

TUC Impact at a glance

JULY - DECEMBER 2025 SERVICE HIGHLIGHTS

Backing local higher education through to 2028

A strengthened partnership marked the close of 2025, with Tablelands Regional Council renewing its foundation partnership with the Tablelands University Centre (TUC) through to 2028 - reinforcing a shared commitment to supporting the region's rising demand for skilled workers.



The Tablelands' population is growing, and with it, the demand for skilled professionals in health, education, and essential services. Since opening in 2023, TUC has welcomed over 273 students pursuing qualifications in the fields the region needs most.

The student community reflects the Tablelands itself: parents balancing family and study, career changers building new skills, and learners overcoming geographical barriers that once meant leaving home to access higher education. More than 64% are the first in their families to attend university.

"The TUC is an extremely valuable resource making qualifications, including tertiary degrees, available right here on the Tablelands - it's making a very important contribution," Mayor Rod Marti said.

"Council's continued investment gives students confidence that their education is valued locally," said Maryanne Tranter, VPG CEO. "This three-year commitment allows us to plan ahead and deliver the support students need to pursue their career goals right here at home."

Through this renewed partnership, and with the continued support of the Australian Government through the Regional University Study Hubs Program, VPG will continue building on TUC's success - nurturing aspirations for higher education and strengthening pathways from study to employment across the Tablelands and Mareeba. ✨ [Featured in The Express Newspaper](#)



273

Students Registered

26

NEW
Students



121

Students Graduated



64%

are the first
in their family to study



69%

of students are
15-25 years of age

27%

of students
identify as First
Nations People



24% of students have
a disability



63% of students
are female



53%

of students enrolled in
Uni Bridging &/Or
Vocational Certificates

47%

of students pursuing
Diplomas, Degrees,
Masters & PHD Studies

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



Building Our Own Healthcare Workforce

Health is the largest area of study at the TUC. With students like Paula (pictured) training for healthcare careers locally, the Centre is helping grow the region's own workforce from within.

The busy mum is studying a Bachelor of Nursing with CQUniversity while working in administration at a local school, balancing her studies with work and parenting as she works towards a career change from education into healthcare.

Before starting her degree, Paula accessed pre-enrolment support at the TUC to explore her pathways and options. Throughout her studies, she's made the hub a home base - using it for quiet study time, assessment support, and connection with other nursing students and local healthcare professionals.

Paula recently completed a residential placement locally - an experience that confirmed she's heading down the right path. She's one of many TUC students building careers to support our local healthcare system.



Connecting Study to Employment Through Industry Partnerships

TUC is creating clear pathways from study to local jobs by connecting students directly with the professionals already working in their future fields. Throughout the second half of 2025, TUC brought together students and industry across multiple sectors.



Social Work Mentoring Network Event: Demystifying CHHS Child & Youth Mental Health Service

Social work and human services students joined industry for specialist training as part of an Industry Mentoring Network event: "Demystifying CHHS Child & Youth Mental Health Service." Guest speaker Tomaline Hartley, Ed-LinQ Coordinator and Accredited Mental Health Social Worker with CYMHS, led the session. The training equipped students and professionals with knowledge and tools to confidently support children and young people accessing mental health care - covering referral pathways, service eligibility, and how to navigate the mental health system effectively.



Dr Kerry Francis, Senior Psychologist, Better Together delivers workshop on ADHD & neurodiversity

TUC also welcomed Dr Kerry Francis, Senior Psychologist at Better Together, who delivered a workshop on ADHD and neurodiversity. The session extended students' understanding and equipped them with practical strategies to support their professional success, while building awareness of career pathways in psychology and community services.



Nursing students and local nurses came together for an Industry Mentoring Network event exploring "Lifelong Learning - What Happens After Graduation?" The evening opened up conversations about career progression, specialisations, and navigating the early years of nursing practice.



Nursing Industry Mentoring Network: Lifelong Learning - What Happens After Graduation

Guest speakers Adam Wallace (Nurse Educator, Mareeba Hospital), Darren Freeman (Nurse Educator, Atherton Hospital), and Tim Rothwell (Nurse Educator, Rural & Remote) shared insights from their diverse roles, giving students a window into the range of nursing careers available locally.

By bringing industry expertise directly to students, TUC is building the relationships and knowledge that create a homegrown workforce ready to step into local jobs.



Vocational Students Stepping into the Workforce

For vocational students, connecting theory to practice means stepping into real workplaces and seeing careers in action. Across the Tablelands and Mareeba, students explored a range of career pathways through industry visits and work experience placements. Local employers opened their doors to support these young people, including Tablelands Regional Council, Mareeba Shire Council, Central Tyre Service, Ravenshoe Home Timber & Hardware, Tablelands Hardware, John Cole Toyota, Skybury Coffee, Brown & Hurley, MSF Sugar, and Great Beginnings Childcare. For many students, these placements provided their first experience in a professional environment - building confidence, clarifying career goals, and allowing them to demonstrate their skills to potential employers.



Volunteering as a Pathway to Skills & Connections

Volunteering emerged as another avenue for students to develop professional capabilities while contributing locally. TUC welcomed Better Together to speak with students about local opportunities to get involved, giving insight into how community work builds practical skills, strengthens resumes, and creates professional networks while making a difference in the region.

TUC Jobs Board Connects Students to Local Opportunities

TUC promoted 29 local job vacancies through the [jobs board](#) during the reporting period, creating a direct bridge between study and local employment.



New Industry Partnership Brings Scholarship Support to Regional Students

TUC secured a new partnership with engineering firm Civil Geotechnical Consultants (CGC), bringing industry-funded scholarship support to students as part of a \$20,000 investment across the Tablelands and Cassowary Coast University Centres.

CGC's investment - the company's first major education partnership in the region - will provide four \$5,000 scholarships to students demonstrating commitment to their studies while managing work, family, or other life challenges. The scholarships prioritise students who may face additional barriers to higher education, including first-in-family students, those entering through non-traditional pathways, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, and those showing community leadership.

"We see great potential in Far North Queensland communities and want to contribute to their future," said Ian Thompson, CGC Director. "Supporting regional education allows us to give back to areas where we work while helping develop local talent that strengthens these communities."

The partnership represents growing industry recognition of the value regional education brings to communities. It also builds on existing council support, with industry collaboration helping meet community funding requirements that support the long-term sustainability of regional study hubs.

"Regional students bring incredible dedication - we have students juggling multiple jobs, others supporting families while studying," said Maryanne Tranter, VPG CEO. "Industry partners like CGC are recognising this commitment and stepping up to support it. Having direct financial support available can take the pressure off and allow students to focus more on their studies."

Applications for the first round of scholarships opened in early 2026, with two scholarships to be awarded - one at each centre - and two additional scholarships to be awarded later in the year. [🌟 Featured in The Express Newspaper](#)



Pictured: VPG CEO Maryanne Tranter with Rhys Pope, Far North CGC Associate Engineer and Team Lead

Bringing University Experiences Home

For students on the Tablelands, university study has often meant online courses with little face-to-face connection to peers or staff. TUC is changing that, bringing metropolitan-style support and experiences to the region - for students already studying and those still exploring their options.

Between July and December, TUC partnered with universities and developed its own programs to support students at every stage of their higher education journey. For current students, the University of Southern Queensland visited TUC in July to deliver a Critical Thinking in Assessments workshop, giving students practical strategies to strengthen research, writing, and academic skills.

For prospective students and families, TUC opened doors to what's possible. In December, James Cook University ran a JCU Prep Info Session, helping people explore alternative entry pathways. TUC also developed its own three-part Preparing for Higher Education workshop series, helping prospective students and families navigate university financing, terminology, and plan study pathways, with the final session scheduled for early 2026.

Through partnerships and homegrown initiatives, TUC is widening participation in higher education across the region - supporting students from exploration through to graduation.



Pictured: Natalie from UniSQ travels to the Tablelands to deliver skill building workshop to TUC students.

Pictured: TUC hosts JCU Prep and pathway planning workshops for prospective students.

14 Students Graduate, Ready for Local Careers

In August, TUC celebrated the graduation of 14 young people from the Tablelands and Mareeba who completed vocational education and training - for many, their first formal qualification and a fresh start after leaving school early. The graduation ceremony brought together Mayor Rod Marti, Deputy Mayor Dave Bilney, Councillor Con Spanos, industry partners, families, and staff - a community showing up to recognise achievement and the value of vocational education. Graduates are stepping into employment opportunities across the region's trade, agricultural and environmental sectors, with many having already started apprenticeships or positions with local employers.



100% Of Students Feel They Belong

Survey Results Reveal TUC Impact

The question was simple: Do you feel a sense of belonging at TUC? Every student said yes. The latest annual Student Experience Survey asked students what's working and where they want to see growth. The results highlight a thriving, supportive learning environment where regional students can study alongside peers, access the resources they need, and build confidence in their abilities.

96% of students said having TUC nearby makes it easier to balance study with work, family, and life commitments. This shows how the Centre supports students to pursue their qualifications without compromise.

The survey also gives future direction - students told us 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: VPG Tablelands & Cassowary Coast team attend National RUSH Widening Participation Summit in Canberra.

National Collaboration in Action

In November, the VPG TCUC team headed to Canberra for the National Regional University Study Hub (RUSH) Widening Participation Summit at the Australian National University, joining study hubs and universities from across Australia to share strategies and strengthen opportunities for students in regional and remote communities. The summit offered a chance to learn from hubs across the country, explore what's working in different regions, and bring fresh ideas back to the Tablelands. From innovative support models to new approaches in student engagement, the conversations sparked thinking about how TUC can continue evolving to meet local needs.

TUC in Community

TUC took higher education conversations into community, sharing what's possible. The team connected with locals at the Atherton Show in July (where local MP Shane Knuth stopped by to learn about TUC's work), the Child Protection Week Family Fun Day in Mareeba in September, and the TRC Living Well Expo in November - sharing pathways, options, and support available for anyone considering higher education.



100% students feel a sense of belonging at TUC



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



96% believe TUC helps improve their academic success

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



96% students said the TUC contributes to their wellbeing

100% Students feel safe and welcome at TUC

Starting conversations early

Nurturing aspirations for higher education means starting the conversation early. VPG works with local schools to help students explore their options and see post-school pathways clearly - whether that's university, vocational training, or alternative routes.

In the second half of the year, VPG engaged with students at critical transition points. Year 10 and 12 students at Atherton State High School participated in transition talks exploring career planning and pathways into higher education and employment. At Malanda State High School, a four-week Year 12 transition program was delivered, guiding students to explore career options and plan their next steps, followed by individual follow-up support after graduation.

VPG also offered one-on-one support to Year 12 school leavers across the region, checking in on their post-school plans, providing tailored guidance, and connecting those interested in higher education with TUC for local tertiary access support.

Making pathways visible also means celebrating them. VPG continued sponsoring the 'Vocational Student of the Year' awards across all local high schools, recognising students excelling in hands-on learning and career-focused training - reinforcing the value of vocational pathways and the diverse ways young people can build meaningful careers.

Through this sustained school engagement, VPG ensures pathways are visible early, and support remains available along the way.



Pictured: St Stephen's CC 2025 Vocational Student of the Year award recipient.



Pictured: Local MP Shane Knuth with TUC staff at the Atherton Show.



TUC STUDENT SPOTLIGHT

Local Mum Graduates Second Masters and Opens Counselling Practice to Serve Tablelands Community

Michaela, a local mother of two with 18 years' experience in education, has graduated with her third qualification - a Master of Guidance and Counselling from James Cook University - and recently opened Tablelands Counselling and Play Therapy in Malanda. She's now one of the region's own allied health professionals, trained locally with support from the Tablelands University Centre (TUC) and choosing to build her practice right here at home.

Her academic journey spans a Bachelor of Teaching, a Master of Special Education, and now a Master of Guidance and Counselling, all while raising two primary school-aged children. Throughout her career, Michaela knew where her passion was. "I've always liked the pastoral side of teaching and enjoyed it more than the actual education side," she reflects. "So I was looking for another avenue of something that I could do that was a little bit different but still related."

"The first Masters I did was before I had children, and I found that one much easier because I had a lot more time," Michaela says. "This one was a little bit trickier because I had to fit it in around the kids."

That's where TUC came in. "I found setting aside the time to get stuff done really hard," Michaela admits. "If I was at home I'd be putting washing on, I'd be cleaning, I'd be finding anything else to do other than study. Whereas when I came in to TUC I could just focus on what I needed to do."

She used TUC on weekends, during school hours, and even late Friday nights - turning limited study time into focused, productive sessions. Combined with a 100-hour placement at local community support centre Better Together, Michaela gained the practical experience needed to complete her qualification and confidently open her own practice.

Now operating from Malanda Family Health with outreach services extending to Atherton, Yungaburra, Tolga, and Ravenshoe, Michaela is helping address a critical gap in local mental health services. "I found over the years that services were hard to get into," she explains. "A lot of services won't work with younger children as well - some start at seven and some start at twelve - whereas I'm happy to take them from kindy age."

Her practice serves both children and adults, with a particular focus on people with disability and families seeking play therapy for young children - bringing specialised support to the Tablelands.

Her advice to others considering further study? "It can seem very daunting at the start, but if you take it subject by subject or semester by semester, it makes it a lot easier. Rather than looking at it as a whole, I would break it down into 'this is due now, so this is what I need to focus on.'"

Looking back, Michaela is most proud that she pushed through. "I had thoughts of 'oh maybe I'll just leave that subject until later,' but then I decided it was easier to knuckle down and get it done."

After nearly two decades in government employment, opening her own practice feels both brave and daunting. But her commitment to bringing accessible, specialised counselling to Tablelands families drives her forward.

Michaela will be honoured at her graduation ceremony March 31, marking both academic achievement and a new chapter of service to her community.



“ Studying at an older age is something people shouldn't be afraid of... find what you really love doing and go for it. If I can do it, anyone can do it. ”

~ Sofie, TUC Student

Lifelong learning happens here.

Sofie, a Tablelands student, never planned to do a PhD. A gap year after high school turned into three years of solo world travel, during which she discovered her love for primates while volunteering at animal rehabilitation centres. That passion sparked a 14-year learning journey - from undergraduate study to her PhD in Biological Anthropology at The Australian National University - focusing on the nutritional ecology of Zanzibar Red Colobus monkeys. With the TUC as her space to study, she completed her research and submitted her thesis, proving that it's never too late to follow your passion.

➔ [Click to hear from Sofie about her higher education journey.](#)



TUC STUDENT SPOTLIGHT



Tablelands Student Makes History as JCU Cairns' First Indigenous Pharmacy Graduate

Shi-Anne made history as the first Indigenous student to graduate with a Bachelor of Pharmacy from JCU, Cairns. She wrapped up her final work placement at Atherton WholeLife Pharmacy & Healthfoods, adding to a total of 960 placement hours completed across community and hospital settings, including experiences in Thursday Island, Emerald, and Brisbane's Princess Alexandra Hospital. For over a year, Shi-Anne worked as a pharmacy cadet at Atherton Hospital, gaining valuable hands-on experience in hospital pharmacy.

She has since secured a Pharmacist Intern (HP3) position at Townsville University Hospital and commenced in January 2026. Born and raised on the Tablelands, Shi-Anne always knew she wanted to work in healthcare - inspired by a local pharmacist she looked up to during her time at Atherton State High School.

While she first leaned towards community pharmacy, her uni journey ignited a passion for hospital pharmacy, where she hopes to make a difference in patient care.

Alongside her studies, Shi-Anne proudly represented Australia at the inaugural Indigenous Pharmacists Gathering in the US and made history as the first student elected as Indigenous Pharmacy Chair for the National Australian Pharmacy Students' Association (NAPSA), a role she was re-elected to for a second term.

Shi-Anne's advice to young people unsure about their future? "Know what's available to you. No matter who you are or where you come from, you can do amazing things."

It was an honour to have Shi-Anne as part of the local Tablelands student community. Her journey is a reminder of the incredible talent coming from the region.



**Know what's available to you.
No matter who you are or where you
come from, you can do amazing things.**

~Shi-Anne, TUC Student

Big dreams happens here.

Seth first connected with VPG in 2017 through work experience, exploring career options. Now, he's studying a Bachelor of Science with University of Southern Queensland at the TUC, working toward his dream of becoming a Theoretical Physicist. Balancing full-time work and after-hours study, Seth makes the most of TUC's flexible access - pursuing a specialised degree while staying local, working, and building his future here. He's thriving in his first year, proving that ambitious academic goals and regional life don't have to be mutually exclusive - they can go hand in hand.



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.

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