

CAIRNS REGIONAL COUNCIL

EDUCATION AND TRAINING INDUSTRY

2024/25



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Industry Snapshot - 2024/25



\$1,044M

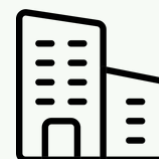
Output / Total Sales



8,703

Local Jobs

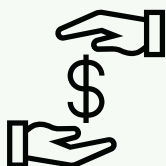
9.8% of total local jobs



246

Local Businesses

1.6% of total GST Registered Businesses

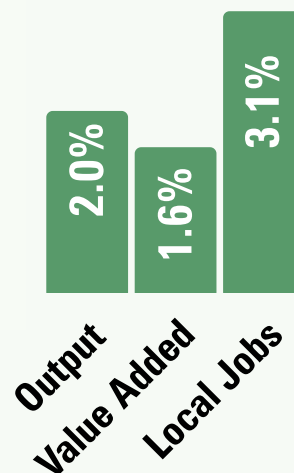


\$737M

Gross Value Added

7.0% of total industry value added

**5YR
ANNUAL
GROWTH**



KEY SUB-INDUSTRIES



School Education

\$467M Value Added

5,595 Jobs



Tertiary Education

\$192M Value Added

1,232 Jobs

Sources: NIEIR, 2026; ABS ABR 2026

Industry Size and Composition



Output/Sales



Value Added



Employment

Direct

\$1,044M

\$737M

8,703

Indirect/Flow-on Impacts

Industrial

\$245M

\$119M

869

+

+

+

Consumption

\$576M

\$300M

2,767

Total Impact

\$1,864M

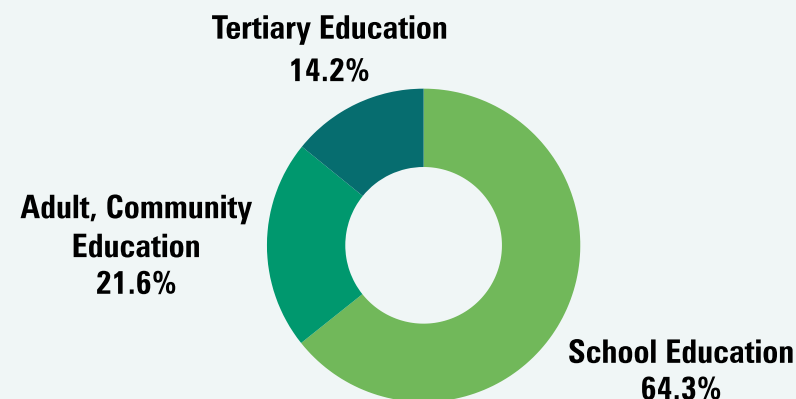
\$1,156M

12,339

In 2024/25, the Education and Training Industry in Cairns was estimated to have generated \$737M in direct plus an additional \$419M in indirect impacts for a total contribution of \$1,156M in Value Added. The industry supported 8,703 jobs directly and an additional 3,636 in indirect employment.

The largest sub-industry for direct employment was estimated to be School Education with 64% of the total sector's employment.

Share of Total Sector Employment, 2024/25

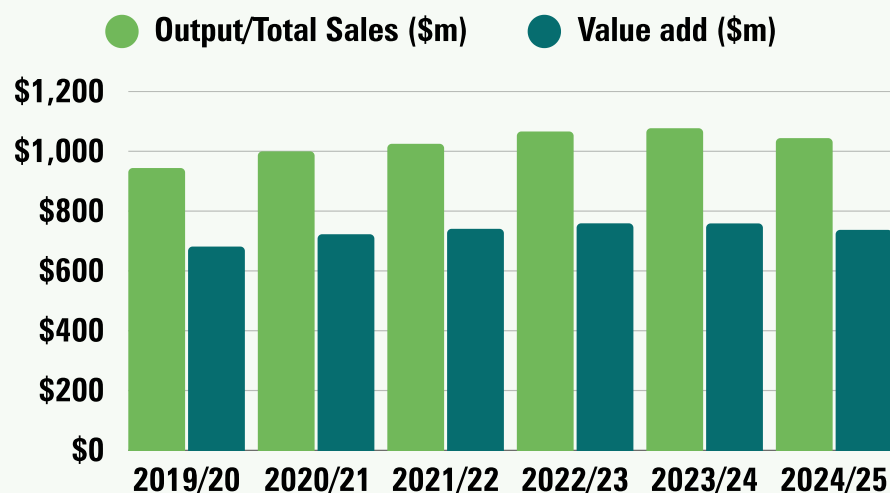


Sources: NIEIR, 2026

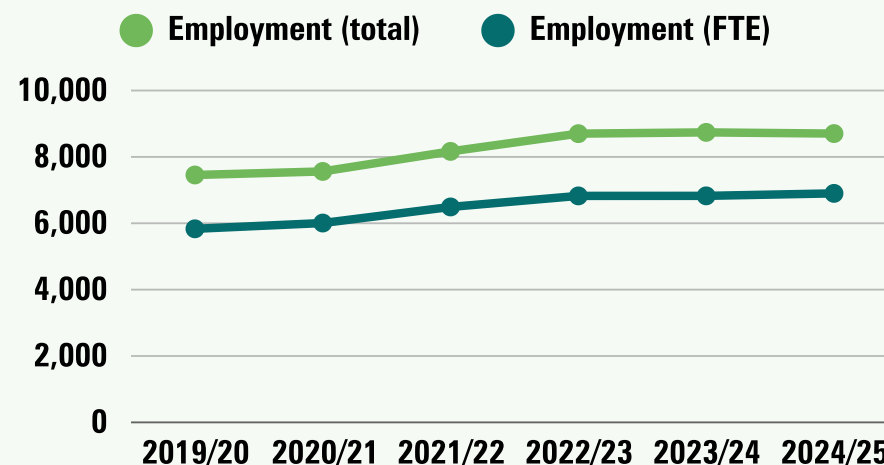
GROWTH TRENDS

In 2024/25, there were an estimated 8,703 employees working in the Education and Training Industry in Cairns and 6,901 full-time equivalents. The industry generated \$737M in Value Added, or \$84,708 per employee (\$106,815/FTE). Growth in the industry has averaged 3.1% p.a. for employment over the last five years and 1.6% p.a. for value added. Jobs growth has been above the state average, but economic value has been on par with the state average.

Economic Value, Cairns Region, Financial Year



Average Employment, Cairns Region, Financial Year



**5 YEAR
AVERAGE
ANNUAL
INDUSTRY
GROWTH**

2.0%

Output/Sales

2.1% p.a.

1.6%

Value Added

1.7% p.a.

**5 YEAR
AVERAGE
ANNUAL
INDUSTRY
GROWTH**

3.1%

Employment

2.7% p.a.

3.4%

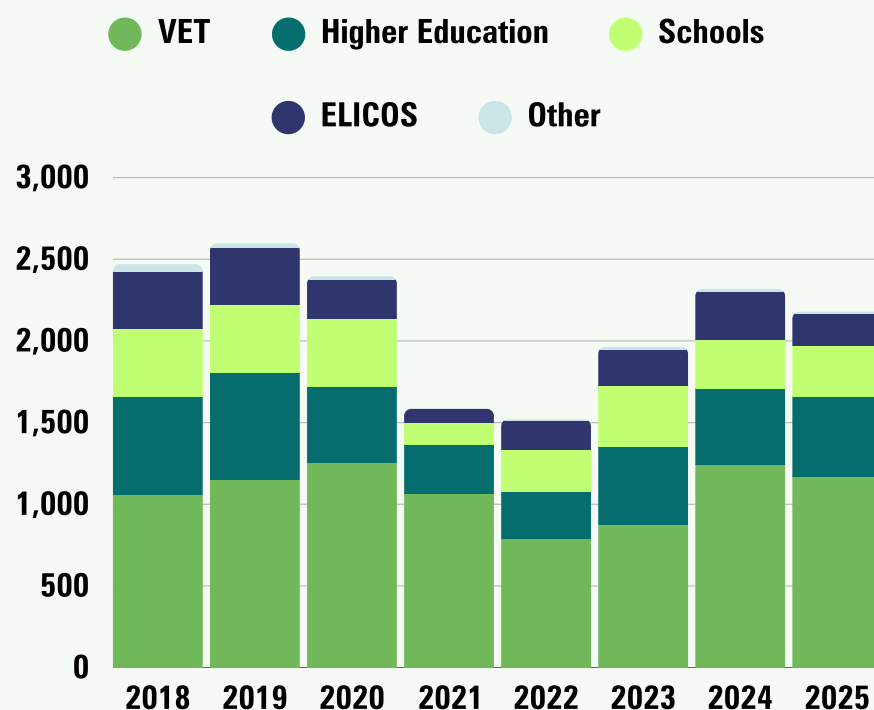
FTEs

3.3% p.a.

Sources: NIEIR, 2026

INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION

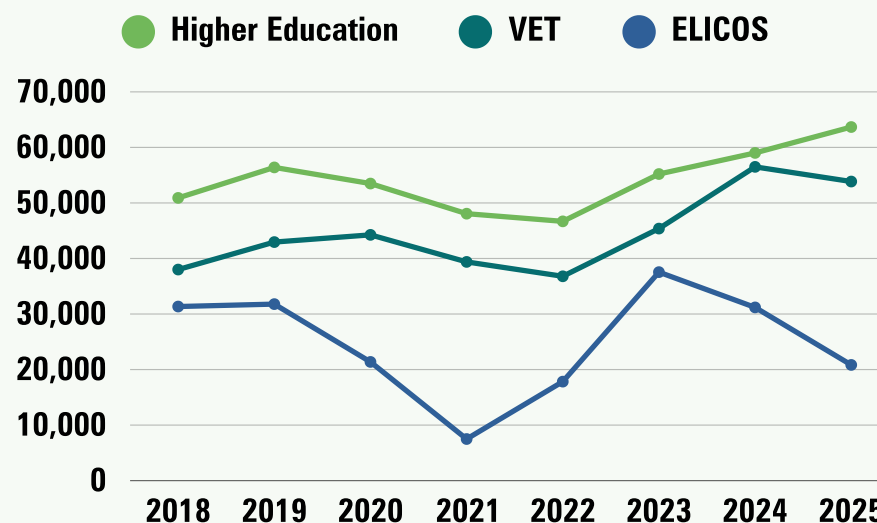
International Student Enrolments, Cairns SA4 Region, Calendar Year



International students play an important role in the Cairns economy. Prior to COVID, there were an estimated average of 2,500 international student enrolments per year in the Cairns region (ABS SA4 geography). This number fell by almost 1,000 enrolments in 2021 and 2022. Despite a return in numbers, enrolments were still 16% below pre-COVID levels in 2025 with most sub-sectors down except VET.

The situation in Cairns contrasts somewhat with state figures where higher education enrolments are above pre-COVID levels.

Int Student Enrolments, QLD, Year to December



Source: Department of Education, Commonwealth Provider Registration and International Student Management System (PRISMS) database, 2026

COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE



A strong education and training network underpins Cairns' workforce, with James Cook University, CQUniversity and TAFE Queensland delivering tertiary education, research capability and industry-focused training. These institutions help develop the skilled workforce needed to support the region's key industries and future growth.



Cairns is home to world-class training facilities in specialised areas such as the Cairns Aviation Skills Centre and the TAFE Queensland's Great Barrier Reef International Marine College. Hospitality and health disciplines are also key focus areas.



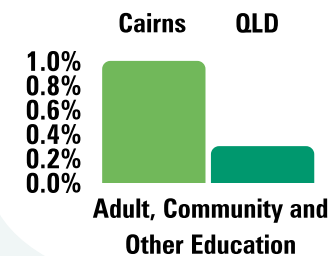
Cairns is attractive to international students offering lifestyle advantages, major city facilities and access to the Great Barrier Reef. Employment opportunities for students are also in good supply.



The need for higher education is increasing - the share of key working age residents in Cairns with qualifications rose 4.5% between 2016 and 2021. The majority of this growth was in residents with degrees.



Share of exports value generated by adult education is more than three times the state average.



Sources: ABS Census, 2021; NIEIR, 2026

WORKFORCE PROFILE

Workers in the Education and Training Industry in Cairns were slightly older than the state as a whole in 2021 with a median age of 46. Three quarters of workers were female and a quarter born overseas.

More than half the workforce was degree educated (58%) and working in professional or managerial roles (61%).

In 2021, the FTE median income of the local workforce was slightly lower than the state median.

KEY CHARACTERISTICS OF THE EDUCATION AND TRAINING INDUSTRY, 2021 - CAIRNS REGION



46 years

Median Age

QLD - 44 years



\$85,059

Median Income FTE

QLD - \$88,469



26%

Male

QLD - 26%/74%



74%

Female



56%

Full Time

QLD - 55%



25%

Born Overseas

QLD - 24%



4%

Owner Manager

QLD - 5%



6.1%

Identified as First Peoples

QLD - 2.8%



61%

Professionals/Managers

QLD - 62%



58%

**Degree or
Above**

QLD - 61%

29%

**Certificate III to
Advanced Diploma**

QLD - 25%

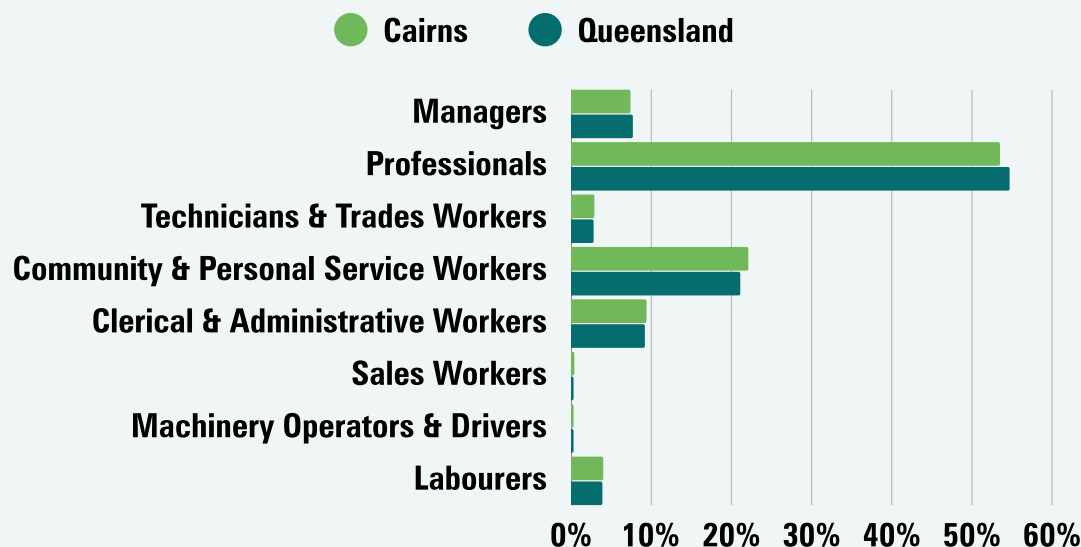
Sources: ABS Census of Population and Housing, 2021

EDUCATION & SKILLS

The Education and Training Industry in Cairns had an equivalent share of workers in professional occupations in 2021 (54%) compared to the QLD average (54%). The top occupations were secondary and primary teachers.

The industry had a slightly higher share of qualified workers (85%) than the QLD average (84%), but a slightly lower share with post-graduate degree level qualifications (9% vs 10% for QLD).

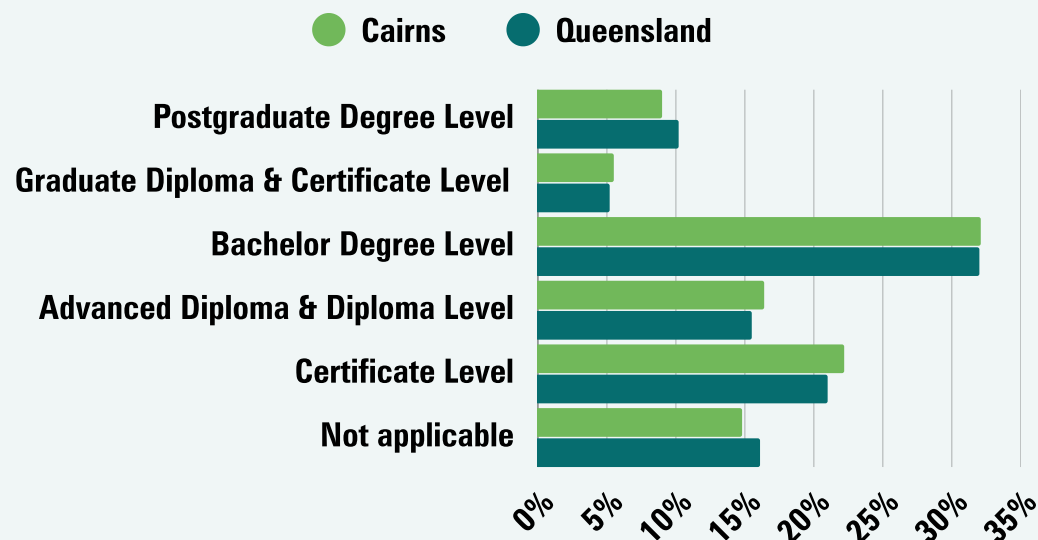
Local Workforce Occupations, 2021



Top Occupations

- Secondary School Teachers
- Primary School teachers
- Education Aides
- Child Carers

Local Workforce Qualifications, 2021



Top Study Fields

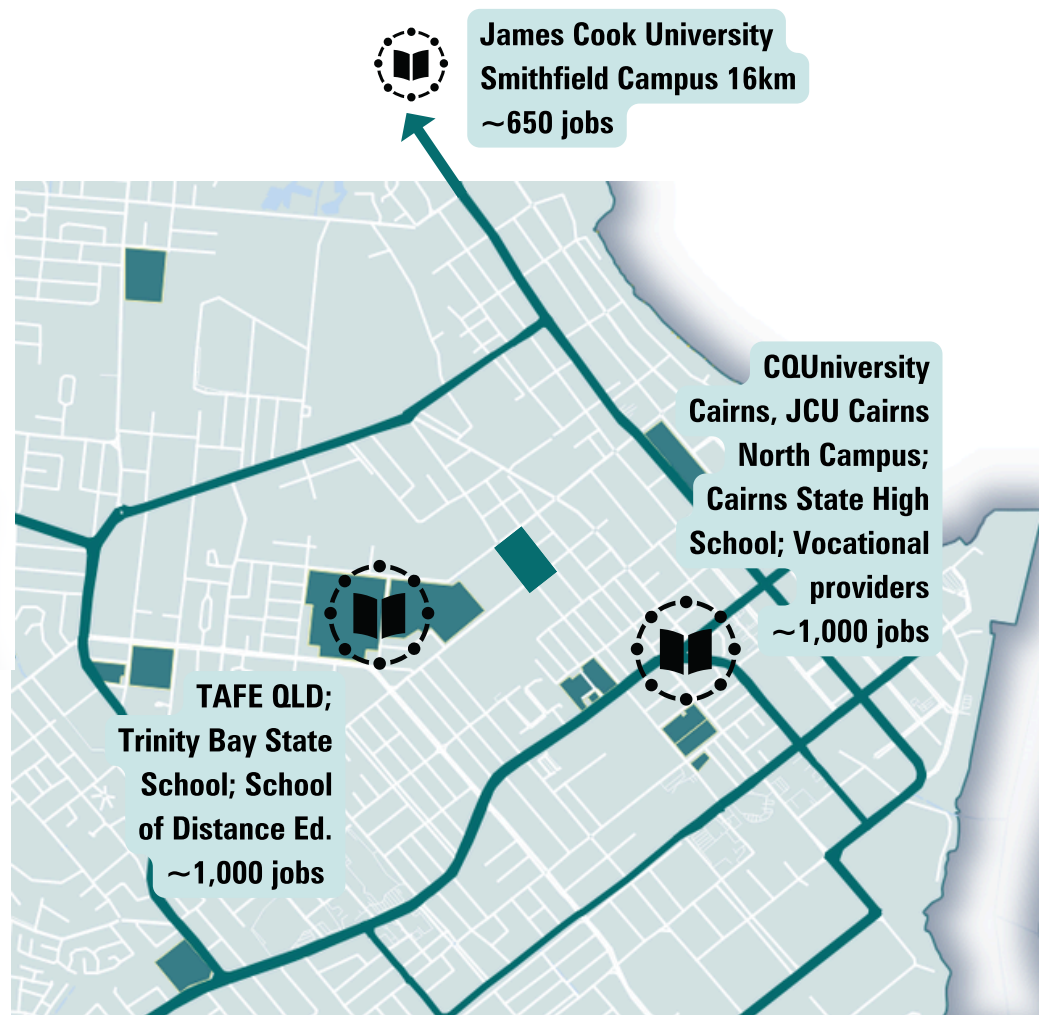
- Teacher Education (Secondary and Primary)
- Business and Management
- Children's Services

Sources: ABS Census of Population and Housing, 2021

Main employment precincts



Estimated Industry Jobs, 2021



Sources: ABS Census of Population and Housing, 2021

Key employers

- Cairns Aviation Skills Centre
- Cairns College of English & Business
- Catholic Education in the Diocese of Cairns
- CQUniversity Cairns
- Department of Education
- Great Barrier Reef International Marine College
- Holmes Institute
- James Cook University
- TAFE Queensland
- 21 private/non-government schools
- 25 state primary schools
- 10 state high schools.

PROJECTS & TRENDS SHAPING THE FUTURE



CQUniversity (CQU) city campus

CQU has secured \$77.5M in funding to deliver a new, purpose-built city campus. The project will deliver specialised teaching facilities in allied health, nursing and midwifery, medical imaging, and engineering disciplines, and expand capacity to support 6,000 students annually, boosting the region's future workforce.



JCU Cairns North: The Yeinie Building

Opened in 2026, JCU's \$60M health education facility - The Yeinie Building, named in honour of Yeinie, a respected ancestor and warrior of the Gimuy Walubara Yidinji people, is home to Nursing, Midwifery and Medicine. Co-located with the Hospital in the Cairns Health and Innovation Precinct, it creates a multi-disciplinary centre for health education, research and innovation.



TAFE Queensland Advanced Manufacturing Skills Lab

TAFE Queensland opened its \$4.1M Advanced Manufacturing Skills Lab in 2024, providing state-of-the-art training in computer-aided design (CAD), computer-aided manufacturing (CAM), and computer numerical control (CNC). The facility features cutting-edge technology, including a collaborative robot arm (cobot), 3D printers, and water jet and laser cutters.



Great Barrier Reef International Marine College Expansion

The \$17.6M million expansion of the Great Barrier Reef International Marine College in Cairns will lift the TAFE's annual student capacity from 900 to 1,500 and support the growing demand for maritime industry workers in the region.

SWOT Analysis

STRENGTHS

- Strong higher education providers supplying courses that cater to local needs and export opportunities
- Specialist facilities such as Cairns Aviation Skills Centre and the Great Barrier Reef International Marine College that complement growth industries.
- Designated Area Migration Agreements (DAMA) for FNQ allows Cairns to attract more overseas workers
- Lifestyle factors attractive to workers and students
- Proximity to Asia attractive for overseas students



WEAKNESSES

- Distance to other major domestic population bases can limit schools growth
- Higher education facilities and vocational centres vulnerable to exchange rate movements which can impact demand from international students
- Low demand for particular courses as a result of low awareness of job availability and relevant qualifications needed in certain professions



THREATS

- Visa policy changes impacting international student enrolments
- Increases in online provision of courses may limit growth in on-campus learning
- Rising living costs increase 'net' cost of studying
- Limits to availability of student accommodation and safe and reliable transport infrastructure, specifically for international students
- In times of low unemployment, people tend to move away from studying



OPPORTUNITIES

- CQU's new city campus will expand courses, and increase local graduates in critical skills shortages
- Designation of Cairns as a Defence Regional Maintenance Hub will create training opportunities in marine and manufacturing areas
- Cairns Airport expansion will strengthen the region's aviation skills capability
- The partnership between Cairns Hinterland Hospital and Health Service and JCU will make the Cairns Health and Innovation Precinct the epicentre of health education and research in the Far North — growing the region's own medical, nursing and allied health workforce, expanding clinical services and translating research into practice. It underpins Cairns Hospital's shift to a University hospital and lets JCU deliver its full health degrees in the CBD
- An expansion of the TAFE Queensland's Great Barrier Reef International Marine College will enable growth in both program delivery and student numbers
- Aligned with the Accord and CQU's strategic plan, expanding access to education gives students the flexibility to study how, when and where it suits





For more economic data on the
Cairns Region, visit economy.id

