

UNESCO Learning Region of Circular Head, Tasmania

Extract taken from literature review written by Dr Leone Wheeler for Victorian Adult Community and Further Education Project, 2022 (Updated February 2025).

Circular Head is one of four Australian UNESCO Learning Cities¹ which are members of the UNESCO Global Network of Learning Cities (GNLC) and the only one located in a rural and regional area.

The rural community of Circular Head is in far North-West Tasmania and is classified as outer regional by the ARIA measure. The community is served by the Circular Head Council, and covers an area of 4,917 km², with an estimated population of 8,352 (ABS, 2024). Key economic sectors include dairy and livestock production, commercial fishing, aquaculture, forestry and timber production, agriculture, light industrial manufacturing, iron ore agglomeration and tourism. Smithton is the principal town, primarily servicing the above industries. The second largest town Stanley, in the shadow of an extinct volcano basaltic plug named Circular Head. It is this geographic feature, known colloquially as “the Nut”, that gives the region its name.

Formal lifelong learning infrastructure within Circular Head include five public primary and one independent primary school, one public high school, and one K-12 independent school. Both schools with secondary students have Trade Training Centres that facilitate school-based VET training to Certificate II level. There are no tertiary training campuses within Circular Head. Burnie, approximately one hour drive east of Smithton hosts the University of Tasmania Cradle Coast Campus and the TasTAFE Burnie campus. Smithton has a Regional University Study Hub supporting remote students as described further on in this case study.

There are many organisations that provide non-formal learning opportunities. Such organisations include a Heritage Museum in both Smithton and Stanley, numerous sporting clubs, particularly AFL and hockey, a “Men’s Shed”, Circular Head Aboriginal Corporation, Libraries Tasmania and Circular Head Council. It is of note that Circular Head Council and Libraries Tasmania are both members of the organisation 26Ten, which is a network of organisations working to improve the literacy and numeracy of Tasmanians.

Circular Head as well as being a 26Ten community is also a UNESCO Learning City. The ambition to be recognised as a UNESCO Learning City came from the Circular Head Education and Training Consultative Committee (CHETCC) formed in 1999 as a sub-committee of Circular Head Council.

Vision:

CHETCC promotes the value of community participation in skills and learning for life and will enhance awareness of the critical link between education and training and future life opportunities to work, connect and thrive in Circular Head (CHETCC, 2018).

¹ The four UNESCO Learning Cities are: the City of Melton and the City of Wyndham in Victoria; the City of Canning in WA and Circular Head in Tasmania

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CHETCC is responsible for:

- establishing recognisable and sustainable programs with young people
- supporting and liaising with community groups
- engaging and creating partnerships with business and industry
- promoting local learners.

Key Stakeholders include:

- Circular Head Council
- Cradle Coast Campus of UTAS
- TasTAFE
- Department of Education (Circular Head Cluster Group)
- Circular Head Business Enterprise Centre & industry members
- Cradle Coast Authority
- Department of Economic Development
- Circular Head Non-Government School
(Circular Head Council, n.d.)

The CHETCC Operational Plan 2018-2021 states that CHETCC and Circular Head Council have taken direction from the UNESCO Global Network of Learning Cities Guiding Document (UNESCO UIL, 2015) which defines a Learning City/community/municipality which effectively mobilises its resources in every sector to:

- promote inclusive learning from basic to higher education
- revitalise learning in families and communities
- facilitate learning for and in the workplace
- extend the use of modern learning technologies
- enhance quality and excellence in learning, and
- foster a culture of learning throughout life

In so doing it will create and reinforce individual empowerment and social cohesion, economic and cultural prosperity, and sustainable development.

These principles and values of UNESCO Learning Cities (UNESCO UIL, 2015) are equally applicable to those people living in rural, regional and remote communities; those living in disadvantaged and poor neighbourhoods and communities, as well as small towns and villages under the umbrella of a learning society (Maclean & Wheeler, 2021 p.18).

To achieve their vision, CHETCC have developed a number of plans and studies, including a Literacy Plan, and a Workforce Planning Study. It should be noted that although CHETCC didn't pursue a Regional University Study Centre for Circular Head during application phase, its opening was accepted when proposed by the West Coast Study Hub and is part of the lifelong learning infrastructure (McGillvery, A., personal communication, February 10, 2025).

Literacy Plan

There is a draft literacy plan released for comment (Circular Head Council, 2025) that plans to help the Circular Head community learn for life. This draft plan is intended to replace the previous Literacy Plan of Fletcher and Maynard (2013). Some learning elements cited in the previous plan still exist including: holding annual 'Leading Learning' events (the Science Gig and Onwards and

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Upwards), the Mayor's Education Fund (a yearly bursary), the project 'Learning While Having Fun' (in partnership with Rural Health Tasmania), and holding an Opportunities and Options Expo. Of note, is that funding was obtained for the Circular Head Trade Training Centre (not to be confused with the Study Centre), with the Trade Training Centre now operating as part of Smithton High School.

The statistics show that there is a great need for literacy support with less than half of adult Tasmanians aged 15-74 years have the literacy skills needed to cope with everyday life. For Circular Head that translates to 3000 – 4000 people who may benefit from literacy support. In addition, the Fletcher and Maynard report noted that less than half of the young people of Circular Head have gained a Year 12 qualification (37%) which is lower than other parts of Tasmania and other parts of Australia (op cit: p. 2).

The vision statement in the draft literacy plan is that anyone who wants to learn, can. The aim is to ensure that Circular Head "can be a place where people take part in different types and styles of learning programs to suit their interests and needs – for work, for school, to make social connections, or just for fun".

The stated goals of the draft literacy plan have been reduced from the previous five down to four:

1. We are a community with skills and capacity to sustain ongoing literacy and learning programs
2. We have networks and connections that help all learners in our community thrive
3. We are a community of life-long learners
4. We are a community that enables participation in literacy and learning programs

As with the current plan, the draft plan outlines a series of practical strategies for each goal with actions, who will do the actions, timelines, and measures of success. A part-time funded coordinator role as previously recommended by Fletcher and Maynard (2013) has been funded and engaged.

Workforce Planning Study

The Circular Head Workforce Planning study is another major research piece delivered by CHETCC and Circular Head Council. The purpose of the study is to enable a greater understanding of the workforce challenges and opportunities in the region and assess the capability to deliver key actions identified in the workforce planning study (Circular Head Education and Training Consultative Committee & Circular Head Council, 2021).

The following four themes are identified in an Action Plan:

1. Pursue skill development and job recruitment initiatives
2. Strengthen a link between industry needs and educational pathways
3. Pursue broader economic development measures
4. Embrace and Embed a Jobs Hub into the Jobs Tasmania Network.

The Action Plan prioritizes a range of actions, with partners with a focus on a Jobs Hubs model for the Northwest region.

The Workforce Planning Study and the Literacy Plan are important background research that is backed up by solid actions. A study centre and hub are the learning infrastructure that will deliver training outcomes for the region.

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The Study Centre Circular Head, Study Hub West Coast and Study King Island



The Study Centre Circular Head, Study Hub West Coast and Study King Island are part of a network of Regional University Study Hubs (RUSH) across regional and remote Australia. These Study Hubs are funded by the Commonwealth Government. Approval and funding for each Study Hub is released in rounds known as cohorts. Study Centre Circular Head and West Coast Study Hub are cohort 1 while Study King Island is cohort 4. In May 2022 it was announced that cohort 1 have received another four years of funding.

Source: Circular Head presentation (ALA, 2022)

The Study Centre Circular Head is an innovative example of a flexible learning space. The Study Centre has a close partnership with the University of Tasmania (UTAS). The university state that it is committed to regional Tasmanians by:

- Enabling colleges to achieve their strategic outcomes in regions
- Lifting engagement with internal stakeholders and facilitate college engagement in regions (via college stakeholders)
- Increasing educational aspiration, access and participation to higher education in remote areas, particularly in the West Coast and Circular Head regions (UTAS, 2023).

It should be noted that the Study Centre is not expressly for UTAS University students:

Students studying a university degree through any Australian university are welcome to access Study Centre Circular Head facilities.

Students studying any vocational education and training qualification Australia wide are welcome to access Study Centre Circular Head facilities (SCCH, n.d.).

The Study Centre, like all Regional University Study Hubs provide infrastructure such as study spaces, video conferencing, computer facilities and internet access, as well as academic support for students studying at Australian Universities and Registered Training Organisations.

The Study Centre Circular Head is staffed by a Centre Manager and a Student Support Officer to act as learning facilitators and assists learners with a range of support services. In addition, a UTAS Regional Learning Officer is hosted on site three days per week and a Local Engagement Officer from West North West Working is hosted half a day a week to help enable wraparound services for students (McGillvery, A., personal communication, February 2025).

An additional Study Hub is approved under cohort 5 in Eastern Tasmania at St Helens, opening mid 2025 (Department of Education, 2025). This is run by a different auspice organisation to the existing Regional University Study Hubs in Tasmania. A similar model to the RUSH network has been funded by the Commonwealth Government as the Suburban University Study Hubs. One of these Suburban Hubs has been approved for opening at Sorell in Tasmania's south (Department of Education, 2025 [Feb 5]).

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Note: in Victoria, Commonwealth funded Study Hubs are located at Bairnsdale, Corryong, Mansfield, Swan Hill, Wangaratta, and Wonthaggi. In addition, Bairnsdale operate Study Hub outreach to Heyfield, Mallacoota, Omeo, Orbost and Yarram. Furthermore, Hamilton is approved in cohort 5 (Department of Education, 2025, [Feb 6]). Suburban Study Hubs will open in Broadmeadows, Epping and Melton by mid-2025 (Department of Education, 2025, [Feb 5]).

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