**REPORT:**

Geraldton Universities Centre:
Australia's first community initiated
regional study hub for
initial teacher education

# Partnerships
# with Community

*Key insights into the unique
opportunities and inherent challenges
of students as pre-service teachers,
tutors and community members
associated with a regional study hub.*

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## Executive summary

This report provides key insights into the unique opportunities and inherent challenges of students undertaking an Initial Teacher Education program in regional Western Australia. The report focuses on a unique partnership between a community initiated universities centre and a regional interstate university. The Geraldton Universities Centre and CQUniversity have been in partnership since 2012. The key partnership objective is to develop teachers for the community and the region.

The research project was granted approval from the CQUniversity Human Research Ethics Committee. The research presented in this report draws on demographic statistics, archival data and responses from interviews with pre-service teachers, university tutors, community members and graduates. A qualitative case study approach was used within the research so that the researchers could examine the realities of delivering initial teacher education through the universities centre model.

Key findings of the research include:

- Participation rates in initial teacher education are growing within the Geraldton region, meaning that increased professional capabilities will benefit the region's schools and the children and young people who attend those schools.
- The support structures that are embedded within the Geraldton Universities Centre model enables students to succeed more so than if they were studying via the traditional distance mode.
- The Geraldton Universities Centre is graduating teachers from the community for the community. Graduates are teachers who understand the uniqueness of the region and its people.
- Professional capability within the localised schooling/educational sector is increased in that experienced teachers are being provided with professional opportunities to increase their own teaching knowledge and skills, but also to give back to their profession.
- The Geraldton Universities Centre increases the economic and social benefits of the region. Young people stay local to gain their teaching qualification and contribute to the local economy whilst doing so. The pre-service teachers become role models for other young people in the community, demonstrating that educational aspirations are not out of reach, but instead are an achievable reality.
- The Geraldton Universities model empowers present and future generations and strengthens the community's identity.

## Background

CQUniversity prides itself on providing access and participation to students, wherever they may be located. According to Halsey (2018, p. 8), "education and training plays a critical role in building the social fabric of communities, but also in developing social capital for economic prosperity". CQUniversity have been examining approaches that support education delivery across Australia. To this end, we have been engaging in community partnerships in areas with previously low student engagement rates.

In November 2018, the government announced a new policy for creating regional study hubs by an investment of $24.2 million over a four-year period. They state that "this is to assist in the establishment and operation of 16 community-owned, regional study hubs at 23 sites across regional Australia" (Australian Government Department of Education, 2018). The opportunity for regional, rural and remote communities to access higher education becomes a realistic goal for those who have been unable to do so before.

Communities in regional Australia have long sought social and economic sustainability and growth. The problem has been to stem economic leakage of jobs and incomes while growing from within future generations of professionals to foster social sustainability, and if not economic growth, then at least a healthy vibrant local economy. In regional communities, including those who are rural and remote, teaching is one of the professions with distinctive opportunities and challenges (Kenny, Harreveld & Danaher, 2016). It is well documented that those wanting to become teachers, in particular school leavers, leave their communities to attend university in a major city rarely returning to teach in community.  In regional, rural and remote communities, contextual relevance and socio-cultural appropriateness in pre-service teacher education courses is essential (Ajayi, 2014; Darling-Hammond, 2009).

In Australia, sustainable regional, rural and remote communities may be supported by reform to the ways in which teacher education is delivered; especially when the relationship is reciprocal (White, Lock, Hastings, Cooper, Reid & Green, 2011). Reciprocity goes beyond pre-service teachers' practicum experiences or the mobility of teacher graduates if it is to actually impact social networks and economic sustainability. At the heart of this investigation is the reciprocal relationship initiated by a single community and responded to by a university offering teacher education. The recent development of the Australian regional study hubs model, is providing the stimulation to initiate partnerships for the delivery of a unique model for pre-service initial teacher education.

There are currently 52 universities delivering pre-service initial teacher education courses throughout Australia. Approximately one third of them offer distance education as well as face-to-face delivery. Significantly, the pre-service initial teacher education delivery model investigated in this study did not begin with the university seeking partnerships with specific communities or local shires. It began with community initiated not for profit organisation (The Geraldton Universities Centre [GUC]) seeking university partners for specific courses to be delivered through their resourcing mechanisms and infrastructure. As such, the key purpose of the GUC was to enable easier access to tertiary education within a regional a community. Thus, CQUniversity Australia was approached and entered into service agreements for delivery of teacher education via online distance education with support.

While CQUniversity (CQU) had the online IT infrastructure to support both distance and face-to-face delivery, particular challenges were faced in the pre-service initial teacher education courses. The core question for CQU was how to deliver and assess across multiple state jurisdictions with Initial Teacher Education courses accredited with the Queensland College of Teachers (QCT). This highlighted the peculiarity of Australia's teacher education accreditation and registration structure.

Currently a national standards body, the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL), outlines the requirements and structure for accreditation of Initial Teacher Education courses and registration for teacher graduates. Yet the responsibility for implementation resides with each individual State and Territory, meaning that aspects such as entry and exit requirements, are determined by the accreditation authority.  For the purposes of this initiative, this meant that CQUniversity was and is managing a maze of entry requirements, professional experience placements, teaching requirements and registration requirements to ensure students can complete their courses locally and graduate with teacher registration in Western Australia.

This report presents the findings of the delivery of an Initial Teacher Education program through CQUniversity's community partnership with the regionally based study hub known as Geraldton Universities Centre (GUC). This Centre represents a unique community-initiated learning and teaching model with no existing research investigating its effectiveness in terms of initial teacher education and impact upon schooling in regional, rural and remote communities.

To achieve this aim, the study has to date:
1. Mapped CQUniversity (CQU) pre-service teacher education students' enrolment, progression and graduation rates from inception of cohorts at the Geraldton Universities Centre (GUC) to December 2019.
2. Developed demographic profiles of the community serviced by Geraldton Universities Centre (GUC).
3. Undertaken a specific case study focusing on the impact of the delivery of Initial Teacher Education through the Geraldton Universities Centre.

This research has sought to answer the following question:
What impact has the delivery of an Initial Teacher Education program on the Geraldton community?

## Historical context
Business partnerships with CQUniversity for the delivery of initial teacher education commenced in Geraldton in 2012. The model is one of mixed mode delivery and supported distance education. Students are enrolled as distance students with CQUniversity and supported at GUC administratively, pastorally and academically.  For these services, CQUniversity pays the Centre a negotiated share of the EFTSL (Equivalent Full Time Student Load) funding they receive from students and the Commonwealth. There is an overarching Service Level Agreement with the Centre's Board as well as an appended Schedule to deal with specific arrangements for the Bachelor of Education, such as what share of EFTSL applies and the various responsibilities each must cover and fund.  For example, the responsibility for securing, funding and supervising student teacher placements in local school's rests with GUC.

CQUniversity already invests heavily in quality distance education and online platforms. The partnerships with GUC bring additional students, without significantly adding to costs, while providing greater support, retention and success for these students. Tutors providing face to face academic support to students are sourced (and paid for) by the Centre, with their qualifications and experience approved by the Dean of CQUniversity's School of Education and the Arts. This is necessary under the requirements for course accreditation with the QCT for initial teacher education courses.

## CQUniversity context
CQUniversity is a comprehensive university within the Australian higher education system. It offers courses from Certificate I to Doctoral levels of the Australian Qualifications Framework. As well as

substantial distance education offerings, a key feature of the University is its campus and study centre or hub model of delivery (see Figure 1).



*Figure 1: CQU's campus & study centre hubs as at October 2017*

As of December 2017, there were 13 campuses (8 regional and 5 metropolitan) across Queensland, New South Wales, Victoria, South Australia and Western Australia. In addition, there were 8 study centre hubs: 3 in Queensland; 1 in New South Wales (with CUC Snowy Monaro); 4 in Western Australia (Broome, Karratha, Busselton and Geraldton with GUC); with more in the pipeline as negotiations with other regional communities continue. Students that enrol at CQUniversity reside in regional and rural locations, are traditionally first in family to attend university, are from low socio-economic families, are a mix of mature age and school leavers and are often career changers. Many of our students are reported to hold one or more jobs whilst studying.

### Geraldton context

The Geraldton Universities Centre was first established in 2001 as an independent, not for profit incorporated body. In a first, the Australian Government provided the GUC with allocated university places.  A service agreement was negotiated and agreed upon in 2011 between the GUC and CQUniversity to deliver initial teacher education courses locally with the first cohort starting in 2012.

Geraldton is 414km north of Perth with a population of 38,634 at the time of the 2016 census (ABS, 2016). It is located on the coast of Western Australia yet functions as a regional hub for the Mid-West region of the State which reported a population of 54, 019 in the 2016 census (ABS, 2016).

Of significance for this study, in 2016 Geraldton's unemployment rate was 8.8%, compared to Western Australia's rate of 7.8%, and the national rate of 6.9%. The types of employment in which people were working included professional and white collar 50%; and blue collar 50% (ABS, 2016).

This is comparable to the State (55%) and national (59%) proportion of the population working in professional and white-collar jobs. It can be seen from Table 1 that the proportion of the population within the Geraldton region who have graduated from tertiary education is half that of the State and national averages.

*Table 1: Demographic data*

| Demographics | Geraldton | WA state | National |
|---|---|---|---|
| Population | 38, 634 | 2.4m | 23.4m |
| Median age | 38 | 36 | 38 |
| Education – Bachelor degree or higher | 10.5% | 20.5% | 22.0% |
| Internet connection from dwelling | 79.3% | 85.1% | 83.2% |
| Indigenous (as % of population) | 9.7% | 3.1% | 2.8% |
| Unemployment | 8.8% | 7.8% | 6.9% |
| Household income (median weekly) | $1055 | $1595 | $1438 |

*Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics – Census 2016*
*http://www.censusdata.abs.gov.au/census_services/getproduct/census/2016/quickstat/101031014?opendocument*

Demographic implications for initial teacher education

*Schools*

Within a radius of 60 km from Geraldton, there are 20 schools. Table 2 shows 18 primary schools (14 primary only and 4 as part of a K-10/12 or P-12 arrangement) and 6 secondary schools (which include 4 as a K-10/12). Early childhood, primary and secondary initial teacher education is offered through the GUC. Students enrolled at the GUC live within the 100 km radius and may be placed at any of these schools for variability in experiences as required by accreditation.

*Table 2: Geraldton Schools within 60km of Geraldton*

| Schools | Sector | Level | Co-Ed | Faith based | Boarding | Notes |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Geraldton Primary | Public | Primary | Yes | No | No | |
| St Francis Xavier Primary School | Independent | Primary | Yes | Yes | No | |
| Leaning Tree Community School | Independent | Primary | Yes | No | No | |
| Rangeway Primary School | Public | Primary | Yes | No | No | |
| St John's School | Independent | Primary | Yes | Yes | No | |
| Allendale Primary School | Public | Primary | Yes | No | No | |
| Beachlands Primary School | Public | Primary | Yes | No | No | |
| Mount Tarcoola Primary School | Public | Primary | Yes | No | No | |
| Bluff Point Primary School | Public | Primary | Yes | No | No | |
| St Lawrence's School | Independent | Primary | Yes | Yes | No | |
| Waggrakine Primary School | Public | Primary | Yes | No | No | |
| Walkaway Primary School | Public | Primary | Yes | No | No | 32km from Geraldton |
| Chapman Valley Primary School | Public | Primary | Yes | No | No | 34km from Geraldton |

| St Mary's School | Independent | Primary | Yes | Yes | No | 51km from Geraldton |
| Northhampton District High School | Public | K-10 | Yes | No | No | 51km from Geraldton |
| Dongara District High School | Public | K-12 | Yes | No | No | 51km from Geraldton |
| Geraldton Grammar School | Independent | P-12 | Yes | No | Yes | Centralised boarding |
| Strathalbyn Christian College | Independent | P-12 | Yes | Yes | No | |
| Geraldton Senior College | Public | Yrs 10-12 | Yes | No | Yes | Centralised boarding |
| John Willcock College | Public | Yrs 7-9 | Yes | No | Yes | Centralised boarding |
| Nagle Catholic College | Independent | Secondary | Yes | Yes | Yes | Centralised boarding |

There are many primary schools located within the Geraldton region that provide diverse opportunities for professional experience placements for Bachelor of Education students undertaking the primary or early childhood specialisation, however the opportunities for secondary students are not as diverse.

*Other Universities*

As noted in the background information for this report, CQUniversity is not the only university offering initial teacher education in Australia. The tables below reveal the major universities within the footprint of the Geraldton Universities Centre. There are no inferences being drawn from these data, other than to present the options students have for undertaking teacher education studies. In their home state of Western Australia.

*Table 3: GUC Geraldton - distance from other major universities offering teacher education*

| Major WA universities offering teacher education | Distance from Geraldton | Distance mode offered |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Edith Cowan University | 441km | Yes |
| Curtin University | 441km | Yes |
| University of Notre Dame (Fremantle) | 441km | No |
| Murdoch University | 441km | Yes |

Options for students wanting to study initial teacher education in Western Australia broadly indicate a move to Perth.  However, in Western Australia, three of the four universities listed in Table 3 offer teacher education in the distance mode. This does not account for other universities in Australia—such as CQUniversity—that operate teacher education in the distance mode from other States and Territories.

The significance of the demographics presented lies in the nature of control exerted over initial teacher education in Australia. Nationally, the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) endorses professional standards for teachers at four levels of professional progression (graduate, proficient, highly accomplished, lead). The legal oversight of those professional standards lies within State/Territory jurisdictions. In other words, "all Australian ITE programs are accredited by state and territory teacher regulatory authorities using the nationally agreed Standards and Procedures" (AITSL, https://www.aitsl.edu.au/deliver-ite-programs/understand-ite-program-accreditation). As CQUniversity is a Queensland university, its initial teacher education courses are accredited with the Queensland College of Teachers (QCT).

Thus, in the delivery and management of these courses, it is the Queensland requirements that must be adhered to. Differences between the implementation of initial teacher education in Queensland and Western Australia must be taken into account.

As can be seen in Figure 2, the enrolments in initial teacher education in Geraldton since the forming of the partnership in 2012 have steadily increased. During the period of 2012 to 2015, the data includes enrolments into the Bachelor of Education (Primary) and the Bachelor of Education Early Childhood only (as well as the Bachelor of Learning Management which was replaced by the Bachelor of Education in 2014). The 2016 data includes the Graduate Diploma of Learning and Teaching, and in 2017 includes the Bachelor of Education (Secondary). It should be noted here that in 2016 there were significant changes in entry requriements in initial teacher education programs in Queensland, hence there was a drop in enrolments in the Bachelor of Education courses in the 2017 intake. Generally, Geraldton education students are enrolled full time and as of December 2018, 27 students have graduated as registered teachers from the Geraldton Universities Centre.



*Figure 2: New enrolments - Initial Teacher Education in Geraldton*

## Literature review

The following section reviews the literature concerning the changing nature of higher education in Australia and the possible pathways that regional, rural and remote communities can use to access education.

### The context of change

Over the past ten to fifteen years, tertiary education, particularly higher education institutions, have been developing innovative practices and new institutional models for their academic offerings, with a view to increasing market share. For example, technological advances and broadband internet have made the online learning model an increasingly sustainable option. Another example is the expansion and wide adoption of the Massive Open Online Course, commonly referred to as MOOC. Popular media hyped that "The sheer scale of numbers of students led to bold proclamations of education disruption and a sector on the verge of systemic change" (cited in Siemens, Gasevic & Dawson, 2019, p. 6). It is argued that despite the potential of MOOC's, they have fallen short in the provision of equitable access to education (MacNeill, Smyth & Johnston, 2016).

Besides the proliferation of technology-enhanced learning and the impact this has on institutions, there are other changes affecting the broader higher education landscape. Contemporary Australian universities are expected to engage with social responsibilities – where universities contribute to engagement and service within local and regional communities (Norton & Cakitaki, 2018). According to Vice-Chancellor Freshwater from University of Western Australia, "Universities will remain vital places for the development of global citizens; a university thinks internationally, is based in the local economy, but works for the purpose of national and regional development" (Ernst & Young, nd, p. 22).

In other innovative approaches to course delivery, it is interesting to note, for example, that Swinburne Online courses are delivered by a subsidiary company of SEEK job search; La Trobe University's Sydney campus is operated by Navitas and Queensland TAFE offer degrees from the University of Canberra (Norton & Cakitaki, 2018). There are further examples of similar arrangements both within Australia and at offshore locations. These approaches are about university diversification as well as creative partnering.

There are also changes to the types of students now attending higher education; a heterogenous student demographic, comprising young adults, more women and working mothers as well as mature-aged adults seeking a change to career (O'Shea, 2015). This heterogeneity should be valued, and students recognised for the skills and knowledge that they bring to university life. However, many of these students have "different expectations from the traditional school leavers about what facilities and services are needed to support their learning and demand more flexibility in the teaching and learning process" (Glasby, 2015, p. 4).

With this rapidly evolving higher education landscape, Ernst and Young (nd, p. 4) argue that "Australia's dominant university model – a broad-based teaching and research institution with a large asset base and cumbersome back office — would prove unviable in the future". Traditional institutions are attempting to adapt and shift to a fundamentally new paradigm.

Juxtaposed with the changes to contemporary universities and their diverse cohorts, has been a government agenda of widening participation; a more equitable and accessible learning experience for all. The challenge for the Australian government both historically and in recent times, has been how to enable greater numbers of students to access the benefits that higher education offers, while maintaining a fair, quality, affordable and accessible system (Australia Department of Education and Training, 2015).  To this end, there have been significant reviews over the past twenty years that have impacted on our current higher education systems, including, the Nelson Review (2002); Bradley Review (2008) and the Lee Dow-Braithwaite Review (2013). All such reviews discussed the need to expand access to quality higher education for students from not only regional communities, but also from "ever more diverse social, economic and academic backgrounds" (Australia Department of Education and Training, 2015, p. 28). To assist this mission, since 2012, the government uncapped student enrolment, implementing a full demand driven system for bachelor places. However, as Bradley, Noonan, Nugent and Scales (2008) suggest, in response to increasing OECD higher qualification figures, "to increase the numbers participating, we must also look to members of groups currently under-represented within the system, that is, those disadvantaged by the circumstances of their birth: Indigenous people, people with low socio-economic status, and those from regional and remote areas" (p. xi).

The next section will discuss regional universities and how their presence in rural, regional and remote communities can support the government need for innovation in course delivery, specifically around pre-service teacher education courses.

*Responding to change*

In a timely and independent comprehensive review into regional, rural and remote education (RRR), Halsey (2018) considered "the key issues, challenges and barriers that impact on the learning outcomes of regional, rural and remote students" (p. 6). He noted his five convictions for the review, two of which align to the CQUniversity and Geraldton Universities Centre value propositions: "vibrant and productive rural communities are integral to Australia's sustainability and prosperity – socially, economically and environmentally; and improvement in education is achieved by exploring how existing resources can be used more effectively, not just by allocating more of them" (p. 1-2). CQUniversity believe that the establishment of this unique community-initiated learning and teaching model are effective in terms of initial teacher education and impact upon schooling in regional, rural and remote communities. CQUniversity supports Professor Halsey's recommendations for a national focus to increase outcomes and opportunities in these locations.

The uniqueness of the Geraldton Universities Centre (GUC) lies in the strategic partnerships and multiple funding sources. GUC determine the locally generated provision of human resources and physical infrastructure so as to stimulate post-compulsory further education and lifelong learning opportunities, including in this case, pre-service teacher education. There are, however, a variety of courses offered from a range of other institutions. This signals clearly that the communities wish to do business with whichever universities provide meaningful partnerships. These centres are visible products of powerful economic and political agendas, operating in and through social relationships of members within the community.

*Participation and pathways*

The Australian Bureau of Statistics (2014) determined that based purely on numbers, Australians living in rural and regional areas constituted thirty-three percent of the population. Geographically speaking, RRR areas cover the majority of Australia, see Figure 1, although the majority of people are located in metropolitan areas. Fleming and Grace (2017) note that "This numerical majority of metropolitan Australia has also contributed to a range of inequalities that exist between (broadly speaking) 'urban' and 'rural' Australians. According to a report from the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2017):

> Australians living in rural and remote areas tend to have shorter lives, higher levels of disease and injury and poorer access to and use of health services compared to people living in metropolitan areas. Poorer health outcomes in rural and remote areas may be due to a range of factors, including a level of disadvantage related to education and employment opportunities, income and access to health services.

The literature points to a number of ongoing issues in regional, rural and remote education, all of which may be assisted by participation in higher education.
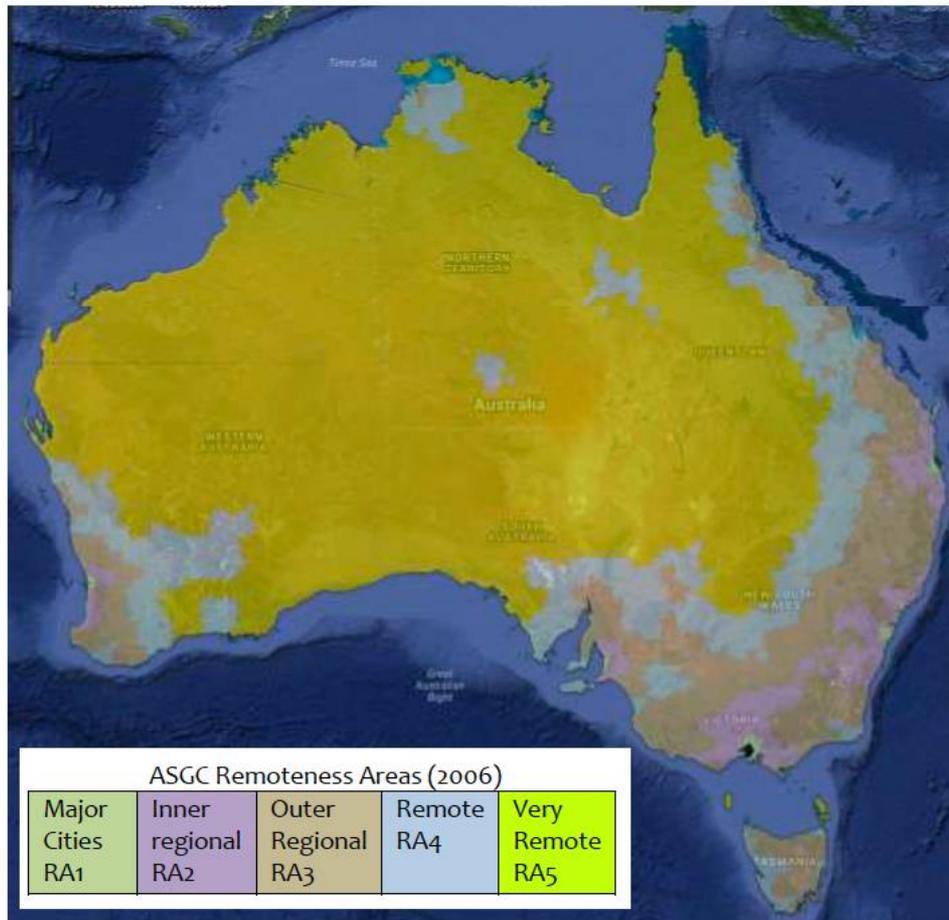
*Figure 3: Classification of the Australian Continent as rural and remote*
*Sourced from Haynes & Miller, (2016)*

The urban advantage in Australian education is evident in Year 12 completion rates which range from 78% (major cities) to 64% (inner regional) to 43% (very remote) , with NAPLAN scores following this pattern, reducing with increasing remoteness (Halsey, 2018). School completion is impacted by many factors including SES disadvantage, school and parental support, literacy and numeracy level, community attitude and support (Watson et al., 2017).

While VET and Certificate 3 completion rates between metropolitan and RRR areas are on par, diploma level course completions are higher in RRR than metropolitan areas. Completion of Bachelor degrees (ages 25-34yrs) reduces significantly with increasing remoteness - major city 42%, inner regional 22%, RRR 17% (Halsey, 2018). These disparities highlight the need for "rethinking and reframing education in RRR" rather than focusing on problems (Halsey, 2018).

Engagement of regional, rural and remote youth in higher education is impacted by both hard and soft resources. Hard resources include lack of local tertiary institutions, money, allowances, entry scores, transport/logistics, accommodation and part time employment opportunities for financial support while studying. Soft resources include student aspirations to higher education, relationships and support networks (Curtis, 2011; Halsey, 2018).

Aspirations toward tertiary education are comparable among young people in low and higher SES regions, though actual participation is significantly lower in regional low SES than metropolitan due to lack of opportunities to support these aspirations (Gale & Parker, 2015; Vernon, Watson, & Taggart, 2018). Earlier desire to attend university increased later desire to attend, though this needs

to be supported with school-university partnerships and outreach programs to enable the students to consider that university attendance is actually possible. Family, school dynamics and neighbourhood factors influence desire to attend university – potentially being first in family to engage in higher education, school focus on VET and location/logistics issues to attend campus – all potentially reduce desire, aspiration toward and enrolment in higher education (Vernon et al., 2018). Students with parental support and expectation of university attendance are four times more likely to complete year 12 and 11 times more likely to plan on attending university, compared to students with parents less inclined to expect or value tertiary education (Baxter, 2013).

Parental, teacher and community enthusiasm to encourage student aspiration to higher education is important, though this may be lower than ideal in regional, rural and remote areas due to their understanding of the real and perceived barriers entrance and engagement in higher education (Curtis, 2011; Drummond, Halsey, & van Breda, 2011; Fleming & Grace, 2014). These issues may be lessened by future engagement of parents in pathway programs (Penman & Oliver, 2011). For regional, rural and remote students, moving away from their community can result in social disconnections (Drummond et al., 2011; Fleming & Grace, 2014). Regional, rural and remote students who received a university offer were more likely to defer the offer for one year and consequently more likely to let the offer lapse at that later date (Curtis, 2011; Drummond et al., 2011).

Research by the Year 13 organisation Australia wide has found that youth feel undervalued in the classroom in final school years, reducing engagement with school content and desire to transition to higher education. Fear and confusion surrounding possible career pathways creates conflict over direction: work, study or gap year. In considering the transition from school to higher education, the challenge is the lower application rate to higher education, not the lower likelihood of acceptance (Halsey, 2018).

Location has stronger influence on educational achievement than SES. While regional, rural and remote youth are often directed towards VET qualification, the lower level of VET programs undertaken by regional, remote and rural students does not provide the same opportunities as those undertaken in metropolitan areas, thereby further disadvantaging rural youth. Further focus should be placed on formulating pathways to higher education via partnerships between VET and universities to improve skills for the individual and community (Curtis, 2011; Woodroffe, Kilpatrick, Williams, & Jago, 2017). These programs should not only focus on youth, but also on considering the factors which enable and inhibit mature age students from aspiring to, accessing and completing tertiary education in regional rural and remote areas (Townsend, 2010). The mature age students are likely firmly entrenched in the communities and more likely to remain post-study, hence the need for this group to be considered in the development of bridging, mentoring and articulation programs (Townsend, 2010).

Lobo (2012) identified 17 main factors for student attrition from first year tertiary courses to enable the development of preventative interventions, however this study did not consider factors specific to RRR students. It did however identify that mature age students are more likely to withdraw from university than younger students – mostly due to external factors of family and work commitments. Overall, retention of students in second year and above showed no disparity between metropolitan and regional, rural and remote students (Wilson et al., 2013), highlighting the need to better understand first year attrition and development of strategies to support those RRR students.

Career education to enhance student understanding of options beyond school is critical to future success, with significant importance for youth in RRR areas who may perceive their choices as limited relative to their metropolitan counterparts (Fleming & Grace, 2017; Woodroffe et al., 2017).

Education programs involving partnerships between schools, community, industry, training organisations and universities are required to ensure youth receive relevant information about career options, skills required and pathways to make the transition from school to work (Woodroffe et al., 2017). Pathway programs which include opportunities for students to attend university campuses and larger urban areas have value by exposing students to different experiences if they have limited exposure beyond their community (Woodroffe et al., 2017).

There are a number of examples of pathway programs within the sector. One example is the University of Canberra's Aspire UC Schools Outreach Program, delivered by university staff who were trained school teachers – offered 3 sessions per year level, years 7-10 with in-school and on-campus sessions. Following engagement with the program, students (particularly female students) were more likely to consider further education, however the younger students held higher expectations highlighting that year 10 students in particular require significant support to understand their future options prior to selection of their year 11 and 12 pathway (Fleming & Grace, 2014).

Another example is the University of South Australia's First Generation Program targeted Whyalla Year 10 potential first-generation rural university students and aimed to increase awareness of the regional university and to raise aspirations of secondary school students about university study. The program was based on-campus over six weeks with interaction between school and university staff and university student mentors and included exposure to a variety of study areas and learning methods. Post-program surveys indicated a high interest in pursuing university study, follow up is not available to determine if this translated to increased participation in higher education (Penman & Oliver, 2011).

While the above two examples are school-based, Pitman, Trinidad, Devlin, Harvey and Brett (2016) noted that "There is currently a diverse range of enabling programs available throughout the higher education sector in Australia, including course length, content, and mode of delivery" (p, 4). Other pathways, aimed at allowing students to take different routes into the courses they ultimately wish to study, or to gain some experience on what it is like to study in the higher education sector, include (The Good Universities Guide, 2016):

- Foundation and bridging courses – help prepare students by developing the foundation skills required for higher education study.
- Vocational Education and Training (VET) study – offer students a lower-level qualification, for example a diploma, where they can then seek credit and entry into a bachelor level degree.
- Higher education pathway – students enter a degree with a more manageable entry requirement, then study for a year and transfer into their desired degree.

While pathways offer students opportunities to access higher education, this alone is not sufficient to help with retention and success. An integrated, proactive and holistic range of support that serves students from a multiplicity of backgrounds, can also be provided within regional, rural and remote communities.

## Methodology and data analysis

The methodology used to undertake the research in this report was case study. Case study was chosen on the basis that it used a constructivist and interpretive approach to understand the particular world of the Geraldton Universities Centre (Bryman, 2008). This approach allowed the researchers to explain, interpret, analyse and critique the Geraldton Universities Centre and the impact it has had on the Geraldton community and the surrounding districts. The research was

therefore designed to undertake lines of enquiry that examined the lived experiences of the students, staff, graduates and key community stakeholders (Guba & Lincoln, 2005). Such a qualitative approach allowed the researchers to focus on the on "the cultural, every day, and situated aspects of human thinking, learning, knowing acting, and ways of understanding ourselves as persons" (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 13). The use of the case study method was also chosen on the basis that it provided a diverse range of opportunities to gain a deeper insight into the realities faced by the participants (Merriam, 1998; 2009).

The participants who were involved in this research were chosen on the basis that they had worked at the Universities Centre for a period of time, or they were current students or past graduates of the centre during the period of time that CQ University had been delivering Initial Teacher Education. education. Key stakeholders were also interviewed from the community such as teachers who had worked with graduates, or were currently supervising preservice teachers or were members of the Geraldton Universities Centre board.  Key stakeholders are referred to as a Community Colleague in this report.

While there are many case study method theorists that offer varying views pertaining to the different types of case study, Miriam (2009) was chosen as she conceived case study as an end product defining it as "an intensive, holistic description and analysis of a single instance, phenomenon or social unit" that needs to be bound or 'fenced in' to determine what is to be studied (p. 203). Miriam (2009) also classifies case into a number of categories. One of these categories resonated with the researchers and was chosen on the as the basis for the research to be undertaken. Therefore, this particular case is categorised as a particularistic case study where the research focuses on particular event, program or phenomenon, such as the preservice teacher education courses undertaken at the Geraldton Universities Centre (Miriam, 2009).

## Research collection methods and analysis

The research was collected using a number of collection methods including semi structured interviews and focus groups. An online survey was also used to gather data from graduates who were unable to be interviewed in person. The data was recorded and then transcribed for data analysis to be undertaken. A thematic analysis approach was undertaken to assist in data reduction and clarification of core themes. This approach drew upon the work of Bryman (2012), Bernard and Ryan (2003) and Symons (2009). Themes were identified within the transcripts and were matched the work undertaken in the literature review. This was also complemented by the researchers own experiences with the students and the organisation. Hatch (2002) referred to this process as "organising and interrogating data in ways that allow researchers to see patterns, develop explanations and make interpretations" (p. 148). Thematic analysis "moves beyond counting explicit words or phrases and focuses on identifying and describing both implicit and explicit ideas within the data" (Guest, McQueen & Namey, 2012, p. 10). The final process of the thematic analysis undertaken was to identify key quotations from each participant or focus group to evidence the key themes.

## Detailed findings

The analysis of the focus group interviews and online survey generated six key themes as follows:

1. Personalised support
2. Sense of and connection to community
3. Contextual understanding
4. Community identity
5. Community role models
6. Strong relationships

The six themes interconnect as similar observations and remarks occurred throughout the data collection and analysis. Each of the six themes are discussed in depth and evidenced with direct quotes from the participants.

## 1.    Personalised support

The support offered to the students studying through the Geraldton Universities Centre was a reoccurring theme throughout each of the interview responses. Each of the participant groups were overwhelmingly positive in regard to the support that the GUC affords the students at the beginning of their study but also throughout their study. Through the analysis of the responses it became apparent that there are several layers of support at play.

Firstly, an overarching layer of support comes from having the option of studying on campus. The pre-service teachers clearly delineated the opportunity to study face to face as a key support mechanism for their success. They identified on many occasions that success would not be possible if they were studying via distance education. It was also identified that having an education degree delivered on campus at the centre meant that the transition into study was an easier pathway into university, particularly for those students who were mature aged and had not studied since leaving high school.

> *It was either do distance or come here and I just felt that Geraldton University Centre offered such a supportive environment.  I needed that face-to-face interaction.  It's just such an easy career path.  You go into STEPS, you get nurtured, you know the university and everything, you are ready to move on and everything, and then you just jump straight into it.*
> Pre-service teacher

The second layer of support that was identified was the direct contact with other people: university tutors, professional staff and university peers. The ability to contact a university tutor or peers when they had a question, needed help or simply needed some encouragement provided pre-service teachers the support needed to make sense of and succeed in their study. This type of support builds not only academic capability, but confidence in one's self.

> *It was easy at transition and, yes, just all the support that they provide, it's wonderful.  I wouldn't be able to do it distance, there's no way.  You've got faces you can contact and someone you can go to when you need help. Yes, I just - I love the face-to-face part.  It's just really difficult on my own like if you have a question and you need it clarified, I find it's quicker and easier having that face-to-face.  If you ask someone online sometimes you're a bit hesitant on how you're wording your question and it's hard to get - read body language and stuff.  So, yes, I like that you get an immediate response.*
> Pre-service teacher

The university tutors who work in the education courses also reiterated these first and second layers of support.  They identified the importance of the option of face to face study for the pre-service teachers, and the ease of contact that occurs between tutors and pre-service teachers. This person to person contact has a significant impact on student success, retention and attrition. The tutors identified that they knew their students, and if they hadn't seen them on campus for a period of time, that they could follow up on their absence and offer the support needed. The university tutors themselves, as experts in the field, are an important source of support for the pre-service teachers.

> *I think they like the contact with the personal contact and support from the local centre. I think they would maybe pull out if they didn't have that contact, because we do follow up. So, if we don't have students attending our classes, we'll actually follow it up and say to them, how are you, what's been happening for you this week? They'll be prompted to then attend.*
> Geraldton tutor
>
> *…the resource to go to that are actually walking the talk.  So it's not just that you can always go to this website or look up that resource.  Its face-to-face, which supports them as well, so I think having those local tutors is a real benefit to them.*
> Community colleague

The third and final layer of support is in the form of supportive networks. Such support networks include family, friends and work colleagues; those that are located outside of the Centre. This layer of support was identified specifically by the education graduates and community associates.  Having friends and family close by, not having to move away from home to study and also removing the need to support yourself through study featured heavily in this layer.

> *I didn't want to move to the city, away from friends and family. It is much more personal and family like.*
> Geraldton graduate
>
> *It was close to home and offered close peer/teacher contact.*
> Geraldton graduate
>
> *I think also to have the confidence of knowing your family, your friends, your community around you, let's you focus on your studies rather than having to relocate and then worry about all the other logistics that come with the move.*
> Community colleague

## 2.  Sense of and connection to community

The GUC's ability to build a sense of and connection to the community is a theme that connects directly with the supportive mechanisms described above in theme 1. Firstly, the pre-service teachers have local tutors who know their students. They know each of the pre-service teacher's background, their situation and who they are in the community. This in itself creates a sense of community, whereby the pre-service teachers and tutors know each other and care about each other. The community environment provides the ability to cater for individual needs, support those needs and find workable solutions when issues arise.

> *There's a sense of real community and camaraderie here which is just really quite unique I think.  Yes, so I think the - and the fact that we have local tutors means they understand a bit more… we're not a face in the crowd.  They actually understand our unique circumstances and therefore if I don't turn up for a lecture they might actually email and just check that everything is okay or something.*
> Pre-service teacher
>
> *It's funny, because some of the students that come through, I've taught at high school, and then it's just this - it's just a really community type feeling here, and it's really special. We know them, they know us. We know their skillset, we know their personalities.*
> Geraldton tutor

pre-service teachers to network and access support from a number of avenues, particularly whilst they are out on professional experience placement (prac).

> *There's generally a connection for them in the schools, somewhere. So, it might only be one person, they go, hey, how are you? Which immediately helps to ground them in the school community, so they're not feeling like this prac student, I don't know what I'm doing. They've got a community that they can go to.*
> Geraldton tutor
>
> *All my pracs were completed in local schools which has helped me to network and meet local teachers and principals.*
> Geraldton graduate

It is clear from the interview data that the Geraldton Universities Centre prepares teachers 'from the community for the community'. The connectedness to community provides opportunities for pre-service teachers to be immersed in local schools and industry, thus assisting them to develop into their professional selves. The GUC connections provide links to existing networks and professional learning communities that can both support them during their study, but also prepare them for their profession.

> *I find our first years, they come in here - and I've - I don't know if you've noticed, but their standard of dress gradually lifts. They put on this - when they start doing Professional Practice 1, they actually start putting on a teacher hat and they start acting as teachers. They start changing their Facebook name from their last name to their first and second names, things like that, because they're really aware that they are now becoming teachers in our community.*
> Geraldton tutor
>
> *I think it's obviously great, because we get people who grew up here, perhaps, or have been here for some time. There's a lot of community support, so one of the students I had last year was such a great student, and while we would have hired her immediately if we had a job, the connectedness of Geraldton allowed us to then be able to say, there's a job going over here, and we could recommend, and they could have that sort of support. So I think it allows us to prepare teachers who work in this environment, this area, and they have a lot of expertise and connections as well.*
> Community colleague

## 3.  Contextual understanding

Preparing teachers 'from the community for the community' means that the students enrolled in initial teacher education at the Geraldton Universities Centre have the contextual understanding of the community, the children they will be teaching and the way things work. In many respects, this means that the students as pre-service teachers can apply their understanding of the context to their learning at university, thus creating graduate teachers who will be workplace ready but who can 'hit the ground running'.

> *If they're studying local, it's exactly what you're saying. They're connected. They understand the needs of the kids and the parents, if you know what I mean, because they're - they don't have such a huge gap. Whereas coming from the city, they do. They spend the first year just trying to understand why these kids think and act a little bit different. Some of them have been on school buses since seven o'clock that morning and of course the understanding of Aboriginal students as well is really, really important. They come with that understanding before you actually have to retrain them, which is what you do.*
> Community colleague

Teachers (both graduate and experienced) who are new to a region or community often have little understanding of the contextual features of the location. The GUC tutors identified that graduates who lived and studied in the local community understand who the community is, what difficulties the community may face, and thus can contribute to it by making a difference through education.

> *I think attracting people with that connection to the local region and the local area is what's so important about GUC. From a school basis, having people who are from a range of age groups, who are settled here in the Geraldton community, makes such a difference to us as a local school, rather than that transient sort of - people are appointed from Perth and they're forced to come here. The contribution that it gives to the community, and the quality of education, is huge.*
> Geraldton tutor

The university tutors employed to work with pre-service teachers are also local teachers who work in schools, consequently they are able to pass on their contextual understanding of what it means to be a teacher in the region. They can also ensure that the pre-service teachers have the skillset and knowledge needed for the unique context they will be teaching in.

> *They know that GUC turns out really excellent teachers because there's such an intensive oversight over them. You know there's - the lecturers are making sure they're actually doing what they need to do and it's just so beneficial.*
> Pre-service teacher
>
> *As someone who has lived and studied here, I think I was more employable than those who studied away. This is because it shows commitment to staying and not moving away after a couple of years of working.*
> Geraldton graduate

## 4. Community identity

The Geraldton Universities Centre provides the community with options for education; thus, it is helping to change the identity of the region. The 2016 census identified that Geraldton and the Mid-West region has unemployment rates higher than the state and national average. The region also has a low percentage of the population with a Bachelor (or higher) level of education. The GUC provides avenues for the local community access to Higher Education qualifications. Rather than just being known for its mining, agriculture and fishing sectors, the region is changing its identity to one as an education hub.

> *I think it just lifts the profile of the - of our region and our city. You know, it's - I think often young people perhaps think that Geraldton is a place that they want to escape from, or that they're - they have to move upwards and outwards and onwards kind of thing, it's that mentality. Yeah, I think that's changing in terms of - we have different options available, and just because your friends or whatever - or we've done it before, in terms of going to Perth, and that's the way it's always been done, doesn't necessarily mean that that's the best way for you, or as them individually.*
> Geraldton tutor
>
> *I think too having the university here, it's great, not just for Geraldton but the Midwest, it's much more attractive if people are looking at coming here for a job or something like that, they say, ah, there's a university there. The kids are right. The whole picture of kids growing up and it does. It makes it an attractive place to come and work. Geraldton struggles, because we have the highs and lows of fishing, of agriculture, of mining.*
> Community colleague

A community identity is made up of many individual identities that reflect who we think we are and who we think other people are. The GUC provides opportunities for access to higher education; meaning that as more of the population access education through the centre, the community identity begins to change. The opportunities that the GUC has provided has changed not only identities, but lives.

> *Education is one of the major barriers for women in regional in all areas. So, the benefit for the community here is that not only are you upskilling and educating the whole community but you're actually empowering women.*
> Pre-service teacher
>
> *I know I've already said it but I can't - you can't put into words, you can't quantify just how valuable it is. I would not be getting - I just wouldn't be getting a tertiary education if it wasn't here. This has potentially changed my children's lives.*
> Pre-service teacher

Geraldton is a proud regional hub. Having locally trained teachers who studied locally, lived locally and now work locally enables that 'regional-ness' to continue.

> *I believe now that the program that's here is a regional program that is for regional people and they understand it. There's a lot more openness in the program for students to be able to get around. I think there's a recognition of the tyranny of distance. I think there's a recognition of the tyranny of the network, the Internet access and things like that. It's - we've now got student graduates who have been working in schools for many years. In fact, one of their first graduates is actually teaching my granddaughter in English in grade 2. So you can actually see that whole cycle starting to repeat itself, and I think that if we didn't have something that was very regionally centred, that that may not have been the case.*
> Community colleague

## 5.   Community role models

It is common in regional areas for the number of people to hold a tertiary education qualification to be lower than the State or National average. As noted in the previous theme, the Geraldton Universities Centre provides the city of Geraldton with greater access to tertiary education. With this access comes the creation of community role models, thus bringing the educational goals and aspirations of individuals closer.

> *What we found, certainly through the teaching programs here that have been very effective is that students, even some students, grads, who've gone away, have come back.  I know that through the weekend that one of our grads from about five years ago is now the deputy at one of the primary schools.  That's a really important thing.  This is a young man who grew up and is a well-known identity, and I think that the whole building of role models, as you were saying before, where I've got prac teachers going out and that was the enabler.*
> Community associate
>
> *Definitely a positive impact on friends and family who have seen how much easier it was for me to stay in Geraldton and complete my studies. Having been taught by local teachers at local schools, I can now give back.*
> Geraldton graduate

Role models within the community set the tone of what can be achieved. Traditional thinking around needing to move to the city to study is still assumed by many who live in regional areas. Many of the students who study through the Geraldton University Centre are first in family to attend university and quite often have low socio-economic status. Students who are first in family break the barriers of study and often show others what it means to study at this level.

> *I come from quite a low socio-economic community. I didn't grow up there but I'm at football training every Wednesday typing on my computer doing assignments and stuff and there's a massive amount of Aboriginal and low socio-economic town kids that are seeing someone studying and the benefits of that. It's indirect but that's so valuable and I think that's true for the wider Geraldton community. If people are seeing other people study and value education that can only do good thing, yes.*
> Pre-service teacher

Students who study at the Geraldton Universities Centre also role model to others how accessible higher education is in the local community. The pre-service teachers themselves, particularly whilst they are on professional experience placement in schools, become instant role models to younger school students, thus embedding the notion that anything is possible.

> *So once our students start graduating and being more embedded in the local culture, then they'll have children and they'll be able to say, well you can go to university because we've got one here.*
> Geraldton tutor
>
> *It's someone that they can see that they may have connections to already that they can think, oh, that is now a career path for me that's possible. But it's something that wasn't there before, so it's a recognisable face in front of them that they can see, oh, they went to high school with my sister or my cousin, and now they're doing this?  So they're like, oh, maybe I can do that, so that's really good.*
> Community colleague

## 6. Strong relationships

The Geraldton Universities Centre provides a space where relationships grow and cultivate. The findings indicate that strong relationships are developed between the Geraldton Universities Centre students as peers. Such strong relationships will provide those lifelong connections that will support them throughout their study, but also their career.

> *I just think it's nice to actually come and meet some like-minded people and you can discuss things about your own industry and you can talk about experiences.*
> Pre-service teacher
>
> *They have that collegiality as well. So, once they come through and there's such close cohorts… So, they come through for four years and then they graduate. When they get jobs locally, and often they do, they have their - they already have a collegial connection and relationship with their peers. I think it actually assists them with - in their teaching.*
> Geraldton tutor

The GUC has also instilled a strong sense of trust between the education students, their tutors and the local schools who host them during their professional experience placements. Trust is not something you can develop without the relationship. It can be seen that tutors and community members alike acknowledge the value of professional relationships.

> *I think because we offer the courses locally, the students are able to study locally and be employed locally and be trusted to actually stay within that employment. I think a lot of schools actually find that it's a very transient place here in Geraldton. I think the Principals in particular, when they're placing practicum students in the schools, I think they keep an eye on who they like, who they don't like.*
> Geraldton tutor
>
> *The tutors that we've had here are really high standard. You're not dragging people out… who then read the book 10 minutes before they go in for a tutor - a support meeting.  You've got people who are grounded in what they are doing and want to make sure that things happen, and they're connected with their students.  They know their students.*
> Community colleague

## Conclusion

The research undertaken in this study investigated the impact of the delivery of an Initial Teacher Education program on the Geraldton community. The study was borne from a need to evidence the outcomes that staff from the Geraldton Universities Centre and the School of Education and the Arts at CQUniversity have observed since the intake of the first cohort of pre-service teachers in 2012. The aim of the research project was to engage with and record lived experiences of key participants, including pre-service teachers, graduates, GUC university tutors and key community stakeholders.

Six key themes were identified through the data analysis, those being: personalised support, sense of and connection to community, contextual understanding, community identity, community role models and strong relationships. Within these themes it was identified that:

1. Participation rates in initial teacher education are growing within the Geraldton region, meaning that increased professional capabilities will benefit the region's schools and the children and young people who attend those schools.
2. The support structures that are embedded within the Geraldton Universities Centre model enables students to succeed more so than if they were studying via the traditional distance mode.
3. The Geraldton Universities Centre is graduating teachers from the community for the community. Graduates are teachers who understand the uniqueness of the region and its people.
4. Professional capability within the localised schooling/educational sector is increased in that experienced teachers are being provided with professional opportunities to increase their own teaching knowledge and skills, but also to give back to their profession.
5. The Geraldton Universities Centre increases the economic and social benefits of the region. Young people stay local to gain their teaching qualification and contribute to the local economy whilst doing so. The pre-service teachers become role models for other young people in the community, demonstrating that educational aspirations are not out of reach, but instead are an achievable reality.
6. The Geraldton Universities model empowers present and future generations and strengthens the community's identity.

It can be seen from the findings that the Geraldton Universities Centre model is a unique, but effective model that benefits the local community and surrounding regions in many ways. The research shows that Geraldton is a community that has the resources to support and strengthen the abilities and confidence of students which in turn will enable the community to build their identity as both an education hub, but also through employment opportunities that may not otherwise exist.

Early career teachers often claim that they are ill prepared by their university to meet the practical challenges of teaching in a range of different contexts, which include regional and rural contexts (TEMAG,2015). The model of delivery used by the Geraldton Universities Centre and CQUniversity provides an alternative solution to a problem. The expansion of the model to other University centres and hubs through Federal and State funding in other locations creates further opportunities for communities to determine their own future.

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