



## USG University Study Centre Wins Funding

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A university study centre in the Upper Spencer Gulf now looks certain, with the project receiving a \$1.1 million funding boost from the Federal Government.

The funding, from the *Upper Spencer Gulf Regional Jobs and Investment Package*, was announced recently by Federal Regional Development Minister, Dr John McVeigh and Member for Grey, Rowan Ramsey.

Chair of Spencer Gulf Cities and Port Augusta Mayor Sam Johnson explained the Councils had been working on the Community Tertiary Education Centre (COTEC) initiative with universities, regional development boards and industry leaders for close to four years.

"It is fantastic to finally secure some funding to make it a reality. We are very appreciative of the support we've had from the Federal Government."

Mr Johnson explained the COTEC model has grown in regional Australia over recent years as a result of increasing centralisation of higher education delivery and decision making to larger cities.

"There are similar university study centres based in smaller, regional centres right across Western Australia, New South Wales and Queensland. What they have demonstrated is that the retention and graduation rates for students who have access to local face to face support is well over 80%. In contrast, less than 20% of students studying online without support finish their degrees.

"It's a model that works."

Whyalla Mayor Lyn Breuer said the Upper Spencer Gulf is seeing strong economic growth in renewable energy, mining and minerals processing, event and nature-based tourism, Defence and horticulture, but needs a strong local, skilled workforce to support these opportunities."

"The number of people with university qualifications in the Upper Spencer Gulf is less than half the South Australian average. We have had several reports warn us that the lack of technical capacity in the region will be a barrier to future growth and economic diversification", explained Mayor Breuer. "The COTEC initiative will help address that challenge."

Port Pirie Mayor John Rohde also welcomed the news, saying the investment by the Federal Government will finally provide a supported local option for university study.

"We recognise that a number of country students prefer and will continue to move to the city for their tertiary studies", said Mr Rohde.

"We also recognise that establishing a study centre in the Upper Spencer Gulf will open opportunities for the vast majority of potential students - both at school leaver and career-upgrade levels - who cannot afford to move or commute to Adelaide, or who don't have a family or cultural history or affiliation with university engagement."

The first study centre will be established in Port Pirie later this year, with a site in Port Augusta to follow.

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Photo:

Member for Grey Rowan Ramsey, Regional Development Australia Deputy Chair Brenton Vanstone, Port Pirie Mayor John Rohde, Industry Leaders Group Chair Stephen Richter with Federal Minister for Regional Development, Dr John McVeigh announcing the funding for the University Study centre in Port Pirie last week.

