



# CASSOWARY COAST UNIVERSITY CENTRE

HIGHER EDUCATION SUPPORT BY

VPG

## NOV- APRIL 2025 SERVICE HIGHLIGHTS



97

Students  
Registered

57

NEW  
Students



50%

are the first  
in their family to study



42%

of students are  
17-25 years of age

11%

of students  
identify as First  
Nations People



15%

of students have a disability



83%

of students  
are female



45%

of students are parents



### Top Areas of Study

University

1. Health
2. Education
3. Society & Culture



26%

of students progressed to  
Uni after CCUC guidance  
& support

## Building the Cassowary Coast's Professional Pipeline

It's hard to believe the Cassowary Coast University Centre (CCUC) has only been operational for eight months. In that time, 97 students have joined the centre. That's 97 future professionals preparing to shape a stronger, more sustainable workforce for our region.

Nearly 70% of our students are studying in priority fields like health, education, and human services. These students represent our future nurses, teachers, social workers, just to name a few - forming a critical backbone of our local workforce. At CCUC, we're proud to be supporting their success, growing a skilled workforce that strengthens the region from within.

### Here's what our local professional pipeline currently looks like...

#### 26 future healthcare professionals

That's 26 students studying health-related fields, preparing to become doctors, nurses, paramedics, physiotherapists, and mental health practitioners delivering essential care across the region.

#### 21 future teachers & educators

That's 21 students pursuing education-related studies, aiming for careers as teachers, early childhood educators, guidance officers and teacher aides supporting local schools and learning centres.

#### 20 future human services professionals

That's 20 students enrolled in society and culture related studies, working towards roles in social work, psychology, counselling, and law, strengthening the services that support our communities.

Our students are also pursuing careers in business (11), science (7), engineering (4), creative arts (2), agriculture (1), and preparation programs (5), further expanding the region's future talent pool. With 97 homegrown professionals in the making, and counting, this is an exciting time for the Cassowary Coast (and we're only just getting started).

*Our students. Our future professionals.*



### Our Growing Community of Parent Learners



At the CCUC, 45% of our students are parents juggling study, work, and family, often all at the same time. They're gaining the qualifications they need for the careers they want, without leaving their families or their community behind. Madeleine (pictured) is one of them. While working in an education support role at Goondi SS, she completed her Bachelor of Education through JCU, with CCUC backing her across the finish line - a big achievement toward her future as a teacher. After welcoming her new bub, Madeleine is enjoying this next chapter, and we have no doubt she will be a wonderful addition to the local teaching workforce.

## Celebrating Success, Right Here at Home

For regional students, milestones like graduation often pass quietly. Travel, cost, and family responsibilities mean many miss out on formal celebrations. But these moments matter. They build confidence, strengthen community, and remind students their achievements are worth recognising.

In February 2025, the CCUC held its first graduation ceremony in centre, celebrating Angie and Sharon - friends, colleagues, and study buddies - who completed their Certificate III in Business through TAFE. They were joined by peers, our staff and their families - including three generations of Angie's family - making it a memorable occasion for everyone in attendance.

There were tears, smiles, and an overwhelming sense of pride. For both women, the chance to graduate close to home, with their community around them, meant more than words could express.

"I hadn't told anyone I was doing this course because I thought I would fail," Angie said. "Having this ceremony, the support from Karina and Jade, and the chance to wear the cap and gown, it's amazing. I never had many opportunities before, so this means a lot."

Completing their Certificate III has driven both graduates' professional growth and inspired Sharon's next step. Sharon's now pursuing a Bachelor of Education at Charles Sturt University, with CCUC guiding her through course selection, enrolment, and semester preparation.

Gowns and caps now remain on display at the CCUC as a quiet nudge to students - your success matters, and it will be celebrated. This was the first graduation - with many more on the horizon.



## A Connected & Supported Community of Regional Learners

At the CCUC, we've turned regional study into a shared journey. Step through our doors any day and you'll find learners over coffee, swapping study tips and tackling assignments together. Those spontaneous moments lead to progress - questions answered on the spot, motivation maintained, and friendships that carry students through the toughest weeks.

To sustain this momentum, we introduced casual connection points designed around student routines: Toastie Tuesdays over morning tea to support peer connections, drop-in group study support in the afternoon, and weekly Pomodoro sessions in the evening to combat procrastination. We've also rolled out workshops responsive to student needs - from Zotero referencing and LANTITE prep to university pathway support - delivering practical sessions on the topics students request.

Reflecting on these initiatives, we've seen consistent attendance, enthusiastic feedback, and a clear rise in student confidence. CCUC stays closely engaged with our learners and actively responds to the skills and support they say they need. We'll continue to evolve these programs and, through our tertiary partnerships, deliver reliable, face-to-face workshops that are practical, relevant, and student-driven. This approach is strengthening connection, boosting retention, and driving success for regional learners.



### Study Support, Side by Side

In early 2025, Dalton and Lily, both began their Bachelor of Education with CQU. CCUC helped connect them early in their studies, recognising the value of peer support for students on the same degree path. Now, they're study partners: sharing resources, swapping feedback, and working through assignments side by side.

*"CCUC connected Dalton and me, and it's been great - we swap ideas, help each other out, and it just makes study feel less overwhelming, knowing you're not on your own."*

~ Lily, CCUC Student



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In early April 2025, VPG proudly hosted the Cohort 4 RUSH Foundations Program at the CCUC, bringing centre managers and staff from the RUSH Network across Australia to Innisfail. Despite an unexpected Irukandji sting sidelining our local Coordinator, VPG's CEO and Operations Manager stepped in to host the event. The program provided a valuable opportunity to showcase the Cassowary Coast & CCUC, strengthen national collaboration, and contribute to shared learning across the RUSH Network.



Pictured:  
CCUC & CCRC teamed up to support Council staff study and upskilling.

### Local Backing & Endorsement

The CCUC continues to benefit from strong support and endorsement from Cassowary Coast Regional Council (CCRC), our founding partner and one of the region's largest employers. We've welcomed opportunities to present our work and impact directly to elected members and council leadership, who have consistently voiced enthusiastic support for the centre and its growing role in the community.

In 2025, our partnership took a practical step forward through a joint promotion encouraging Council staff to explore study options, upskill, and pursue career development through the CCUC. Co-designed with Council and backed by their internal rollout, this initiative reflects shared commitment to local workforce development and lifelong learning.

Council staff and councillors regularly share positive feedback from local residents, acknowledging the value of keeping students local, celebrating family achievements in higher education, and recognising the wider sense of opportunity created by the CCUC's presence. This ongoing endorsement speaks to the centre's deep local roots and its impact as a trusted, vital resource in the Cassowary Coast region.

### Strengthening University Partnerships

Through strong partnerships with universities, we're opening up access and support for local learners at every stage of their journey. We're collaborating with education partners to deliver in-person events and tailored workshops that address local student and community needs in 2025/26. This includes STEM awareness programs designed to inspire local high school students, equip teachers, and provide hands-on learning for CCUC's education students - strengthening pathways and opportunities for the region's future workforce. Watch this space.

### Reaching More Communities

VPG's CCUC staff continues to take a 'feet to pavement' approach to engagement, meeting people where they are and raising awareness across the Cassowary Coast region. Recent outreach has included face-to-face visits in Mission Beach, where interest in local study and service access continues to grow. We've seen clear community appetite for connection, information, and in-person support, and when time allows, we plan to expand our outreach to both the southern and northern parts of the region, with strong interest in service discussions and meeting the local team face-to-face.

Our commitment to community is also reflected in long-standing partnerships with local schools. In late 2024, VPG attended the Innisfail State College and Tully State High School awards nights to present the VPG-sponsored Vocational Student of the Year Awards - a tradition we've proudly maintained for more than 25 years across the Cassowary Coast, Tablelands, Cairns and Mareeba. These awards recognise Year 12 students excelling in vocational education through VET subjects, structured work placements, or school-based apprenticeships and traineeships. Whether through grassroots outreach or ongoing partnerships, VPG remains a trusted presence in the region's education landscape.



Pictured: 2024 VPG Vocational Student of the Year recipient Fallon from Innisfail State College with Jade, CCUC Student Development Coach.



# CCUC STUDENT SPOTLIGHT



## Future Leader in Local Government

Kirrily studies a Bachelor of Business with Griffith University to grow her career with Council.

## Staying Local, Succeeding Locally

Born and raised in Innisfail, Kirrily realised early that staying local could offer real financial and professional advantages. After attending a high school Careers Day, she set her sights on working with the local council and, soon after graduating, secured a traineeship with CCRC.

Now a Support Officer in the People & Safety team at council, Kirrily is combining on-the-job experience with a Bachelor of Business through Griffith University to support career progression. With the CCUC just a stone's throw from her office, she uses the space to step away from the busy work environment and focus in a quiet, dedicated study area.

Kirrily saw the value of CCUC straight away - and so did her family. Her enthusiasm sparked a snowball effect, with family members Ethan and Amalia also registering to pursue their own tertiary studies through the centre.

By combining work, study, and local support, Kirrily is proving that young professionals don't have to leave the region to build a future. She's part of a growing group of locals shaping their careers, and their communities, right here in the Cassowary Coast.



## Future Primary Teacher

Claire studies a Bachelor of Education with JCU and hopes to specialise in inclusive education & advocacy

## Growing Teaching Career with CCUC

With prior vocational-level study under her belt, Claire was keen to upskill, but uncertain about what that might look like alongside work and family responsibilities. Through the CCUC's pre-access services, she explored her options in depth, including course structures, time commitments, local career projections, and her own areas of passion.

After weighing it all up, Claire made the decision to pursue a Bachelor of Education with James Cook University. With CCUC's support, she prepared and submitted her application and used the centre's services to help her transition into study with confidence.

Now in her second semester, Claire regularly uses the centre's on-the-ground support for academic skill-building, assignment guidance, and navigating university systems. Each week, she's grown in confidence and capability.

Claire's long-term goal is to become a primary school teacher, with aspirations to one day specialise in inclusive education and advocacy, a path shaped by her own lived experience. She's embracing the journey with purpose, backed by CCUC every step of the way.



## Future Educator or Psychologist

Ali studies STEPS with CQU as a pathway to university for education or psychology.

## Ali's Return to Study

For Ali, a young mother returning to education after leaving school early, the CCUC has helped her get started and find her footing. Through CCUC's pre-access services and tailored guidance, she explored her interests, course options, and multiple entry pathways, where she chose to enroll in CQU's STEPS preparatory program. The program is helping her build academic confidence, adjust to study, and lay a strong foundation while juggling parenting. Now well into her first semester, Ali's grades and morale are high. She's formed friendships with other local students at the Centre, many of whom are also navigating preparatory programs and adjusting to university life. With aspirations in education or psychology, Ali is taking things one step at a time — and gaining clarity and confidence with each step. We're proud to support Ali as she charts a new course for herself.



Pictured: CCUC Coordinator Karina Messina with Tara Larsen, studying Medical Sonography with CQU.



# Take an Active Role In Shaping the Future of Our Community

At the Cassowary Coast University Centre, we are committed to providing the best possible education and support for our students. However, we can't do it alone. Working in partnership with industry and community, we can provide students with the resources, experiences, and connections they require to succeed.

We are deeply grateful for the support from the Australian Government and the Cassowary Coast Regional Council. However, to meet government expectations, local communities are asked to contribute 30% of the costs to sustain a Regional University Study Hub. To ensure the long-term success of the Cassowary Coast University Centre, we are actively seeking both in-kind and financial contributions. Your support is essential in helping us provide lasting educational opportunities for our community.

**Explore our partnership packages and opportunities [here](#), or visit our [website](#) to make a donation online.**

The CCUC is an initiative of VPG.

As a registered charity endorsed as a Deductible Gift Recipient, VPG will provide a donation receipt for your contributions.