

COMMUNITY & CULTURE

3.3. Late Report - Regional University Study Hub (RUSH)

Prepared by: Louise Knol, Manager Community & Engagement

Meeting Date: Wednesday, April 24, 2024

Executive Summary:

The Vocational Partnerships Group (VPG) and Cassowary Coast Regional Council are partnering to deliver a Regional University Study Hub (RUSH) to the Cassowary Coast Region. The RUSH program is an Australian Government program that is focused on improving access to tertiary and vocational education for regional and remote students.

VPG is a not for profit organisation that has been operating in Far North Queensland for over 20 years with offices in Cairns, Atherthon, Innisfail and Mareeba and currently operating a RUSH on the Atherton Tablelands.

In mid-2023 Council and VPG entered into arrangements for the establishment of a RUSH in Innisfail and this was formalised through a Memorandum of Understanding executed in December 2023.

VPG's application to Round 4 of the Federally-funded RUSH program was successful with an announcement in late March 2024. This application was supported by Council with support including advocacy and a commitment for in-kind contributions and ongoing collaboration, industry partnerships, promotion and marketing and integrated learning placement support.

In late 2023 Scyne Advisory was engaged by Council to complete a preliminary options assessment of a range of potential facilities to identify a preferred option that may be suitable to host a RUSH in Innisfail. Scyne's report considered the available infrastructure in Innisfail (detailed in the Background section of this report). The facility size needed to cater for between 50 to 100 students with floor space of 200 to 250 m² and be ready to commence operations in July 2024. Scyne's assessment concluded that the Community Hub Space at the Innisfail Library was the preferred facility for the RUSH.

In accordance with the Memorandum of Understanding and the outcome of the Scyne assessment, Council is now progressing to entering into arrangements with VPG for the RUSH to be situated at the Innisfail Community Hub.

Recommendation:

That Council:

1. **authorise the Chief Executive Officer to execute a Facility Use Agreement with Vocational Partnerships Group Ltd ACN 671 445 257 for a period of 3 years from 1 July 2024 to 30 June 2027 with the option for a further term of 3 years, for the establishment and operation of a Regional University Study Hub at the "Community Hub", First Floor 49-53 Rankin Street Innisfail being part of Lot 318 on CPI2811;**
 2. **congratulate Vocational Partnerships Group for their successful application to Round 4 of the Australian Government's Regional University Study Hub Program; and**
 3. **acknowledge the education and collaboration opportunities that the Regional University Study Hub will provide for our community, especially young people seeking to complete higher education without having to leave the Cassowary Coast."**
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Background:

A Regional University Study Hub (formerly Regional University Centre) is a facility that regional students enrolled at any Australian tertiary institution can use to seek support to study tertiary courses delivered by distance. Regional University Study Hubs provide -

- i. *Infrastructure such as study spaces, break out areas, video conferencing, computing facilities, and high-speed internet access.*
- ii. *Administrative and academic skills support services such as developing writing and researching skills and managing administrative processes.*
- iii. *Student support services including pastoral support, study advice and assistance with accessing tertiary education student services*

(2023 Cohort 4 Regional University Study Hub Program FAQs)

The Regional University Study Hubs program aims to -

- *Enable students in rural, regional and remote Australia to access and complete higher education without having to leave their community*
- *Meet a demonstrated gap in support for study in a regional, rural or remote community*
- *Support students who wish to stay in their community while they complete their course of study*
- *Enhance the experience of students studying within their own community*
- *Encourage strong links between the hubs and other organisations in the area, including other support services that students may access and industry*
- *Complement, rather than replace, existing and planned university investments and activities in regional areas, such as satellite campuses and study centres.*

(<https://www.education.gov.au/regional-university-study-hubs>)

In mid-2023 Council and VPG entered into arrangements for the establishment of a RUSH in Innisfail and this was formalised through a Memorandum of Understanding executed in December 2023. This initiative was in response to Council's 2022 Community Scorecard (Youth Advisory Committee) and Economic Development Strategy.

Operating in Far North Queensland for 20 years, VPG currently operates a RUSH on the Atherton Tablelands. VPG seeks to empower youth, strengthen families and build the capacity of education, industry and partnerships through quality partnerships through a Community of Practice approach to get young people into employment pathways.

VPG's application to Round 4 of the Federally-funded RUSH program was successful with an announcement in late March 2024. This application was supported by Council with support including advocacy and a commitment for in-kind contributions and ongoing collaboration, industry partnerships, promotion and marketing and integrated learning placement support.

The RUSH will be established at the Innisfail Community Hub and, in accordance with the RUSH Program, will reflect the Cassowary Coast community it will serve and will be established with consideration of the -

- *Geographic location of the study hub in relation to the community*
- *Population size, demographic and cultural needs of the local community*
- *Local industry and businesses in the area and the skills they need*
- *Location of local TAFE and VET providers.*

(<https://www.education.gov.au/regional-university-study-hubs>)

In late 2023 Scyne Advisory was engaged by Council to complete a preliminary options assessment of a range of potential facilities to identify a preferred option that may be suitable to host a RUSH in Innisfail. The assessment was completed primarily through desktop analyses, with outcomes of these analyses validated with the Council representatives through workshops or meetings. As a preliminary assessment, the engagement considered the critical requirements of the RUSH program and the strategic objectives of Council and assessed these against a range of potential facility options.

Scyne's report (as attached) considered the available infrastructure in Innisfail and the key elements of a RUSH which are outlined in Table 1.

Table 1: Key Elements of a RUSH

Infrastructure	Administrative and Academic Support Services	Student Support Services
• Study spaces. • Break out areas. • Video conferencing. • Computer facilities. • High-speed internet access.	• Developing writing and research skills. • Managing administrative processes.	• Pastoral support. • Study advice. • Help accessing student services.

The facility size needed to cater for between 50 to 100 students with floor space of 200 to 250 m2 and be ready to commence operations in July 2024.

Scyne's assessment focused on 8 potential locations in Innisfail that were progressed through a two-stage assessment process to refine the list to a preferred facility. The first step was using a Fatal Flaws Assessment which was designed to refine the longlist of facility options to a shortlist of feasible facility options. This process involved identifying a range of critical or mandatory facility requirements and assessing the longlist against these for suitability. The second step was undertaking a Multi-Criteria Assessment (MCA). This assessment step involved the refining of the shortlist of facility options arising from Step 1 to determine a preferred facility option through the completion of an MCA.

The Facility Options Assessment conducted by Scyne concluded that the Community Hub Space at the Innisfail Library was the preferred facility for the RUSH and Council is now entering into those arrangements with VPG at the Community Hub through the Facility Use Agreement and supporting Memorandum of Understanding (MoU).

The MoU commits both Council and VPG to supporting the future growth of the region through provision of the *opportunity for all persons of the Cassowary Coast to access tertiary education regardless of their location or circumstance*. Broadly, Council will provide infrastructure support, leverage industry partnerships, promotion and marketing support, integrated learning placement support and a high level of collaboration through Council's teams namely Community and Engagement (including Library Services), Economic Development and People and Safety. VPG will develop and operate the RUSH utilising appropriately skilled staff.

Both Council and VPG enter the relationship focused on the RUSH with a high degree of goodwill aimed at delivering sustainable outcomes for the Cassowary Coast Community.

Link to Corporate Plan:

OUR COMMUNITY - FOCUSED ON OUR PEOPLE

Our Aspirations

Our community is enjoying enhanced liveability with a strong sense of pride, belonging and connection, with improved access to quality health and wellbeing and community services.

Our Objectives

- C2 - Our community is diverse and inclusive, supporting and valuing families, children, young people and seniors and people of all abilities

OUR ECONOMY – OUR Future

Our Aspirations

We have a resilient economy leveraging opportunities through strategic partnerships and collaboration between all levels of government, community and industry.

We meet the social, economic and environmental challenges of our region to provide long-term inclusive and sustainable socio-economic outcomes using a place-based, community-first approach.

Our Objectives

- E1 - We provide an environment that encourages and facilitates new investment in our region
- E6 - Our community has accessible and inclusive opportunities for lifelong learning

OUR ORGANISATION - OUR LEADERSHIP AND OUR TEAM

Our Aspirations

Cassowary Coast Regional Council is a highly functional and financially viable Council that listens, makes informed choices, communicates and engages effectively, and creates a safe, inclusive and engaging workplace to attract and retain staff to deliver quality customer experiences.

Our Objectives

- O5 - Strive to attract and retain a diverse, engaged, capable workforce

Consultation:

The RUSH initiative was in response to Council's 2022 Community Scorecard (Youth Advisory Committee) and Economic Development Strategy. The 2022 Community Scorecard was open from 25 April to 13 May 2022 and was completed by 1,859 community members sharing over 100,000 words and results were shared with the community. The Scorecard highlighted areas the community wanted Council to prioritise including Economic Development and Jobs and Youth Services. Council's Economic Development Strategy undertook stakeholder engagement (community members, businesses, industry and government representatives) in the development of the Strategy which provides for the establishment of a RUSH in the Cassowary Coast (Action 9.1).

Legal Implications (Statutory basis, legal risks):

Nil.

Human Rights Act 2019 - Considerations

The *Human Rights Act 2019* provides that it is unlawful for a public agency to act or make a decision in a way that is not compatible with human rights, or to fail to give proper consideration to a human right. This necessitates understanding the human rights that are protected. When making decisions or taking actions, consideration needs to be given to how that may impact on a person's human rights. Where there is a restriction on a person's human rights the restriction must be no greater than is justifiable to protect the rights of others or the community at large.

The contents of this report do not infringe upon the *Human Rights Act 2019*.

Policy Implications:

The Facility Use Agreement is in accordance with Council's Community Use of Assets Policy.

Risk Implications (Corporate, Operational, Project risks):

The Facility Use Agreement has obligations for both Council and VPG throughout the term of the Agreement.

Financial & Resource Implications:

Establishment of the RUSH will be drawn from operational and capital budgets with the initial establishment costs and ongoing operational contributions being part of Council's commitment to deliver the RUSH.

Report authorised by:

Elizabeth Stavreski, Director Corporate and Community Services

Supporting Documents:

1. CCRC - RUSH Facility Options Assessment Report - LGM April 2024