



## Higher Education Reform Positive for Regions

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Upper Spencer Gulf Mayors have welcomed Federal Education Minister Simon Birmingham's commitment to improve access to higher education for students from country areas through the establishment and operation of regional study hubs.

The Federal Government has allocated \$15.2 million for eight regional study hubs to provide face to face support for regional students studying online through a range of Australian universities. A further \$24 million is available for rural scholarships.

Chair of the association, Port Augusta Mayor Sam Johnson, said representatives from the Upper Spencer Gulf have been campaigning for this initiative for the past three 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."

Port Pirie Mayor John Rohde agrees, saying the data on providing local study support is compelling.

"Reports show that on average, less than 20% of students studying online without physical support, will complete their studies. The evidence also shows that providing a study centre, with face to face student and tutorial support, can increase completion rates to well over 80%."

"Our aim is to establish a hub where students studying a range of courses, at a range of different universities, can come together with the tutorial and student support they need to help them succeed."

On average there are over 2,500 students from the Upper Spencer Gulf and environs enrolled in vocational, undergraduate and postgraduate study every year. Whyalla Mayor Lyn Breuer notes that many of these enrolments are for online courses or are based within capital city universities.

"We need to make the facilities and support available locally to give school-leavers and adult learners the best opportunity to finish their studies and to be part of the long-term success and vibrancy of our regional cities."

"We have fantastic TAFE and university facilities in the region that are under-utilised. We are keen to partner with these local institutions in the first instance to see if there is a better way we can support students in the region."

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

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