



## New Higher Education Partnership for Region

7<sup>th</sup> August 2017

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Access to tertiary education in the Upper Spencer Gulf has taken a major step forward, with a partnership between five higher education providers and the Spencer Gulf Cities Group sealed today.

Chair of the Group, Port Augusta Mayor Sam Johnson, said representatives from the Upper Spencer Gulf have been campaigning for this initiative for a number of years.

"We have had report after report warn us that the lack of locally available scientific and technical capability in the Upper Spencer Gulf will be a key barrier to future growth and economic diversification", explained Mayor Johnson.

"We can't keep relying on a 'fly-in, fly-out' professional and technical workforce. We need to have the facilities and support so we can grow our own local talent."

"Ultimately, we want to see stronger industry, community and university partnerships and an expansion of higher education courses and research successfully delivered in the region."

"After a national call for 'expressions of interest', we now have five tertiary education providers who are keen to work with us and make this a reality", said Mayor Johnson.

Port Pirie Mayor John Rohde is also pleased at this milestone, noting that on average there are over 2,500 students from the Upper Spencer Gulf and environs enrolled in vocational, undergraduate and postgraduate study every year, with many of these enrolments for online courses or based within capital city universities.

"The evidence also shows that providing a study centre, with face to face student and tutorial support, can increase completion rates from less than 20% to well over 80%", explained Mayor Rohde.

"We have under-utilised TAFE facilities in the region that we are keen to better utilise as a study hub to support students studying a range of courses, at a range of different universities, with the tutorial and student support they need to help them succeed."

Whyalla Mayor Lyn Breuer agrees. "This is not about competing with existing institutions, but simply about giving the Upper Spencer Gulf community greater access and the best chance of success in higher education.

"When you consider that 23% of South Australians hold above a certificate level qualification, but this is figure is only 11% in the Upper Spencer Gulf, we are way behind the state average," said Mayor Breuer.

"Something has to change."

The Upper Spencer Gulf Education Committee, community and industry leaders will meet with the five education institutions today to work through some critical next steps ahead of a funding application to the Federal Government's 'Upper Spencer Gulf Regional Jobs and Investment Package' and the 'Regional Study Hubs Initiative'.

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