. In making those risk assessments, the auditor considers internal control relevant to the association's preparation and fair presentation of the financial report, in order to design audit procedures that are appropriate in the circumstances, but not for the purpose of expressing an opinion on the effectiveness of the association's internal control. An audit also includes evaluating the appropriateness of accounting policies used and the reasonableness of accounting estimates made by the committee, as well as evaluating the overall presentation of the financial report. We believe that the audit evidence we have obtained is sufficient and appropriate to provide a basis for our audit opinion.

Liability limited by a scheme approved under Professional Standards Legislation.

Any advice given is taxation advice only and is not and should not be taken as financial or legal advice.

If you require these services, we would be pleased to put you in contact with the relevant professional.

Ulladulla • Batemans Bay • Moruya • Sydney

John C Nevin
CA, B.Bus
(Acc/Mkt), Grad
Dip(ICAA),
Dip FP, JP
Director

Carl Roklitzer
B.Com(Acc)
Dip FP
Director

Matt Bryant
CA, B.Com(Acc)
Director

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SMSF
Administration
& Auditors

Financial
Reporting

Business
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Director's Responsibility for the Financial Report

The Board of Directors of CUC SOUTHERN SHOALHAVEN LTD are responsible for the preparation and fair presentation of the financial report, and have determined that the basis of preparation described in Note 1 is appropriate to meet the requirements of the ACNC Act and the Company's constitution. The directors' responsibility also includes such internal control as the board determines is necessary to enable the preparation and fair presentation of a financial report that is free from material misstatement, whether due to fraud or error.

John Nevin

Office 1, 134 Princes Highway, Ulladulla, NSW, 2539

Dated: 15/09/2025

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NOTES





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closer to regional, rural
and remote Australia.**

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Department of Education

