



**LA TROBE**  
UNIVERSITY

**CO-DESIGNING  
MARYBOROUGH'S  
LEARNING HUB**

**WHITE PAPER  
ON  
ADVANCING  
REGIONAL SKILLS &  
INNOVATION  
LEADERSHIP IN THE  
CENTRAL  
GOLDFIELDS SHIRE**



**APRIL 2023**

## Acknowledgement of Country

Central Goldfields Shire Council acknowledges and extends appreciation for the Dja Dja Wurrung People, the Traditional Owners of the land that we are on.

We pay our respects to leaders and Elders past, present and emerging for they hold the memories, the traditions, the culture and the hopes of all Dja Dja Wurrung People.

We express our gratitude in the sharing of this land, our sorrow for the personal, spiritual and cultural costs of that sharing and our hope that we may walk forward together in harmony and in the spirit of healing.

## Table of Contents

<b>ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY .....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>TABLE OF CONTENTS .....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>ADVANCING REGIONAL SKILLS &amp; INNOVATION LEADERSHIP IN THE CENTRAL GOLDFIELDS SHIRE ...</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>.....</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Foreword.....</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>EXECUTIVE SUMMARY .....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Introduction.....</b>	<b>4</b>
<i>Background to the TILT project in Maryborough .....</i>	<i>4</i>
<i>The Maryborough Context.....</i>	<i>5</i>
<b>Map.....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>The Research and Development Process .....</b>	<b>8</b>
<i>Desktop Research.....</i>	<i>8</i>
<b>CO-DESIGNING A LEARNING HUB IN MARYBOROUGH .....</b>	<b>9</b>
<i>Maryborough Workshop 1: Community Insights on Education to Employment.....</i>	<i>9</i>
<i>Maryborough Workshop 2: Co-Designing Maryborough’s Learning Hub.....</i>	<i>9</i>
<i>Workshop 3: Strategically Coordinating the Development of the Learning Hub.....</i>	<i>10</i>
<b>Next Steps for the Learning Hub: Phase 2.....</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>CO-DEVELOPING A VISION FOR THE CENTRAL GOLDFIELDS SHIRE .....</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>Funding the Learning Hub, Pilot Projects and Maryborough’s Regional Innovation.....</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>CLOSING REMARKS .....</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>Acknowledgements.....</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>References.....</b>	<b>16</b>

## Advancing Regional Skills & Innovation Leadership in Central Goldfields Shire

### Foreword



**Dr Anton Kriz,  
Lead of TILT**

Capturing the attention of our youth, and tapping into their passions, is now a nationwide challenge.

We set up the environment, structures and processes that lead to opportunities (or lack thereof) that our young people experience, so we all share in the responsibility. Interestingly regional companies are some of the first signalling that we need to rapidly turn this around. Given they employ many of our youth straight from school; these companies are privy to many of the deeper issues.

What we find exciting is when local communities, like Maryborough and the Central Goldfields, take the lead and say enough is enough. Watching local stakeholders working together brings hope and what we have seen in Maryborough has been outstanding. Ours is the easy part. We bring evidence to place-based initiatives through TILT or triggering innovation leadership transformation. Unlocking change needs great leadership and our job is to train regions in how to do this more effectively.

This project is an exciting spin-off of a Greater Bendigo Region industry-university TILT initiative. Major Maryborough employers in our TILT program asked for help in building the skills and better engaging with local youth. Fortunately, we had Fraunhofer IESE from Germany working with us. We really believe the community of Maryborough has what it takes to co-create something very special and a first for Australia.



**Cr Grace La Vella, Mayor  
of Central Goldfields Shire**

There is a defined gap in employment in Central Goldfields Shire together with no post-secondary training to support our young adults to stay within their communities.

Covid-19 has brought an awareness that many people are relocating to regional towns and cities, however one of the measures of appeal is employment.

Maryborough is unique in its infrastructure with four major supermarkets, a selection of restaurants and popular eatery franchises, a huge variety of retail outlets and a vast choice of sporting opportunities. Yet, due to an ageing population, we are facing a range of economic challenges. We have a responsibility to our young and the community to ensure the sustainability of our Shire by offering a local tertiary institution such as a ground-breaking co-designed Learning Hub.

A Learning Hub in our Shire will encourage post-secondary students to undertake tertiary education at university or through vocational training. By offering diverse learning experiences, career advice, mentors/coaches, the Learning Hub will build aspiration and interest in local education, training and work pathways. In turn, this will be an investment in our region's future by supporting local industries and businesses overcome employment challenges.

This white paper is a research-based report offering a focused description of a complex topic. It presents a thought-out view to help educate the reader through the eyes of local students, educators, academics and local industry and business experts.

## Executive Summary

Maryborough is a regional town ready for transformation through innovation leadership. Maryborough's serious challenge of retaining young people due to a lack of post-secondary education options requires a response. Equally challenging, is supporting local industries and businesses to grow amid a shortage of suitably skilled employment applicants.

Maryborough's crisis of a gap in education-to-employment pathways is being met by the community who have collaborated to develop solutions. Through a series of workshops involving local industries, school students, universities and TAFE centres, the Central Goldfields Shire Council (CGSC) and a range of community organisations, Maryborough has begun co-designing a Learning Hub to provide young people with opportunities for further study, connections to local jobs and mentoring for skill and mindset development. In preparation for the Learning Hub, invested stakeholders will be running pilot projects to test key program features such as industry tours and after school student mentoring and study spaces.

Co-designing a Learning Hub is a significant milestone for Maryborough indicative of a broader strategy for change being facilitated by the TILT R&D group. TILT R&D (Triggering Innovation Leadership Transformation Research and Development) is a partnership between La Trobe University, The Australian National University (ANU), and Fraunhofer IESE who have provided industry 5.0+ technical support from Germany. This partnership demonstrates an ongoing commitment from TILT to continue supporting Maryborough to build its Learning Hub and with other regional innovation projects in the Central Goldfields Shire.

This white paper documents how the Maryborough community is actively working towards positive transformation with support from TILT R&D. It is a call for support through funding and investment of resources from government and private investors. The investment in supporting Maryborough's young people to study and work locally is an investment in the region's future. It is also a model of community leadership and innovation that would apply to other regions of Australia.



**On behalf of the Maryborough Community, we welcome all forms of support.**



## Introduction

### ***Background to the TILT project in Maryborough***

Maryborough was identified by TILT R&D as a town facing a range of economic challenges related to an aging demographic, its location as peripheral to Bendigo and Ballarat, and a lack of education and employment opportunities. In contrast, Maryborough also revealed strengths such as a newly appointed council with strong leadership, a small cluster of high performing industries, and a connected community resolved to address Maryborough's challenges. The combination of issues and community readiness for change made Maryborough an ideal candidate town for research and development into regional innovation.

TILT R&D became active in the Maryborough community through a leadership program focused on supporting local small to medium Enterprises (SMEs) to survive the 'valley of death'. A group of industries from Bendigo and Maryborough partnered with La Trobe University, Australian National University (ANU) and Fraunhofer IESE (Institute for Experimental Software Engineering) from Kaiserslautern, Germany. This program was called TILT5.0+.

One of the pressure points identified by local industries is a lack of suitably skilled applicants for available positions. Employee demand for Maryborough's industries exceeds supply. In contrast, the perception of school leavers is that Maryborough does not offer suitable study and employment opportunities causing young people to leave Maryborough, resulting in high levels of unemployment. This complex local issue of: a) lack of suitable employees, b) lack of further education options and c) unawareness of employment opportunities became the 'wicked challenge' to be addressed. Addressing this wicked challenge required engaging with more stakeholders from community, education, industry and CGSC to understand the specific context of Maryborough and the interrelated factors causing these complex issues.



*Stakeholders from education, industry and community in Workshop 2, Maryborough, 2023*

## ***The Maryborough Context***

### **Location and Population.**

Maryborough is in the Central Goldfields Shire, in the Loddon Campaspe Region of Victoria, approximately 150 kms northwest of Melbourne. It is situated approximately 60 kms southwest of Bendigo (also part of the Loddon Campaspe Region) and 60 kms north of Ballarat (Grampians Central Highlands Region). The Central Goldfields Shire is known for food manufacturing, historic buildings from the gold mining era, and events such as the annual Energy Breakthrough and the Highland Games.

The population of Central Goldfields Shire is approximately 13,000 people. Maryborough is the Shire's major business centre and is a health and retail centre for surrounding towns including Castlemaine, St Arnaud, Avoca, Talbot and Dunolly. The population of Maryborough is approximately 7,900 people (the largest in the Central Goldfields Shire). The next largest population is approximately 1,200 people in Carisbrook (including Flagstaff). These two cities account for 70% of the population of the Central Goldfields Shire (Economic Development Strategy 2020 – 2025).



*From the Tourism & Events Strategy 2020 – 2025 (p. 15)*

### Demographics.

There appears to be two dominant demographic challenges for sustainable development in the Central Goldfields Shire: a lack of young people in the region and a low socio-economic index. The Central Goldfields Shire population is disproportionately weighted towards an older population compared to other regions in Victoria (median age is 50 years).

There is a decline in all younger cohorts including parents and homebuilders, babies and pre-schoolers, and secondary school students. From 2011-2016 there was an increase in the 20-34-year age groups moving to Central Goldfields Shire, mostly from surrounding areas (Population, Housing and Residential Strategy). The projected increase in elderly residents (aged 70+ years) and the decrease in younger cohorts could create economic issues related to a supply of employees and providing suitable care for older residents including medical services, suitable housing, infrastructure for shopping and transport in and around the city of Maryborough.

The Socio-Economic Index for Areas (SEIFA) Index score for Central Goldfields Shire is 870. This is well below the national average of 1,000 which has placed Central Goldfields Shire as one of the most disadvantaged Local Government Areas in Victoria with issues related to low income, low educational attainment, high unemployment, and jobs in relatively unskilled occupations (Economic Development Strategy 2020 – 2025).

### Employment Profile.

Economic challenges for Central Goldfields Shire include a need to attract a younger and more diverse population to the shire to provide labour and skills for diverse industry and business positions. To attract families to the shire and retain school leavers, there is a need for tertiary education pathways as well as adult education opportunities for upskilling existing and newly arrived lower-skilled workers.

Most businesses are small businesses (less than 20 employees). “98% of businesses in the Shire are considered small business and 55% of those are non-employing businesses. Only 2% of business in the Shire employ between 20 and 199 staff and there are currently no businesses in the Shire that employ more than 200 staff” (Economic Development Strategy 2020 – 2025, p. 26). Since this report was written, one industry (True Foods) has exceeded 200 staff. A few local industries have endeavoured to build improved training and recruitment strategies to match growth with employee numbers.



Non-employing  
Businesses



Small  
Businesses



Employ  
20 to 199 Staff

*Data and graphs from the Economic Development Strategy 2020 – 2025 (p. 26)*

## Education.

The Central Goldfields Shire has one state school: Maryborough Education Centre (MEC) with approximately 1000 students enrolled in Year Levels Prep to 12. The school provides a HeadStart program (Year levels 10-12) which includes apprenticeships while studying and a careers coordinator. Maryborough also has an Ecumenical Christian School for Year levels 7-12: Highview College, with a focus on VCE pathways. There is no tertiary institution in the Central Goldfields Shire as the Maryborough TAFE closed approximately seven years ago. This leaves a gap in post-secondary school education with students needing to travel or move to Bendigo, Ballarat or Melbourne for tertiary studies. The Maryborough District Health Service (MDHS) provides student clinical placements, graduate nurse programs and work experience. The planned \$100 million redevelopment of the MDHS could create further opportunities for health-related internships and university health placements.

This summary of the Maryborough context establishes a rationale for developing a coordinated multi-level and multi-stakeholder approach to respond to Maryborough's challenges and opportunities. This response had commenced through different action groups such as the Committee for Maryborough (C4M), CGSC and other stakeholders. TILT R&D has capitalised on the existing relationships and goodwill of the community to formalise research and development through the input of university researchers from Fraunhofer IESE, ANU and La Trobe University. Bringing together Maryborough's diverse stakeholders (especially young people) has been a central task of the TILT program in the Central Goldfields Shire.



*Some of our young ambassadors from the Maryborough Education Centre, Highview College and the Youth Council after Workshop 2: Co-designing Maryborough's Learning Hub, 2023*



## The Research and Development Process

### *Desktop Research*

TILT R&D commenced its partnership with the Central Goldfields Shire Council (CGSC) through a review of research reports on a range of sectors impacting on Maryborough's regional development. These reports addressed the following sectors: economy, employment, housing, transport, climate action, industrial land, council planning, tourism as business and cultural historical assets. The review provided TILT R&D and CGSC with a synthesis of key findings from all reports into a single scoping review. Some key themes which emerged from the synthesis of findings included:

- A need to redress the age imbalance in Maryborough by attracting younger professional workers and encouraging new families to settle in Maryborough and other parts of the Shire.
- A need to make education pathways within the Central Goldfields Shire a priority to keep school leavers in the region through post-secondary schooling, work training and employment opportunities.
- A need for Maryborough to develop a vision for becoming a leader in specialised growth sectors such as health care, social services, manufacturing, green industries and agriculture which are strengths for the Central Goldfields Shire.

A key recommendation from the scoping review was to conduct a study on supporting education pathways for school leavers in Maryborough and whether the creation of a local tertiary institution was needed. This recommendation was also listed as a priority for CGSC in its Economic Development Strategy 2020-2025.



## Co-Designing a Learning Hub in Maryborough

### ***Maryborough Workshop 1: Community Insights on Education to Employment***

The study into education-to-employment pathways began with a workshop to consult with 16 key stakeholders from education, industry, CGSC and community organisations. This was facilitated by TILT5.0+. The result of Workshop 1 was the identification of a need to:

- Support young people to gain qualifications, skills and aspirational mindsets to apply for local jobs.
- Improve systemic supports for young people by better connecting schools, tertiary education institutions (such as TAFE and universities) and businesses.
- Make Maryborough an attractive place to study, work and live by showcasing its local industries and providing social, economic and educational opportunities for young people.

The workshop resulted in the conceptualisation of a physical and digital Learning Hub in Maryborough with diverse work and learning experiences, career advice and mentors/coaches to build aspiration and interest in further study and local careers.

### ***Maryborough Workshop 2: Co-Designing Maryborough's Learning Hub***

Building on the concept of a Maryborough Learning Hub, a second workshop was run to hear from a broader range of stakeholders including students from both local schools (Maryborough Education Centre and Highview College) and the Maryborough Youth Council. Approximately 40 representatives from schools; industry and business; CGSC; universities; TAFE and community organisations participated in the workshop.

Participants in Workshop 2 developed a solid concept of what the Maryborough Learning Hub would aim to achieve by identifying the following key components:

- *Practical and engaging programs:* Hands-on workshops and practical onsite learning
- *Mentorship and advice:* Having a Q & A forum as well as a range of mentors
- *Networked community of support:* Broader opportunities for support by connecting agencies in a network through the Learning Hub
- *Diverse learning spaces:* Safe and comfortable youth-centred spaces
- *Accessibility:* Transport for physical access and online programs

These broad components of the proposed Maryborough Learning Hub were more clearly defined by developing blueprints of how the components could be trialled as prototypes for the Learning Hub programs, events and spaces. Four prototype ideas have been combined into two pilot projects to be run in Maryborough:

- ***Industry Launch:*** A Q & A Forum inviting guest speakers from industry and tertiary education to schools during school term to answer questions in preparation for an *Industry Open House* tour to local industries and businesses during the school

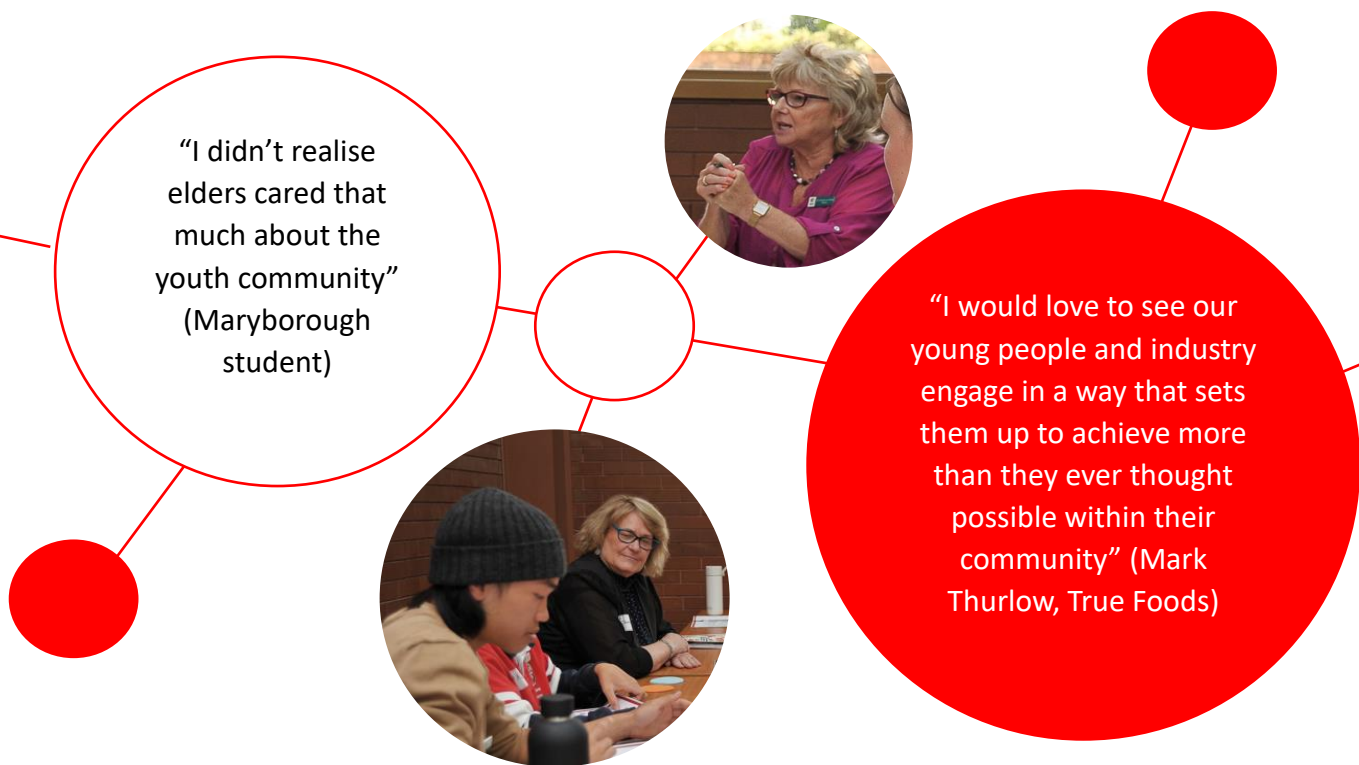
holidays. The Industry Open House would include a tour, discussions with staff and interactive activities for students to learn about different roles in the companies.

- **Youth Learning Hub:** A *Mentoring Program* and *Student Study Support Space* held after school at an existing central venue (such as the Council Community Hub or the Go Goldfields Atrium). Programs could range from study support, peer discussion and career skills with a focus on peer and near-peer support for young people. An online community of practice could also be developed for student peer-learning to increase accessibility for students unable to attend in person.

These pilot projects will trial the key components of the future Learning Hub. Evaluation of the projects' success through university research, community feedback, participant attendance and engagement will provide a clearer understanding of how the proposed Learning Hub can be built and managed to best serve the needs of young people, local businesses and community organisations. The pilot projects are a low-cost investment enabling committed stakeholders to immediately support education-to-employment issues for young people and actively contribute to the development of future Learning Hub programs.

### **Workshop 3: Strategically Coordinating the Development of the Learning Hub**

The next workshop planned for May 2023 will establish a steering committee, strategic plan for the development of the Learning Hub and project action groups to coordinate the two pilot projects. A list of expressions of interest for steering committee members and project coordinators was collected at the end of Workshop 2. The list demonstrates a commitment from community members to be actively involved in the development of the Learning Hub. Prior to this workshop, a strategic planning meeting will be undertaken with a small group of leading industries, the C4M and CGSC. A proposed schedule for the development of the Maryborough Learning Hub is included on the following page.



“I didn’t realise elders cared that much about the youth community”  
(Maryborough student)

“I would love to see our young people and industry engage in a way that sets them up to achieve more than they ever thought possible within their community” (Mark Thurlow, True Foods)

## Next Steps for the Learning Hub: Phase 2

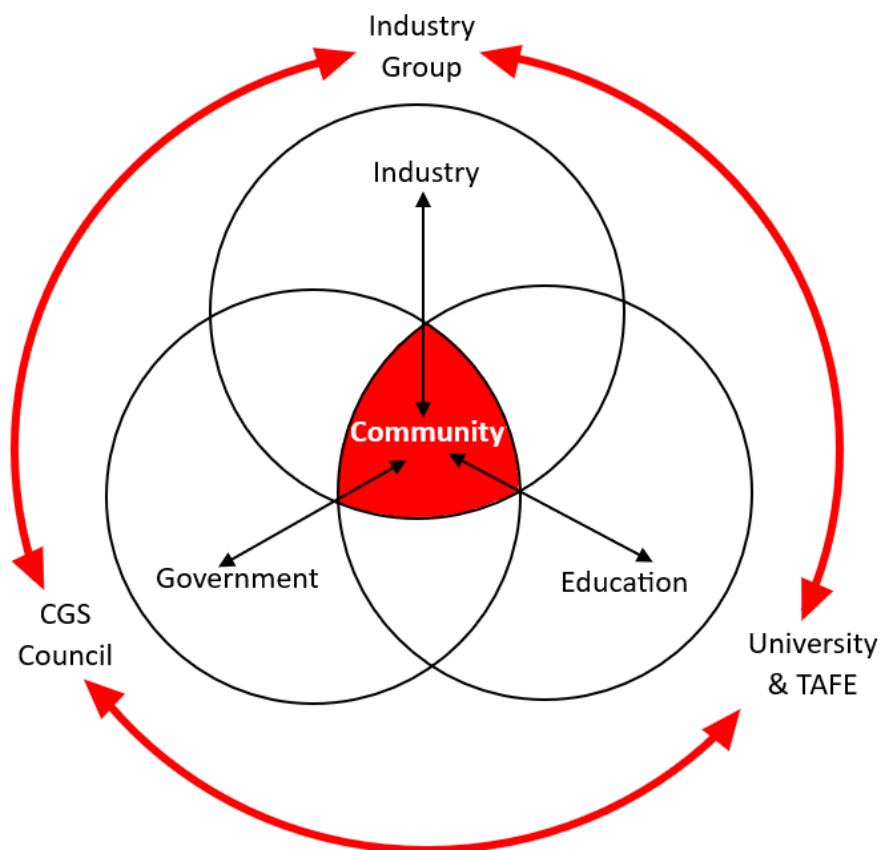
A proposed schedule of next steps for stakeholders of the development of the Maryborough Learning Hub project is provided. The proposal will be revised through future steering committee meetings.

<b>2023</b>	
May	Stakeholder consultation with local organisations, industries, CGSC and the C4M to establish a long-term regional innovation strategy. Part of the strategy will be developing a framework to support the organisation of the Learning Hub steering committee and project action groups.
	Formation of a steering committee to coordinate the future development of the Learning Hub. The steering committee will endeavour to source funding and resources for the pilot projects. The steering committee will develop a timeline for the trial of the projects prior to the commencement of the construction — or repurposing of an existing facility — as the permanent Learning Hub.
June	Project action groups will be organised to lead the pilot projects. The project action groups will coordinate the logistics of venues, participants, communication, program development and evaluation.
July-Dec	A trial period to test the pilot projects will be determined to gain participant feedback and other forms of evaluative data on the effectiveness of the pilot projects.
<b>2024</b>	
Jan-July	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-A suitable location will be found for the Learning Hub for a new construction or renovating an existing venue</li> <li>-Funding proposal with architectural plans for the Learning Hub facility</li> <li>-Formalisation of curriculum including bolt-on courses and programs with external education providers such as TAFE, universities and partner organisations such as MDHS and industry training services</li> </ul>
Sept-Dec	Construction of the Maryborough Learning Hub.
<b>2025</b>	
Feb	Opening of the Maryborough Learning Hub (This is Phase 3 of the Maryborough Learning Hub project).
July	Mid-year evaluation of programs (later evaluations to be conducted every 12 months).



## Co-developing a Vision for The Central Goldfields Shire

TILT R&D is committed to supporting the Central Goldfields Shire to envision innovative responses to challenges and to build from its strong industry and community commitment to transformation. A bold approach to regional development is proposed with a strong partnership between university researchers, CGSC, local industries and community organisations. The Learning Hub project is a proof of concept for a range of projects that address complex challenges for the region. A model of this multi-level and multi-stakeholder partnership is provided. The TILT model is an adaptation of the *Triple Helix Model* by Etzkowitz and Leydesdorff (2000).



*Model of Community and Regional Levels of Mediated Stakeholder Partnership (TILT, 2023)*

This model represents TILT's two levels of intermediary support in the Central Goldfields Shire (in red):

- The central involvement of the Maryborough community to connect industry with education and government. TILT R&D has fostered community-orientated stakeholder projects through workshops and action groups. The development of the

Learning Hub is an example of this bottom-up approach. Specifically, the Learning Hub creates a formerly lacking connection between community and education.

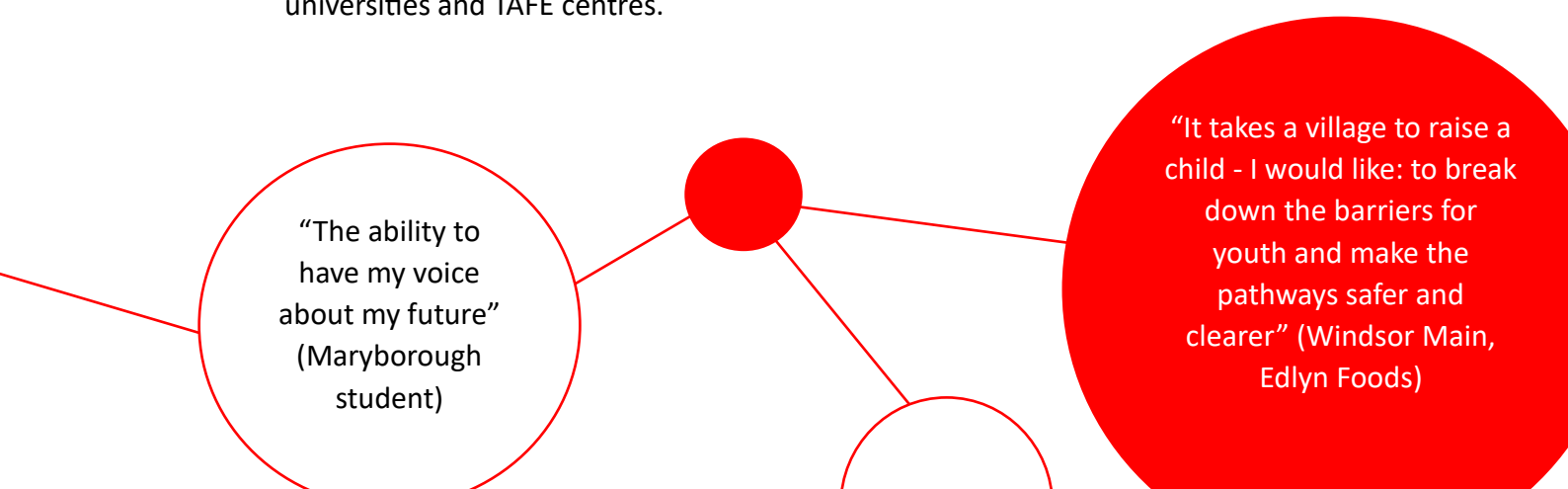
- An outer layer of strategic planning with a small group of leading industries, education institutions (TAFE and universities) and CGSC. This institutional layer of partnership provides long-term strategic vision for the Central Goldfields Shire. TILT R&D is fostering leadership capacity for institutions to work as a group to achieve innovative transformation of the region over a 3–5-year period. TILT R&D has been providing research and facilitation of meetings to support this top-down strategic planning.

By simultaneously working with community stakeholders from the bottom-up and leading organisations from the top-down, Maryborough has been undertaking a process of coordinated transformation. TILT R&D is committed to providing ongoing support to the Central Goldfields Shire to achieve its regional innovation goals. Future involvement of TILT R&D is dependent on further funding. This and other required funds are discussed in the following section.

### **Funding the Learning Hub, Pilot Projects and Maryborough’s Regional Innovation**

Immediate funding for Maryborough’s short term regional innovation can broadly be divided into three categories:

- Funding for the Learning Hub pilot projects, steering committee and project action groups. Funding through grants would enable resources to be provided for each project covering venue costs, materials, transport and possible payment to mentors and participating industries. Funding may also cover a salary for a lead position in the steering committee to oversee the development of the Learning Hub. Funding to support members of the project action groups through work release time to dedicate to the pilot projects, may also be required. This funding may come from local or state government grants.
- A 12-month contract for a TILT researcher to work half-time on research and development for the establishment of the Learning Hub, support for the pilot projects and Maryborough’s long-term strategic planning with leading organisations. Funding for this contract could be split evenly between government, university and industry.
- The construction of the Learning Hub at the end of 2024 and hiring of staff in 2025. This will require a commitment from state government for a set number of years against measurable outcomes from the Learning Hub such as an increased number of employed school leavers and partnerships with tertiary education such as universities and TAFE centres.



“The ability to have my voice about my future”  
(Maryborough student)

“It takes a village to raise a child - I would like: to break down the barriers for youth and make the pathways safer and clearer” (Windsor Main, Edlyn Foods)

## Closing Remarks

This white paper has summarised the beginning of a process of transformation for Maryborough and the Central Goldfields Shire. It has outlined the challenges that Maryborough has been facing and a process of collaborative community initiative and innovation to address these challenges. Building from the excellent research and planning already undertaken by CGSC, the TILT R&D group has crystallised a key project for Maryborough: the development of a Learning Hub. The combination of community workshops and strategic planning with leading organisations provides a model of coordinated action for all stakeholders.

The aim of this white paper has been to draw attention to the success of the Maryborough regional innovation process so far in gaining strong support from community, industry, university and CGSC. We hope that this white paper will attract funding from government and committed stakeholders in Maryborough's future. Funding is required to launch the pilot projects and maintain research and development from the TILT R&D group. Beyond this, funding is required for the construction of the permanent Maryborough Learning Hub and its operations. The construction of Maryborough's Learning Hub will be a key milestone in demonstrating a successful model of innovation for the region which can be applied to other bold projects in the Central Goldfields Shire and other regions. We believe that the provision of funding and other support is an investment in the future of this region and its next generation of learners, workers and their families. It is also a model that can serve other regions to support regional innovation with significant social and economic impacts.

For all inquiries, please contact Brian Gould, Economic Development Officer CGSC  
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**Thank you from our Maryborough community stakeholders.**

## Acknowledgements

TILT R&D thank the Central Goldfields Shire Council for their ongoing support and endorsement of the white paper on April 18, 2023:

### **MOTION**

That Council endorses the La Trobe University-commissioned White Paper on Advancing Regional Skills & Innovation Leadership in Central Goldfields Shire incorporating the Co-Designing of a Maryborough Learning Hub.

**Moved:** Anna de Villiers

**Seconded:** Cr Sproull

**Carried**

TILT R&D thank the following stakeholders for their involvement in the process and/or to the implementation of the Maryborough Learning Hub project:

- Asteria Services
- Australian Catholic University-Teach for Australia Partnership
- Barker Trailers
- Bendigo & District Aboriginal Co-Operative (BDAC)
- Bendigo Pottery
- Bendigo TAFE
- Central Goldfields Shire Council (CGSC)
- Central Goldfields Youth Council
- Committee for Maryborough (C4M)
- Edlyn Foods
- Federation University
- Go Goldfields
- Goldfields LLEN
- Heighton Mezzanines Systems
- Highview College
- Jobs Victoria
- La Trobe University
- Loddon Mallee ACFE Regional Council
- Maryborough District Health Service (MDHS)
- Maryborough Education Centre (MEC)
- McPherson's Printing
- Sonac
- Sutton Tools
- True Foods
- Victorian Skills Authority
- WDEA Works Employment



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*Aerial view of Maryborough, Central Goldfields Shire, Victoria.*

White paper prepared by Dr Aimé Sacrez on behalf of TILT R&D and the CGSC with support from the C4M.