



MAY - OCTOBER 2025 SERVICE HIGHLIGHTS

Celebrating



50% are the first in their family to study



42% of students are 17-25 years of age

12%

of students identify as First Nations People



11%

of students have a disability



80%

of students are female



40%

of students are parents



48%

of students study full-time



Top Areas of Study University

1. Health
2. Education
3. Society & Culture
4. Management & Commerce

Cassowary Coast University Centre Turns One

In September, the Cassowary Coast University Centre (CCUC) marked a major milestone - one year of opening doors to higher education for students who choose to stay local, build their futures here, and contribute to a growing pipeline of skilled professionals for the region.

In that time, the student community has grown steadily, pursuing degrees and qualifications across diverse fields, building a community of local learners who are proving that ambition doesn't require leaving home.

This achievement belongs to everyone who believed in the vision: the Australian Government's Regional University Study Hubs Program, our Founding Partner Cassowary Coast Regional Council, the Youth Advisory Committee, and our students themselves. VPG is proud of what we've built together through CCUC in such a short time - a space where regional students can thrive.

At the birthday celebration with the Mayor, Councillors, students, and staff, students described tangible shifts - from studying alone at home to being part of a community, from feeling isolated to feeling supported and motivated.

Here's what the numbers tell us: almost half of our students are the first in their families to attend university, and 40% are parents. They're training to become the nurses, teachers, social workers, lawyers, and accountants, among others, essential to the Cassowary Coast's workforce - addressing critical gaps while staying rooted in community.

That connection between study and local work is where we're focused next. CCUC will continue nurturing aspirations for higher education across the region while working closely with local businesses and industry leaders to build stronger pathways from study to employment. Through mentoring, networking, and tailored guidance, we'll connect more students with local professionals - giving them the skills, experience, and relationships to step confidently into work here.

One year in, the CCUC is proving what's possible when higher education is accessible locally. The Cassowary Coast is keeping its own.

Read more: [Uni Centre Exceeds Targets - The Observer](#)



Pictured: CCUC Students Lily & Dalton studying Bachelor of Education on placement at Innisfail State College.

Training the Workforce our Region Needs

CCUC students studying education have been out on placement across local schools - and some are walking into classrooms they once sat in as students themselves.

Lily and Dalton, both studying Bachelor of Education with CQU, completed their first placements at Innisfail State College. For Dalton, it meant returning as a teacher in training to the school where he was once a student. They're bringing fresh energy and new teaching approaches to classrooms they know well, stepping up as role models and future educators for the next generation.

It's the full-circle moment that shows what CCUC is building: study locally, employ locally, retain locally.

Regional Queensland faces critical workforce shortages in education, health, and human services. CCUC students are part of the solution - training to fill these gaps while staying connected to the communities that need them. Some are in classrooms like Lily and Dalton. Others are gaining clinical experience in healthcare services or working in social and community roles.

For students, placements build the professional networks and hands-on experience that turn study into careers. For local employers, it's a chance to work with students who already understand the community and may become future employees. For the region, it's a pipeline of qualified professionals who are invested in staying. Win-win-win.

100% Of Students Feel They Belong: Survey Results Reveal CCUC's Impact

The question was simple: Do you feel a sense of belonging at the CCUC? Every single student said yes.

In our first Student Experience Survey, we asked students to tell us what's working and where they want to see us grow. The results validate what we've been building - a space where regional students access higher education and find community.

96% said having the CCUC nearby makes it easier to stay, study, or work in their own community. For students balancing jobs, families, and study, that makes a real difference. Education no longer means leaving home or putting life on hold.

The survey also gives us clear direction - students told us exactly what supports, resources, and connections matter most as they progress through their studies. We're listening, and we're building on what's working.



Pictured: CCUC Libraries team delivers Canva workshop to CCUC Staff & Students.



100%
students feel a sense of belonging at CCUC

96%
said CCUC's presence makes it easier to stay, study, or work in their community



96%
believe CCUC helps improve their academic success

#1 "Dedicated Study Space" is the top reason students attend CCUC.



96%
students said the CCUC contributes to their wellbeing

100%
Students feel safe and welcome at CCUC

Working Side by Side: Thank you Innisfail Library

Sharing a building with Innisfail Library creates natural opportunities for collaboration - and we're grateful for how the partnership supports our students. In July, the Library team hosted a Canva workshop where CCUC students learned practical design skills for assignments and personal projects. We look forward to more collaboration with the Library team ahead.

Leading the Next Chapter: Justin Joins CCUC

After a year of proving what's possible when higher education meets students where they are, CCUC is entering its next phase - and Justin is here to lead it.

As the new Regional University Centre Coordinator, Justin brings both lived experience and professional expertise to the role. He completed a teaching degree at the University of Ballarat and spent four years teaching in local schools before moving to the Tiwi Islands in the Northern Territory, where he taught for five years in remote Indigenous communities. While there, Justin completed a Master's of Educational Leadership online - often navigating patchy Wi-Fi and power outages.

That experience shapes how he approaches this work. He knows firsthand what regional and remote students navigate when pursuing higher education, and he's determined to ensure that location is never a barrier to opportunity.

Justin's focus is building stronger connections - between students and local employers, between universities and regional communities, and between study pathways and real career opportunities on the Cassowary Coast.

Outside work, he lives on a rare fruit orchard, runs, hikes, and cooks - bringing energy and perspective grounded in regional life.



Bringing More University Experiences to Regional Students

Regional students have been able to access online courses for a long time. What they've been missing is the community - studying alongside other students, connecting face-to-face with university staff, accessing career pathway sessions and workshops that metro students experience on campus every day. CCUC is closing that gap.

In July, the University of Southern Queensland travelled north to deliver a session to our students on using AI with academic integrity, sparking discussions shaped by the diverse perspectives and lived experiences of CCUC students. In September, we welcomed QUT for an Innovative Pathways to Teaching information session, nurturing teaching aspirations in a region facing critical teacher shortages.

These visits are part of growing partnerships that treat regional students as valued members of university communities. Students get face-to-face access to expertise and programs without traveling to campus. Universities engage directly with regional talent. CCUC becomes the bridge that makes it possible.

As partnerships with QUT, USQ, and other universities strengthen, CCUC continues to expand what students can access locally. The team is working to bring more pathway programs, workshops, and academic engagement opportunities to the Centre - ensuring regional students experience what their metro counterparts do, without leaving home.



CCUC in Community

Our team remains actively engaged across the Cassowary Coast - raising awareness of higher education opportunities, nurturing aspirations, and connecting with families, schools, and local organisations. Recent community engagement included:

- Cassowary Coast Careers Day, Innisfail State College: Hosted an information stall and interactive virtual reality activity, helping students explore a range of local career pathways. CCUC Student Ambassadors supported engagement.
- Innisfail Show: Connected with local families about career pathways and what's possible after school.
- Mission Beach Community Association: Presented on local study options, extending CCUC's reach across the region.
- NAIDOC Week at Radiant Life College: Student Development Coach Jade shared her First Nations journey into higher education. Students responded strongly, engaging in conversations about the local supports available to help them succeed.



Pictured: (Top) CC Careers Day @ Innisfail SC (Bottom) Connecting with community at Innisfail Show.



Local Teacher Aide Achieves Teaching Dream with Class Valedictorian Honours

Ellen, a Bachelor of Secondary Education graduate from the University of Southern Queensland (UniSQ), has graduated as class valedictorian and is now teaching music and humanities in her hometown at Innisfail State College.

Born and raised on the Cassowary Coast, Ellen always knew she wanted a career in music. She dedicated her childhood to piano, completing her performance qualifications by age 15, and was inspired by her high school music and study of religion teachers at Good Counsel College to share that passion through education.

"I was super burnt out at the end of high school," Ellen reflects. "I needed a break, so I ended up doing everything backwards - getting married, having kids, then going off to study later. Coming back with life experience made me appreciate my time and dedication in a way I never would have at 18."

After a decade working as a teacher aide at Innisfail State College, supporting Year 11 and 12 students to achieve their QCE, Ellen decided to take the next step.

In December 2022, she enrolled in a Bachelor of Secondary Education through the University of Southern Queensland, majoring in Music, Religion and Ethics. Through the Queensland Government's Supported Pathway to Teaching initiative, Ellen turned her experience as a teacher aide into a structured pathway, completing placements at Innisfail State College and Good Counsel College. She gained practical classroom experience, mentorship from experienced educators, and a guaranteed permanent teaching role upon graduation.

Balancing full-time study, four days of work each week, and parenting was no small feat, but the Cassowary Coast University Centre (CCUC) became her anchor. "I'm the kind of person who would find any reason not to study at home," Ellen laughs. "At CCUC, everything was there - resources, printing, even snacks. It was a big financial help too, not spending my own savings on printing and internet."

She spent most Fridays during term and school holidays at the Centre, and particularly valued the chance to meet a UniSQ representative face-to-face when the university delivered a workshop at the CCUC - a rare chance for an external online student to connect in person with her institution.

Ellen completed her studies at the end of Term 3, 2025, with Distinction and Academic Excellence, and was named Class Valedictorian - all while juggling her commitments as a student, employee, and parent. By the start of Term 4, she transitioned into her permanent role as a full-time music and humanities teacher at Innisfail State College.

"It feels like everything has come full circle," Ellen says. "I'm proud of what I have achieved, and I now get to run my classroom the way I see fit and inspire kids to love music the same way I do."

Her message to others in regional communities is clear: "Living here can sometimes make you feel like your options are limited, but that's not the case. We live in a digital age where study and skill-building opportunities are available, and having a local hub like CCUC shows that our small town can support big goals. If I can do this, others here can too."

Ellen will be honoured at her graduation ceremony in Brisbane next week, where she will deliver the valedictorian address to her fellow graduates.



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- Ellen





CCUC STUDENT SPOTLIGHT



Community Leader

Marvin's postgraduate work on Indigenous perspectives in healthcare is heading for publication.

Local Support, When It Matters

Marvin has spent years mentoring young First Nations people through cricket programs like Brothers in the Park and Cricket for Life in Innisfail. Now, he's taking his impact further, completing a Postgraduate Certificate in Human Rights through Curtin University – with local, on the ground support from CCUC.

His study journey began with CCUC's pre-access sessions, where he explored pathways into tertiary study that aligned with his goals. Since enrolling, Marvin has accessed mentorship, academic support, and wellbeing services – from assessment reviews and skill-building workshops to coaching, and sometimes just a cuppa and a yarn.

His research focuses on Indigenous perspectives in healthcare, drawing on his rich lived experience, and some of his work is already in progress for publication. Among those supporting and celebrating his achievements is Ryhanna Mundraby, VPG RAP Co-Chair and Business Support Officer – who also happens to be Marvin's niece.

This is what local support looks like – a community invested in each other's success. The CCUC team is proud to walk alongside Marvin as he bridges his community work with academic research, and grateful for the wisdom and knowledge he shares with us all. A true honour to have him a part of our CCUC learning community.



Future Accountant

Katie switches careers from high school teaching to accounting & secures work within field.

Career Change Through Reskilling

Katie is switching careers from high school teaching to accounting, and she's doing it while working part-time and raising young kids in Innisfail. Her interest in accounting started during a six-month stint with a financial planner between finishing her undergraduate science degree and starting her Diploma of Education. When she took maternity leave, she decided to explore that interest further, looking for a career that could offer flexibility for her growing family.

Katie identified the CPA Foundation course as her pathway into accounting, giving her the essential knowledge before entering full CPA certification. She recently ramped up her local networking and persistence paid off: a cold call turned into an interview with Cosca Accountants, where she'll start as a bookkeeper and junior accountant in 2026.

Katie is currently completing her CPA Foundation exams and will begin the full CPA Program certification next year, expecting it to take another two years to complete. She credits CCUC for making it possible. Treating her study time at the centre like going to work keeps her focused - no washing, no cooking, no distractions. Networking with other students who share similar experiences has also been invaluable to her both personally and professionally. Katie's advice to others thinking about reskilling? "It's worth it. Don't be afraid to use the support networks around you."



Local Innovator

Jake's mango-harvest technology is putting Innisfail on the map for ag-tech innovation.

Growing Innovation: Local Graduate Developing Tech for Mango Harvesting

Innisfail and the surrounding region are known for our productive crops, including mangoes. Now, the area is also growing the talent and ideas behind technology that could transform how they're harvested.

Jake, a proud CQUniversity Australia graduate and local, has taken his love of science further. After completing a Bachelor of Science majoring in Chemistry, he's now pursuing a Master of Applied Research at CQUniversity – all while staying at home, supported by CCUC.

His project uses an instrument that measures infrared light combined with machine learning models to predict mango crop maturity. The research will directly benefit CQU's autonomous fruit-picking robot, bringing cutting-edge tech to one of the region's most important industries.

Jake's work proves that high-tech research doesn't have to happen in a city. Regional students can pursue advanced studies and develop solutions that understand the climate, crops, and challenges unique to Far North Queensland. CCUC is proud to support Jake as he grows not just his expertise, but the innovation potential of the entire Cassowary Coast.

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.