

8.4 Country Universities Centre Mudgee

REPORT BY THE MANAGER ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT
TO 04 AUGUST 2021 ORDINARY MEETING
GOV400088, ECO800022

RECOMMENDATION

That Council:

1. **receive the report by the Manager Economic Development on the Country Universities Centre Mudgee;**
2. **authorise the General Manager to sign a Memorandum of Understanding with Country University Centre Ltd to progress with application for funding from NSW Government; and**
3. **allocate \$50,000 in 2021/22 and \$400,000 in 2022/23 towards CUC Mudgee new building construction and associated fees funded from Unrestricted Cash.**

Executive summary

In November 2019, Council resolved to provide principle support for the establishment of a Country University Centre (CUC) in Mudgee. Since this time, staff have worked to establish a CUC Mudgee Board and undertaken a range of tasks to develop a funding proposal to NSW Government.

The initial location of the CUC Mudgee to co-locate at TAFE NSW has fallen through, and as there are no existing suitable buildings in Mudgee to house the CUC, it is recommended to co-fund the construction of a new dedicated CUC building at 70 Court Street, Mudgee.

This report seeks approval for the General Manager to sign a MOU with Country Universities Centre outlining the proposal to co-fund a new building dedicated to CUC Mudgee and to allocate \$450,000 from Unrestricted Cash to the establishment of the centre.

Disclosure of Interest

If the CUC Mudgee should progress and be formally established, Council's General Manager will hold the position of Director as Council's representative. The final lease agreement will be between CUC Mudgee and Mid-Western Regional Council.

Detailed report

Since 2019, Council staff have been working with CUC Ltd on the proposal to open a CUC Mudgee. The first Country Universities Centre commenced operating in 2013. There will be 14 CUCs in 18 locations by early 2022. Mudgee is still considered a priority opportunity for a CUC. Recently opened CUCs include Parkes, Macleay Valley and Southern Shoalhaven.

There are approximately 367 students across the Mid-Western Region enrolled in higher education. A high proportion of students in the region are mature aged students, with 66% of students over 25 years of age, and 48% are over 25 studying part-time. The CUC Student

Projection Model estimates that during the first year of operation there will be 99 students utilising a CUC Centre in this location, growing to 211 over four years.

Negotiations in regards to a proposal to co-locate with TAFE at the Ulan Road campus have been taking place since 2019. However in May 2021, TAFE NSW advised they do no longer support the concept of shared space with CUC Mudgee and terminated discussions.

After an extensive review of alternative locations and buildings, it has been concluded there are no other viable options that meet the CUC requirements in Mudgee. The proposed solution is to build a purpose-designed building at 70 Court Street, Mudgee, where adequate land and space is available. Further, the concept of housing a CUC at this location is consistent with proposed use of the current buildings as community focused.

The proposed building will be 450sqm and meet design requirements of a CUC including;

- A terminal room
- A large tutorial room
- Smaller break out rooms
- Operating office
- Social Area / Eating / Collaborating
- Kitchenette
- Toilets

NSW Government has funds available to support the capital works and operational requirements for a new CUC. CUC Ltd will apply for this funding on behalf of CUC Mudgee including requesting \$500,000 from the NSW Government towards the capital works of the new CUC Mudgee building. Further capital funding opportunities may exist with the Commonwealth Government, however these are not currently open and will be applied for if they open in coming months.

The NSW Government funding application is currently open and closes for CUC Mudgee at the end of August 2021. For application finalisation, CUC Ltd require a MOU on behalf of Council stating intention to support the new CUC Mudgee in regards to financial support in the construction of a new building at 70 Court Street and the intention to lease the new building to CUC Mudgee for a period of minimum 5 years.

This report seeks approval for the General Manager to sign a MOU with Country Universities Centre outlining the proposal to co-fund a new building dedicated to CUC Mudgee and to allocate \$450,000 from Unrestricted Cash towards capital works for the establishment of the centre.

Community Plan implications

| Theme | Building a Strong Local Economy |
|----------|---|
| Goal | A range of rewarding and fulfilling career opportunities to attract and retain residents |
| Strategy | Build strong linkages with institutions providing education, training and employment pathways in the Region |

Strategic implications

Council Strategies

This project meets Council's strategy of building strong linkages with institutions providing education, training and employment pathways in the region.

Council Policies

Not Applicable

Legislation

Not Applicable.

Financial implications

| Budget Year | Operating Performance Ratio | Own Source Revenue | Building & Infrastructure Renewal |
|--------------|-----------------------------|--------------------|-----------------------------------|
| 2020/21 | ✘ | - | ✘ |
| Future Years | ✘ | - | ✘ |

Associated Risks

If Council does not support the approval to sign an MOU with CUC Ltd and not provide funding support, than it is unlikely a CUC will be established in Mudgee. This will create the risk of further students leaving the region for education opportunities or not undertaking further education studies. Further, monies currently available from NSW Government to support establishing new CUC's may not be available into the future and may be allocated to other regions across the State.

ALINA AZAR
MANAGER ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

JULIE ROBERTSON
DIRECTOR DEVELOPMENT

23 July 2021

Attachments: Nil

APPROVED FOR SUBMISSION:

BRAD CAM
GENERAL MANAGER