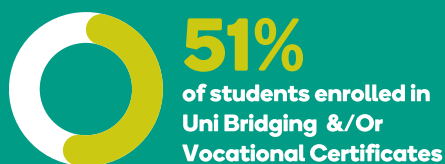
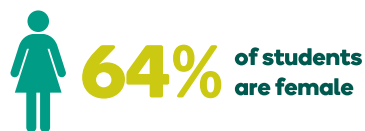


TUC Impact at a glance



44
NEW
Students



TOP AREAS OF STUDY University

1. Health
2. Society & Culture
(Social W, Psych, Arts, Law)
3. Education

Vocational/Bridging

1. Agriculture
2. Pathways/Foundation Skills
3. Society & Culture

JANUARY - JUNE 2026 SERVICE HIGHLIGHTS

A Growing Student Community

In just six months of 2026, 44 new tertiary students joined the Tablelands University Centre (TUC), significant growth for a regional community like the Tablelands and a sign of the growing demand for higher education close to home.

As Semester One got underway, new faces became familiar ones. In March, the TUC welcomed its 300th tertiary student, marking another milestone for higher education on the Tablelands.

Throughout the week, students come and go around work, school drop-offs and family life. As assignments fall due and exams approach, they settle in for longer sessions, studying alongside others navigating the same pressures.

Different universities. Different degrees. Different reasons for being there.

But as the TUC community grows, so do the opportunities for students to connect. Conversations begin over an assessment and end with encouragement, a new connection or a shared laugh. It's in these ordinary moments that the Centre has become more than simply a place to study. For Bachelor of Nursing student Emily, those everyday moments have created what she calls....



...our own little village of support.

Emily is a mother of three, works three jobs and is studying a Bachelor of Nursing through CQU at TUC. She started working in aged care after high school as her way of "toe dipping into nursing." Life took a few unexpected turns, but the goal never changed. Today, she's balancing family, work and university while building the nursing career she always wanted.

Her commitment was recognised during her first student placement at Atherton Hospital early this year, where staff encouraged her to apply for a position. She's now working as an Assistant in Nursing while continuing her studies.

Along the way, Emily has found a community that understands the realities of balancing study, work and family. Through the TUC's nursing mentoring nights and shared study spaces, she's connected with students a term ahead of her, a term behind, and others studying completely different degrees. Those connections have become an important part of her university journey.

"For people who aren't studying, they often forget how hard it can be. At TUC, we're building our own little village of support... even if we don't see each other all the time, we're able to give each other that little bit of a check-in and offer any assistance when needed."

For Emily, the Tablelands is home. Looking ahead, she sees herself here, caring for her community and continuing to build her nursing career for years to come.



I didn't know exactly what I wanted to do when I finished school, and that's okay. There are lots of different pathways. You don't have to have everything figured out straight away.

Karl, TRC Supervisor of Technical Services & TUC Student Ambassador studying a Bachelor of Engineering (Honours), USQ



From Cadetship to Council Leadership

A born and bred Tablelander, Karl didn't have university in his plans when he finished high school. A civil engineering cadetship with Tablelands Regional Council (TRC) instead opened the door to an Associate Degree in Civil Engineering.

Fifteen years later, Karl is leading Technical Services at TRC while completing a Bachelor of Engineering (Honours) through the University of Southern Queensland.

Balancing a leadership role, family life with his wife and two young children, and part-time study, Karl is continuing to invest in his professional development without leaving the community he serves. As a TUC Student Ambassador, Karl now shares his journey with local school students, encouraging them to keep an open mind about their future.

"I didn't know exactly what I wanted to do when I finished school, and that's okay," Karl said. "There are lots of different pathways. You don't have to have everything figured out straight away." Karl's journey shows where a local pathway can lead, and how continuing to learn can strengthen both a career and the community it serves.



TUC Student Ambassadors and staff shared their study and career journeys with local high school students at the Atherton Careers Showcase.

Opening Doors to Higher Education

The TUC continued to make higher education more visible and accessible to local young people, creating opportunities to explore university at different points along the pathway from school to further study.

The TUC team visited Atherton SHS, delivering workshops to Year 11 and 12 students on local higher education pathways, practical study skills and time management strategies.

Students then came our way, visiting the TUC to meet representatives from JCU and CQU, explore admissions and financial support, and hear firsthand from current TUC students about what university study is really like.

The TUC's Preparing for Higher Education series explored alternative entry pathways, while a CQU STEPS information session introduced another pathway into university.

Together, these touchpoints help turn higher education from something students hear about into something they can see, explore and imagine for themselves.



TUC delivers higher education pathways & study skills workshop to Atherton SHS Year 11 & 12 students.



Atherton SHS students tour the TUC, meeting with JCU & CQU & current university students.

Students Inspiring Students

For many, the path to university becomes clearer when they can speak with someone who has already walked it.

At the Atherton Careers Showcase, students from Atherton and Mareeba State High Schools connected with TUC Student Ambassadors and staff from a range of professional backgrounds.

Student Ambassadors shared their experiences across engineering, psychology and exercise physiology, offering an honest perspective on university life, balancing study with work and family, and the different routes that brought them to where they are today.

Alongside them, the VPG team drew on their backgrounds in social work, education and marketing to broaden the conversation around careers and study.

For local students considering what comes after school, it was a chance to hear stories, ask questions and see what's possible close to home.



Carinya Home shone a spotlight on careers in aged care nursing.



Malanda SHS teachers shared practical 'Running Your Room' insights with aspiring educators.



Jo Bentley-Davey led a discussion on trauma-aware practice with social work & human services students.

Preparing Students for Professional Practice

Regional communities are strongest when students, education and industry work together.

Throughout the first half of 2026, VPG brought students together with professionals from health, education and community services through its Industry Mentoring Network at the TUC. Across every session, local professionals volunteered their time to share their experiences, answer questions and help students prepare for professional practice.

For nursing students, the mentoring network offered the opportunity to explore the profession from multiple perspectives.

- Representing Carinya Home, Robyn Brady (Director of Care), Sandra McKenzie (Clinical Care Lead) and Louise Donaldson (Registered Nurse) shared their own career journeys while highlighting the diverse opportunities available within aged care.
- Registered Nurses Sarah Kling and Lisa Essex from Atherton Hospital spoke about transitioning through Queensland Health's graduate program, sharing practical advice on transitioning from university into professional practice.
- Carolyn Hood (Patient Safety Officer) and Donita Teelow (Registered Nurse), also from Atherton Hospital, guided students through professional boundaries, scope of practice and the pathway from Enrolled Nurse to Registered Nurse.

Future teachers connected with Lydia Leeden (Deputy Principal Junior Secondary), Sarah Mather (Head of Department English and Humanities) and Nick Jarvis (Mentor Teacher) from Malanda State High School, gaining practical insights into professional placements, classroom management and beginning a teaching career in regional Queensland.

Social work and human services students welcomed Jo Bentley-Davey, social worker, specialist practitioner and lecturer at James Cook University, who led an interactive discussion on trauma-aware practice, resilience and sustainable professional practice.

The Industry Mentoring Network is helping build clearer pathways from university into critical regional professions, one conversation at a time.

Investing in Local Potential

VPG's first industry-funded scholarships were made possible through a \$20,000 investment from Civil Geotechnical Consultants (CGC), creating new opportunities for students studying at the Tablelands and Cassowary Coast University Centres.

At the TUC, two nursing students, Aysha and Marina, each received a \$5,000 scholarship to support their studies.

Aysha, a proud Aboriginal woman and single mother, is studying through James Cook University while working as a carer in a local aged care facility. After taking time away from study to focus on her family, she returned to university with a goal of building a career in rural and regional healthcare.

Marina, a Tablelands local and mother of three, came to nursing after more than 20 years working in medical administration. Now completing her degree through CQUniversity, she hopes to become a rural nurse providing compassionate, culturally safe care.

For both students, the scholarships are helping with the costs of completing their degrees as they work towards local careers in regional healthcare.



CGC Scholarship recipients Aysha (top) and Marina (bottom), both nursing students at the Tablelands University Centre.



Local vet Cassandra McGee, a UNE Master of Neuroscience student, presented The Neuroscience of Staying Grounded to fellow TUC students.

Students Sharing Their Expertise

The TUC launched a series of peer-led workshops, giving students the opportunity to share their professional knowledge and lived experience with their peers. One of the sessions featured practising veterinarian and University of New England Master of Neuroscience student Cassandra McGee (pictured), who delivered The Neuroscience of Staying Grounded. Drawing on her clinical experience and postgraduate studies, Cassie unpacked the science behind stress and shared practical strategies to support learning, wellbeing and everyday life.

From Study to Local Employment



TUC promoted 42 local job vacancies through the [jobs board](#) during the reporting period, creating a direct bridge between study and local employment.



Local women came together at the TUC for the TRC WISE workshop series, exploring skills, careers and future opportunities.



School support staff came together at the TUC for the Ed-LinQ Support Staff Symposium, exploring how further study could build on their existing skills and support their career development.

Turning Experience into New Pathways

The TUC partnered with Ed-LinQ to host a Support Staff Symposium, welcoming teacher aides, chaplains, youth workers and student wellbeing officers from across the region for professional learning and connection.

The day also created an opportunity for local school support staff to consider their own professional development and how further study could build on the skills and experience they already bring to their roles. The TUC team introduced participants to university pathways, scholarships and the support available locally, broadening the conversation around study and career progression.

For one participant, that conversation continued beyond the symposium. With aspirations of becoming a teacher, she followed up with TUC Student Development Coach Jess to explore her options, identifying a postgraduate teaching pathway that could build on her existing qualifications.

It was an opportunity to plant the seed for further education, helping participants see how study could build on the skills they already have and support their career development.

Connecting Skills with Opportunity

In partnership with TRC, the TUC supported the Women's Initiative for Skills & Empowerment (WISE), hosting workshops that gave local women the opportunity to explore their career and study aspirations and learn more about local education and training pathways.

Led by VPG's Emma Takai, the workshops started with the skills and experience women already had. Participants explored their strengths, values and interests, where these could take them, and how further education or training could help turn their aspirations into new opportunities.

The workshops brought great energy and conversation into the TUC, with local women connecting, sharing experiences and exploring their aspirations. The TUC helped broaden those conversations to include further study, connecting participants with local education and training pathways and the support available to explore them.

A New Face in Student Support

For students studying from the Tablelands, having local, on-the-ground support can make a big difference. In March, VPG welcomed TUC Student Development Coach Jess Winger to the team, bringing extensive experience in higher education, academic skills development and student support.

Having completed much of her own schooling in remote Western Australia, Jess understands the realities of studying regionally. She is also completing a PhD while raising two young children, giving her a personal understanding of the juggle between study, family and life that many TUC students know well.

Drawing on her experience as a university learning advisor and lecturer at JCU, Jess supports students with the practical and academic side of university, from understanding assessment requirements and developing academic writing and study skills to navigating university systems. Jess also works with people considering higher education, helping them explore study options, entry pathways and the steps involved in getting started.

Since joining the TUC, Jess has quickly built strong relationships with students, becoming a familiar face and someone they know they can turn to for practical guidance, encouragement and support throughout their studies.



A Fair Start to the School Year

VPG partnered with Centacare to host the annual School Savvy pop-up shop at the TUC for the third year running, helping local Tablelands families prepare for the new school year. Alongside affordable school supplies available for a gold coin donation, families could access free back-to-school haircuts, vision screening and connect with local support services. Hosting School Savvy also opens the doors of the TUC to families from across the community, making the Centre a familiar part of the local education landscape. It's a connection that begins well before university is on the horizon and reflects the TUC's broader role in supporting education across the Tablelands.



TUC STUDENT *Spotlights*

Building a Career at Home

Born and raised on the Tablelands, Lara has balanced university study with work at FNQ Health & Fitness, progressing from teaching fitness and Pilates classes to working as an Exercise Scientist while completing a Bachelor of Sport and Exercise Science through CQU. She's now continuing her studies with a Master of Clinical Exercise Physiology.

Her passion for the profession began much earlier. "My older cousin is an Exercise Physiologist," Lara said. "I started doing pilates with her after some sporting injuries and just absolutely loved it. I loved being able to use exercise as treatment."

Lara first connected with the TUC during her undergraduate studies and has remained connected with the Centre throughout her Master's.

Alongside her own studies, Lara has facilitated a peer-to-peer workshop at TUC, helping fellow students incorporate movement into their study routines. She also recently joined the TUC team as a Student Ambassador, sharing her university journey with local high school students.

While the TUC has given Lara a quiet place to study throughout her degree, she says it's the sense of community that has mattered most. "Home can be quite distracting," she laughed. "Being able to go somewhere where there are other students, it's like, 'I'm not the only one.'"

Lara hopes to continue building her career on the Tablelands as an Accredited Exercise Physiologist, helping people recover from injury, illness and surgery through movement and rehabilitation.

Reflecting on her role as a Student Ambassador, Lara said, "I had my cousin to look up to. If I could be that person for someone else, I'd love that."

Finding a New Direction

After several years working as a pharmacist across regional Queensland, Bianca made the decision to step away from the profession due to health reasons. Rather than seeing it as the end of one career, she saw it as the beginning of another.

Today, Bianca is studying a Bachelor of Psychology (Honours) through the University of Southern Queensland while balancing life as a mum, working in disability support, tutoring mathematics and completing a Certificate III in Community Services.

"I've realised that what matters most to me is helping people," Bianca said. "Wherever I end up, I want to use what I've learnt to support others while also having a healthy work-life balance for my daughter and my family."

Bianca hopes to continue into a master's, with plans to specialise in psychology, counselling or social work.

Bianca values opportunities to connect with others through the TUC and recently volunteered as a Student Ambassador, where she shared her own journey with high school students exploring future pathways.

"I've changed careers, and I wanted young people to know that's okay," she said. "Sometimes life takes you in a different direction. Changing your path doesn't mean you've failed. It just means you've learnt more about what's right for you."

For Bianca, lifelong learning isn't just about gaining another qualification, it's about building a career that reflects her values while making a difference in the lives of others.



Being able to go somewhere where there are other students, it's like, 'I'm not the only one.'

Lara, Master of Clinical Exercise Physiology (CQU) & working locally as an Exercise Scientist at FNQ Health & Fitness.



Sometimes life takes you in a different direction. Changing your path doesn't mean you've failed. It just means you've learnt more about what's right for you.

Bianca, Bachelor of Psychology (Honours) (USQ) while working in disability support and raising her young daughter.

Pictured: Community Partner QPWS
champions vocational students through
industry mentoring.



Take an Active Role In Shaping the Future of Our Community

At the Tablelands 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 invaluable support from the Australian Government and the Tablelands 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 Tablelands 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 TUC is an initiative of VPG.

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