

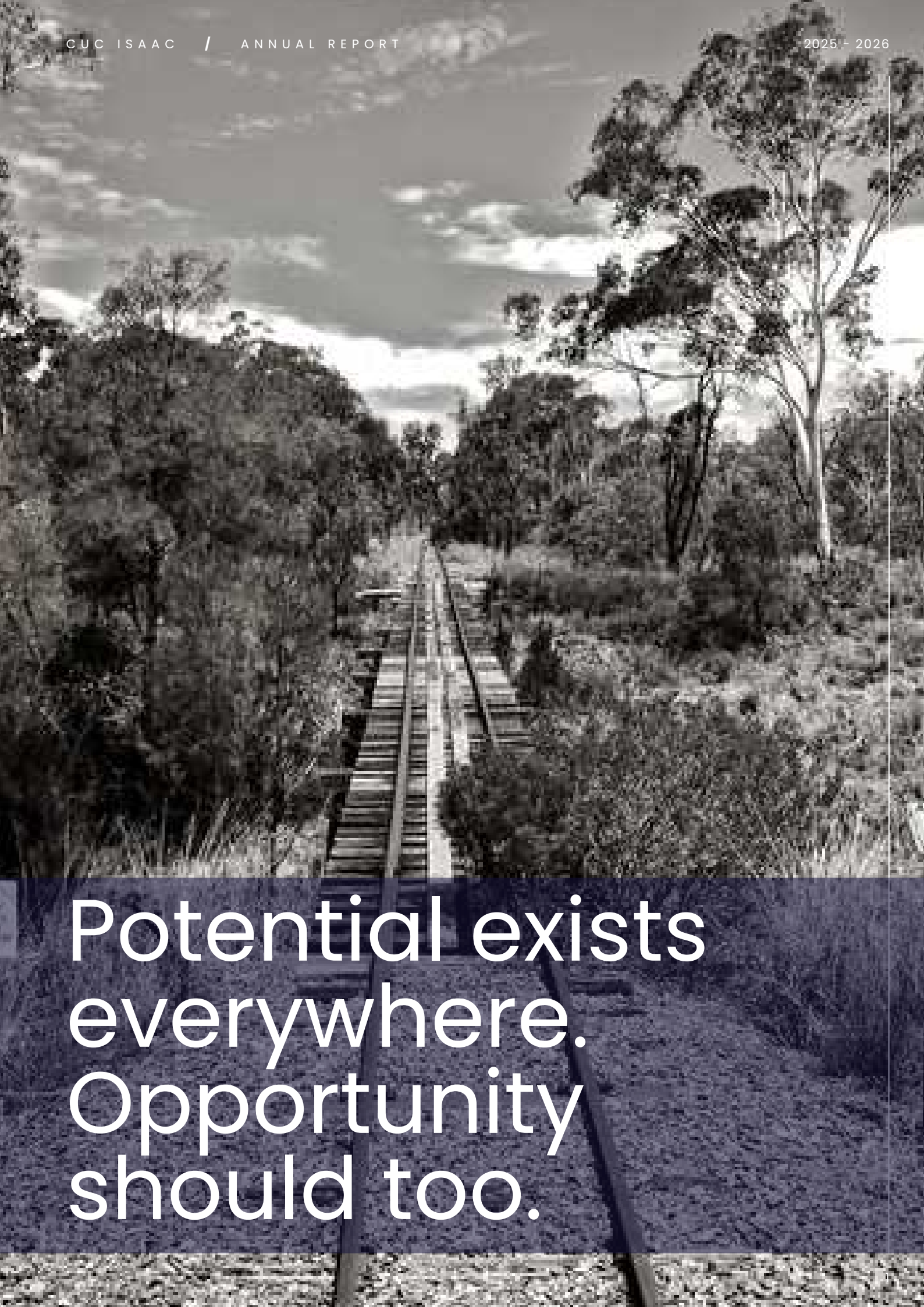


Country
Universities
Centre
ISAAC

2025–2026

ANNUAL REPORT

COUNTRY UNIVERSITIES CENTRE ISAAC



Potential exists
everywhere.
Opportunity
should too.

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We acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of the land in which we work and study and pay our respects to their Elders past and present. The Traditional Custodians have shared knowledge and learning across generations on this Country for tens of thousands of years. As we present our first full year’s annual report, detailing how we aim to open doors to education for local students, we recognise that learning passed from one generation to the next is at the very heart of strong communities and we are proud to continue that shared commitment to education here in the Isaac region.



Who We Are

Country Universities Centre Isaac (CUC Isaac) is a not-for-profit community university centre that helps people in the Isaac Region study for a degree without leaving home. We run two centres, one in Moranbah (35 Town Square) and one in Clermont (21 Daintree St). Each offers modern study spaces, high-speed internet, video-conferencing, printing and supervised exam facilities.

Students enrolled with in any form of tertiary education including university and vocational from certificate I or higher can use the centres, and they also get academic, administrative and wellbeing support from our local team. We are part of the national Regional University Study Hub and Country Universities Centre networks, funded by the Commonwealth and supported by local industry partners. Our mission is simple: bringing degrees closer to regional, rural and remote Australia.

Our Beginning: Fit-Out & Opening of Two Centres



Where it started

CUC Isaac's story began just before this reporting year. In August 2024, Isaac Regional Council's Mayor's Charity Ball raised \$100,000 towards fitting out our first centre, and Kim Edwards joined as our founding Centre Manager on 23 June 2025, a week before this financial year began.

Moranbah: open for business

By the end of June 2025, the Moranbah fit-out was complete. Computers and hubs were installed, signage was up, and the centre at 35 Town Square was open for business. Students didn't wait for the ribbon cutting. Our very first registered student, Tegan, studying a Bachelor of Education, signed up on 15 July 2025, and 17 students were registered by the start of August.

We officially opened the doors on Friday 5 September 2025, with around 50 guests joining us. Mayor Kelly Vea Vea and Cr Melissa Westcott cut the ceremonial ribbon together, joined by CUC CEO Chris Ronan, Isaac Regional Council representatives, Board members Kristy-Lee Roberts, Alana Moller and Sharon Anderson, and representatives from our university partners QUT, James Cook University and Central Queensland University. More than 35 students were already registered and using the space.

Clermont: a second home

Planning for our second centre, at 21 Daintree St, Clermont, ran alongside Moranbah's first months all year. By March 2026, the doors were open and the community was already dropping in, with Sharon and Juliet quickly becoming familiar faces around town, including at the Clermont Show and the Clermont Wombat Festival.

After a quiet soft opening earlier in the month, we proudly marked Clermont's official opening on 27 April 2026. The event celebrated a hub made possible by the vision and funding of Isaac Regional Council and Mayor Kelly Vea Vea, funding from the Australian Government, and the leadership of our Board under Chair Melissa Westcott, both of whom spoke on the day about the value of bringing tertiary education closer to home. Guests included Senator Anthony Chisholm and Sean Dillon MP, with catering from Penny's Plaza Coffee Shop, GG's Delights and the Clermont Hotel Motel, and signage from Create A Sign and Clermont Signage and Frames. It was a genuinely whole of community occasion, and one that made it onto Channel 7 News Mackay.

Message from The Chair



Melissa Westcott

Chair

Last year I reported on a year of preparation: a Board formed, a Company established and a Centre Manager appointed, all ahead of a single student walking through our doors. This year I have the privilege of reporting on something quite different. In 2025–26, CUC Isaac moved from promise to practice. We opened two centres, welcomed students from across the Isaac region, and proved that local people do not have to leave home to pursue a university or vocational qualification.

That remains the heart of why we exist. Families in our region should not have to choose between education and staying home, and partners should not have to take on FIFO or DIDO arrangements simply so one of them can study. Every achievement in this report comes back to that purpose.

Two Centres, Open and Operating

Our Moranbah Centre welcomed its first students in July 2025 and was officially opened on 5 September. By 31 December, 53 students were using the Centre.

Our Clermont Centre followed, opening on 27 April 2026 in the repurposed Old Library building, and grew from one confirmed student on opening day to nine within weeks. As at 30 June 2026, CUC Isaac supported 106 students across both centres.

Our Team and Partners

This year brought change in our staffing, and I am proud of how well the organisation came through it. I thank **Kim Edwards**, our inaugural Centre Manager, for the foundation work that carried the Moranbah Centre through establishment and opening. In early 2026 we welcomed **Juliet Garnett and Sharon Stephen** as our Centre Manager and Clermont Education Coordinator. Together they have brought energy, steadiness and strong relationships with universities, schools and industry.

A highlight of the year was signing our Partnership Agreement with Iberdrola Australia (Broadsound Solar Farm) in November 2025, formally launched in Moranbah in June 2026. It delivers a three-year scholarship program, technology equipment and a cash contribution, exactly the kind of multi-year commitment that gives us certainty. BHP Mitsubishi Alliance provided a \$40,000 sponsorship that funded our CUC Isaac vehicle, and Isaac Regional Council continued its multi-year support through our centre premises and staff accommodation.

Message from The Chair

Melissa Westcott

Chair

Community, Governance and Our Board

In August 2025, the Mayor's Charity Ball raised \$50,000 for CUC Isaac through the Isaac Regional Charity Fund. I sincerely thank Mayor Kelly Vea Vea for championing CUC Isaac, the Fund's board and the Ball's working group, and everyone who bought a ticket, sponsored a table or placed a bid. That support went directly into the Clermont Centre.

Our thanks also go to CUC Central, one of our two Members, for proven systems, training and guidance, including on the updated Child Safety Policy and Commonwealth reporting. It has allowed a young organisation to operate with the maturity of a much older one.

Our governance has matured alongside our operations. The Board adopted a revised Child Safety Policy and Parents and Caregivers Agreement, strengthened oversight of the Conflict of Interest Register, and began developing a Financial Sustainability Framework and a structured sponsorship strategy to reduce our reliance on any single source of funding. I thank Company Secretary Chris Wright (Brown and Bird) for his careful stewardship of our finances and compliance.

None of this happens without a Board that gives generously of its time, expertise and advocacy. I thank my fellow directors, Lynise Conaghan, Alana Moller, Carolyn Franzmann, Anneli Day, Sharon Anderson, Angela Peterson and Kristy-Lee Roberts, for their commitment this year.

Looking Ahead

The year ahead is about consolidation and sustainability. Our priorities are to continue growing student numbers across both centres, formalise multi-year partnerships through our sponsorship strategy, embed the Financial Sustainability Framework and the Board Charter, and recruit new directors with finance and law skills.

Since the close of the reporting period, the Isaac Regional Charity Fund has announced a \$100,000 donation to CUC Isaac from the 2026 Mayor's Charity Ball, a powerful reminder that this region believes in what we are building.

Thank you to our Members, Isaac Regional Council and CUC Central, to our staff, partners and supporters, and above all to our students, who have trusted us with their ambitions. We are, quite literally, Degrees Closer.

Melissa Westcott

Chair, Country Universities Centre Isaac Ltd



Centre Manager Report

Stepping into the Centre Manager role this year has been one of the great privileges of my career. Having called Moranbah home for five and a half years now, I've built a deep connection to this region, and leading CUC Isaac means I get to see the benefits of that connection every single day, through the students who walk through our doors and the community that continues to welcome us.

There is something genuinely special about working in the not for profit space. The sense of purpose is immense, and the personal and professional satisfaction that comes from watching our mission come to life, bringing higher education and support closer to home for the people of Isaac, is something I don't take for granted.

What excites me most about this role is the sheer opportunity ahead of us. CUC Isaac is still young, and that means we get to shape what we become, tailoring our support to the real needs of our community and our industry partners rather than fitting people into a one size fits all model. Every conversation with a student, a school or an employer brings a new idea for how we can do things better, and I feel real momentum in how much room we still have to grow.

None of this would be possible without the strength of our Board, and I want to particularly acknowledge our Chair, Melissa Westcott. Melissa's mentorship has made my job not just easier, but genuinely achievable. Having a Chair who invests real time in developing her Centre Manager, who is generous with her guidance and honest in her feedback, gives me the confidence to lead boldly and the support to know I'm never doing it alone.

Juliet Garnett
Centre Manager



Centre Manager Report

Juliet Garnett
Centre Manager

One of the standout joys of this year has been building CUC Isaac's team alongside Sharon. We arrived here from entirely different paths, Sharon from a distinguished academic career and me from grassroots not for profit leadership, and yet we found our rapport almost immediately. We've built a foundation together that plays to both of our strengths, and our weekly team days have become something I look forward to without fail. We brainstorm, we problem solve, and more often than not we leave feeling inspired. That spirit is visible. Our students, our community partners, our industry partners and our study providers can see the enthusiasm and motivation Sharon and I bring to this work, and I think that's part of why so many of them choose to keep showing up for us.

That enthusiasm has been met in kind. The connection we've built with industry, the support we've received from local community services, and the relationships we've formed with study providers this year have been extraordinary, and hugely appreciated. Countless hours of collaboration, shared knowledge and genuine goodwill have gone into getting us to where we are, and they've set CUC Isaac up for what I believe will be a bright future and a remarkably exciting second year of operation.

I want to make special mention of two organisations whose support has shaped this year. Isaac Regional Council has been an endlessly supportive partner, and I'm grateful for the open, honest conversations we've been able to share with them at every stage, from fit out to opening day and beyond. CUC Central deserves equal credit for the attitude they bring to this network. They are relentlessly focused on empowering and building the capacity of Country Universities Centres right across Australia, and that support has made a genuine difference to our team here in Isaac.

A particular highlight of the year was launching our scholarship partnership with Iberdrola Australia on 9 June 2026. It was an amazing night, one that brought our community, our Board and our first scholarship recipients together to celebrate what this partnership means for local students, and I'm enormously thankful to Iberdrola for believing in what we're building here.

As I reflect on this year, what stays with me most is not any single milestone, though we've had plenty worth celebrating, but the strength of the foundation we've built together: a Board that leads with integrity, a team that brings out the best in each other, and a community that has met us with open arms at every turn. I couldn't be more optimistic about where CUC Isaac is headed.

Juliet Garnett
CUC Isaac Centre Manager

Meet the Team



**Juliet Garnett,
Centre Manager**

Juliet joined CUC Isaac as Centre Manager on 16 February 2026, bringing five years of not-for-profit leadership experience in the Isaac region across wellbeing, education pathways and family support. With a Bachelor of Psychological Science and having called Moranbah home for five years, Juliet is passionate about building accessible pathways to education and helping local people build careers close to home.



**Dr Sharon Stephen,
Education Coordinator**

Dr Sharon Stephen joined CUC Isaac as Education Coordinator on 2 February 2026, supporting the Clermont site from its official opening. Sharon holds a PhD in Applied Mathematics and brings a distinguished career as a lecturer and senior academic leader in the UK and Australia, including research in high-speed flow stability, alongside a long-standing commitment to student support and educational excellence. Having recently settled in Clermont herself, Sharon is already a warm and familiar face at the new centre.

Message from Sharon

Relocating to Clermont has been a very worthwhile decision, both personally and professionally, and my role has been immensely rewarding. I am grateful for the opportunity to become part of the local community and to contribute to the growth of CUC Isaac. I am particularly looking forward to supporting more local students to achieve their education goals and seeing the Centre continue to grow as a valued part of the community.



Strategic Plan

CUC Isaac's Strategic Plan 2025 to 2028 sets goals across eight areas: Environment, Student Services, Employment, Outreach, Widening Participation, Sustainability, Impact and Investment.

With both key staff new to their roles for much of this period, our early focus was on building strong foundations: welcoming, well-staffed centres, safety measures in place at each site, and the governance groundwork. Partnership development and outreach are now picking up real pace heading into Semester 2, including our first Industry Sponsorship Strategy, developed by Chair Melissa Westcott and adopted from April 2026.

We finished the year ahead on several fronts. We reached 106 students registered since opening, well on the way to our target of 125 by December, and celebrated eight student completions against an annual target of four. Retention sat at 50% from Semester 2 2025 into Semester 1 2026, a little under our 60% goal and an area we'll keep focusing on. Our first student satisfaction survey, in March, recorded 100% satisfaction, comfortably ahead of our 70% target.

Financial Summary

It has been a financially healthy first year for CUC Isaac. The Board reported a surplus for the year, allowing us take on the additional operational costs of maintaining two centres which was quickly allocated.

Our core funding comes from the Australian Government's Regional University Study Hubs Program, a grant of approximately \$1.42 million across the life of the agreement. Four milestone payments have been received on schedule to date, totalling approximately \$752,000.

This was topped up by strong local fundraising and sponsorship, including:

- \$99,000 from Iberdrola Australia,
- \$40,000 from BMA, and
- \$50,000 from the Isaac Regional Charity Fund through the 2025 Mayor's Charity Ball.

Looking ahead, we are working through a full budget review to reflect the reality of running two centres, and developing a longer term sustainability plan to build a reserve fund over time and reduce our reliance on year to year funding.



Year in Numbers

The figures below are drawn from our official Regional University Study Hubs data return to the Department of Education, current as at 30 June 2026. These are the most reliable numbers we have for the year, and the same figures behind our Milestone 5 progress report.

106 Students

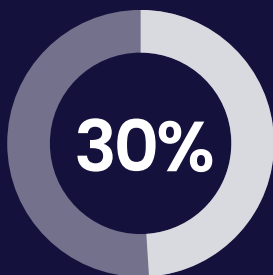
20+

Different areas of study

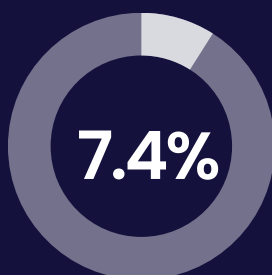
40+

Higher Education Providers

Top Areas of Study



are the first in their family to study



of students identify as Aboriginal &/or Torres Strait Islander

51% study full time



49% study part time

71% female



28% male

Our Students

From our start of year student survey: **the quiet study environment** is the top reason students choose CUC Isaac.



Elsie Bachelor of Engineering

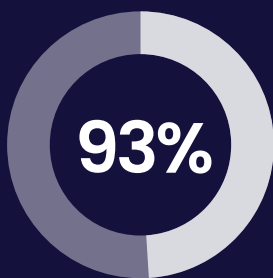
CUC Isaac's first engineering student and the first woman in her family to study engineering. Inspired by her uncles, she says, "I really want to be able to do the same." Elsie has represented CUC Isaac at the Engineers Australia Committee in Mackay and secured part-time engineering work experience.

Ashlin Bachelor of Education

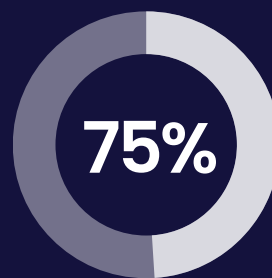
The very first student to enrol at our Clermont centre, Ashlin is completing her degree while balancing family life. She is the first of many stories we expect from Clermont in the years ahead.

Jay Foundations

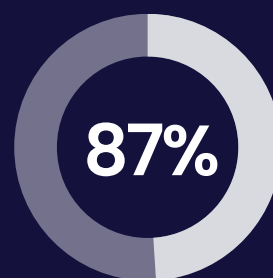
Jay moved from the Gold Coast to Kilcummin for his wife's role as school principal and discovered a passion for education while supporting a student with Down syndrome. He is completing a foundations course before studying Special and Inclusive Education, and Clermont has cut his travel to a study space from two hours to under fifty minutes.



of students felt safe and welcomed at their CUC



said the CUC helps improve their work/study balance



said the presence of a CUC makes it easier for me to stay, study or work in my community



of students would recommend their CUC to other local students

Our Partners & Local Support

CUC Isaac's first year would not have been possible without extraordinary local and industry support. Every centre we've opened, every scholarship we've offered, and every student we've supported has depended on partners who believed in this project before it existed.

Founding & government support

Isaac Regional Council & Mayor Kelly Vea Vea Founding vision and funding for both centres; ongoing facilitation, premises support and community leadership

Australian Government, Department of Education Core operating funding through the Regional University Study Hubs Program

Major community & industry partners

Partner Their contribution Logo

BMA (BHP Mitsubishi Alliance) \$40,000 sponsorship for a dedicated CUC Isaac vehicle, handed over October 2025; ongoing partner through the Future Ready program

Iberdrola Australia (Broadsound Solar Farm) \$99,000 partnership over three years: \$75,000 in student scholarships, \$10,000 asset sponsorship and \$5,000 in career-readiness equipment (including five VR headsets), launched June 2026

Isaac Regional Charity Fund Mayor's Charity Ball \$50,000 raised at the 2025 Mayor's Charity Ball

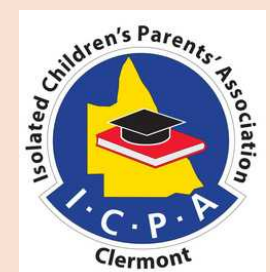
ICPA Clermont Branch (Isolated Children's Parents' Association) \$2,000 donation

University & education partners

QUT, Central Queensland University (CQU) and James Cook University (JCU) have supported course delivery, teacher placements through the QUT EQUiPT program (a national award-winning program), exam invigilation, and campus visits throughout the year, including a visit from JCU's Vice Chancellor and Deputy Vice Chancellor to both centres. Curtin University has supported our participation in the Regional University Study Hubs Network through an annual stipend. Moranbah State High School has been a close partner for career guidance and school visits.

Community partners

Isaac Business Chamber, the NBN Co Community Engagement Team, Resources Excellence Precinct, and Regional Development Australia Greater Whitsundays have all supported CUC Isaac's community engagement this year.



Community Engagement



Jul-Sep 2025

QUT EQUiPT roadshow for 22 trainee teachers; Mayor's Charity Ball; Moranbah officially opens on 5 September.



Oct-Dec 2025

BMA vehicle handover; Minister Sam O'Connor MP visits; RUSH Widening Partnership Forum in Canberra; Pizza and a Yarn student socials; 53 students by December.



Jan-Mar 2026

Sharon and Juliet join the team; Chess Club launches; QUT pre-service teachers visit Moranbah; Clermont opens to the community.



Apr 2026

Clermont officially opens on 27 April, with coverage on Channel 7 News Mackay.



May 2026

Clermont Wombat Festival and Clermont Show; careers forums for local students; Dyno Nobel site tour.



Jun 2026

Iberdrola scholarship program launched on 9 June; 106 students registered by 30 June.



CUC Isaac Board

Positive Governance

Good governance has been a real strength this year, and one we deliberately invested in as both the Centre Manager and Clermont's Education Coordinator settled into new roles. Chaired by Melissa Westcott, our Board introduced an Annual Board Work Plan and updated governance reporting, and established a formal conflict of interest register that is now checked against every agenda. Chris Wright of Brown and Bird continues to provide company secretarial and accounting support.

As at the end of June 2026, our Board comprised Melissa Westcott (Chair), Carolyn Franzmann, Lynise Conaghan, Kristy-Lee Roberts, Anneli Day, Angela Peterson, Sharon Anderson and Alana Moller, together with Chris Wright and Centre Manager Juliet Garnett.

Between them, our Directors bring expertise across agriculture, small business, local government, health, education and First Nations perspectives, a genuinely broad base for a Board this size.

AGM

This year we proudly held our first Annual General Meeting, on 2 April 2026, an important milestone for the organisation. Our second AGM will follow at the start of the 8 October 2026 Board meeting, where most of our current Directors have confirmed they are willing to stand for re-election and the Board is opening an Expression of Interest process to welcome additional Directors.

Child Safety Compliance

Child safety was a particular focus this year. The Board reviewed and re-adopted our Child Safety Policy and Code of Conduct on 4 June 2026, introducing a clearer, age-based framework for how younger visitors can use our centres. Both Juliet and Sharon hold current Working with Children Checks and have completed mandatory child safety training, and our Annual Statement of Compliance was submitted, confirming we met all of our child safety obligations under the Regional University Study Hubs Program for 2025 to 2026.



Meet the Board



Melissa Westcott
Chair



Sharon Anderson
Director



Lynise Conaghan
Director



Anneli Day
Director



Carolyn Franzmann
Director



Alana Moller
Director



Angela Peterson
Director



Kristy-Lee Roberts
Director



Chris Wright
Company Secretary



Looking Ahead: 2026-27

With our first year of two centre operations behind us, here's what's on the horizon:

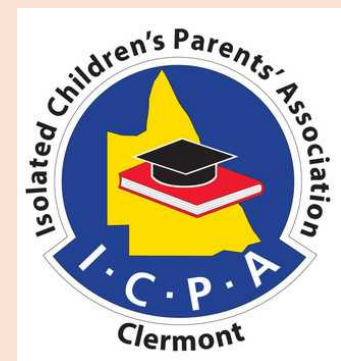
- Our Academic Skills Workshop series, running from July onwards, to build student capability and support retention
- Partnering with local high schools to deliver Study Skills and Pathways workshops, helping the next generation of students see what's possible close to home
- Our inaugural Careers, Courses and Connections Expo, on 13 October 2026 at the Isaac Event Centre, Moranbah, with more than 20 stallholders including universities, training organisations and local industry, opened by the Mayor
- A Student Mentoring Program connecting students with industry mentors, that has been fully funded by the Local Buying Foundation
- A possible new team member, with the Board considering a Student Engagement role to add hands-on support, subject to confirming the budget
- Continuing to grow the Iberdrola Australia Scholarship Program, and building new relationships with regional employers to support our students' career pathways
- Sustainability planning to secure CUC Isaac's operation through to 2028, when our current Commonwealth funding agreement concludes
- Our first CUC Isaac graduation celebration, planned for later in the year
- Continuing to strengthen Clermont as it settles into its first full year
- Attending the SPERA NCRRE and RUSH conferences in Ballarat.

Thank You & Our Supporters

Thank you to everyone who has been part of CUC Isaac's first year: our students, our Board, our staff, our partners, and the communities of Moranbah and Clermont who welcomed us in.

*Bringing degrees closer to regional, rural and remote Australia.
Together.*

Our Supporters



Get in touch

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