I represent a rural remote Shire in far South West Queensland.   It covers an area of 47,600 sq. kms and has a population of 1700 of which 32% are first nations people.   We have one P-Yr12 and two primary state schools and one private primary school across three of our four towns.

In considering how tertiary education should be aligned to the nation’s needs moving forward,  we think the Country or Regional University Centre model should be included as part of the higher education delivery system, particularly to rural remote communities like Paroo, in order to achieve a number of the outcomes being sought through this review.

**Access & Opportunity**

The RUC model provides local access to vocational education and training as well as university courses.   Support is also available through a co-ordinator as well as fellow students.    Students do not have the upheaval of moving away from their home in order to have access to resources to study and for many in remote areas the cost of relocating to attend university is prohibitive.    Having a local RUC would encourage senior school students to be more likely to consider tertiary  education, seeing it as a natural pathway to a career.

Some of our Shire’s secondary school students already study by distance education due to circumstances such as secondary schooling not being available at their local school and ATAR subjects not being available at the one secondary state school.   Whilst this may be outside the realm of this review, we see a need to include distance education for secondary students as part of the RUC model for areas like ours.

**Meeting Australian Knowledge & Skills Needs – connecting VET & Higher Education Systems**

Those in work and already on career paths are finding the need to upgrade or learn new skills within the ever changing workplace.   The RUC model caters well to mature age students seeking to obtain further qualifications whilst not disrupting their family situation by having to move and provides access to others in the community undertaking similar study.    Having VET and higher education available at the same location provides a pathway between the two which students will have support to navigate.   The shortage of skilled labour is hampering the progress of remote rural communities and upskilling locals is one solution to help address this issue.   Feedback shows  that students  who study through an RUC are more likely to work in a regional area once they have graduated.

**Investment & Affordability**

Working with community organisations or local government, the RUC model is a cost effective way to broaden the reach of higher education, making it a viable option for many more students.    It’s designed to equip students with a supportive environment, study facilities, access to high-speed internet, modern technology and general academic support.    In some instances the infrastructure may already be available needing little capital investment.

**Quality & Sustainability**

Studying through an RUC provides learning support to meet student needs and nurture success.   Help with course organisation and management is available providing the student with a clear vision of how they can achieve their goals.    The model has been proven as it has expanded through more regional locations mainly in NSW indicating it is a sustainable form of higher education delivery.    The one-to-one assistance provided to students is highly valued and students are more likely to continue their studies because of the help they receive belonging to an RUC.

In areas like Paroo there needs to be easier, more affordable and supported access to higher education for both senior school students and mature age students to increase our skilled workforce.    Funding to extend the number of Regional University Centres in rural and remote locations would assist with improving the present situation and provide better access and opportunity to higher education for many more.