

# Indigenous Student Success Program

## 2024 Performance Report

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### 1. Declaration

**In providing this Performance Report, it is acknowledged that it is an offence under the Criminal Code Act 1995 to provide false or misleading information.**

### 2. Enrolments (Access)

**What embedded Indigenous Student Success Program (ISSP) strategies, activities and programs has the university implemented to support and improve access for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in 2024?**

The Indigenous Education and Research Centre (IERC) at James Cook University continues to implement a comprehensive suite of strategies to support and improve Indigenous students' access to higher education. Our established programs include the Winter School (for Years 10-12 students), Summer Program (for Year 12 and post-school leavers), and the Try-your-hand-at-Uni program for post-school leavers. These intensive on-campus experiences focus on developing academic literacy, mathematics, and chemistry skills—areas historically challenging for Indigenous students in undergraduate studies.

We maintain a robust school engagement strategy, including organised school visits to the university (ATSIMS), active participation in Indigenous education programs (ATSIAP, QATSIF, Young Indigenous Leaders' Program, Solid Pathways Indigenous STEM Program), and attend breakfast meetings with school principals to provide accurate information on Indigenous pathways and entry requirements. This multifaceted approach has strengthened our recruitment pipeline for Indigenous school leavers and post-school leavers.

**What new strategies, activities and programs has the university implemented to support and improve access for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in 2024? What have been the outcomes or success?**

In 2024, we tried to scale up the implementation of our innovative Learner Identity model in regional and remote schools. This research-based approach, developed by Prof. Nakata and the IERC team, builds on a successful five-year case study (2017-2022) with undergraduate students, now adapted for school

settings. State Education and Catholic Education Queensland were slow to take up this approach in selected schools and pointed to issues around logistics at their schools rather than a lack of interest in the approach.

The model addresses a critical but often overlooked aspect of Indigenous education: the specific capacities Indigenous learners need to effectively engage with teaching and learning opportunities. Throughout the year, we resorted to professional development offerings to teachers in partner schools, equipping them with practical strategies to support Indigenous learners' academic identity development.

The online delivery of our specialised modules for post-school leavers who didn't complete Year 10 has also experienced delays, as the functions of the Blackboard platform the university uses could not be adapted to suit our designed learning activities. These modules were to provide targeted support in mathematics, chemistry, and academic literacy at Year 9/10 levels. This initiative was to bridge a significant gap for students who left their high school education early but who wished to pursue university pathways. Work was subsequently prioritised to investigate AI tools to adapt the modules with adaptive learning technologies.

**How does the university utilise scholarships, bridging and enabling support and outreach services to improve access? What impact did this support have in 2024?**

JCU has strategically realigned its scholarship distribution in 2024 to maximise the impact on access and participation. We've increased education costs support, with \$282,700 allocated to 244 students, while maintaining \$35,500 in reward scholarships for 36 high-achieving students. This represents a deliberate shift to address the most pressing financial barriers to university participation.

Our scholarship allocations are now more precisely differentiated based on individual financial needs and ABSTUDY entitlements, ensuring resources reach those with the greatest need. The ISSP scholarship funds complement the university's broader equity scholarships, allowing for comprehensive financial support that drives both access and success.

JCU continues to offer a comprehensive suite of pathway courses for underprepared students, including Tertiary Access Courses, Certificate courses, Diploma courses, and JCU Prep. These programs are under continuous review to ensure they effectively build the capacities needed for degree-level success. In 2024, we've enhanced the academic support components of these pathways, incorporating further elements of our successful Learner Identity model to strengthen student outcomes.

The combined impact of these financial and academic support measures has maintained strong Indigenous enrolment figures in 2024, with particular growth in STEM-related programs. The strategic alignment of scholarship support with our evidence-based learning support services has created a holistic approach

to improving access that addresses both financial and academic barriers to participation.

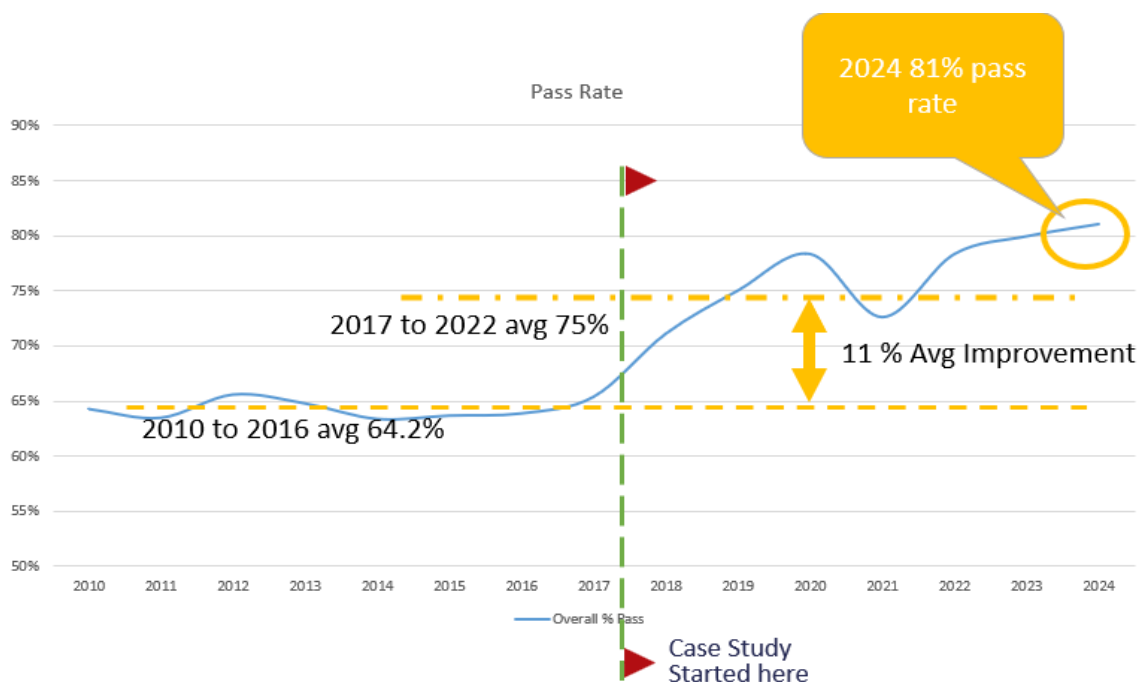
Table 1: ISSP Scholarships - breakdown of 2024 payments

	Education Costs		Accommodation		Reward		Total <sup>i</sup>	
	\$	No.	\$	No.	\$	No.	\$	No.
Enabling <sup>ii</sup>								
Undergraduate <sup>iii</sup>	\$282,700	244			\$35,000	35	\$317,700	274
Post-graduate <sup>iv</sup>					\$500	1	\$500	1
Other								
<b>Total</b>	\$282,700	244			\$35,000	36	\$318,200	275

### 3. Progression (outcomes)

#### What embedded ISSP strategies, activities and programs has the university implemented to support students to complete units?

The IERC's approach to supporting unit completion continues to build on our evidence-based learning response service implemented in 2017, which has consistently demonstrated improved pass rates. Our data shows that Indigenous students' pass rates have increased slightly to 81% in 2024, representing a significant improvement over pre-2017 levels and bringing Indigenous academic performance within 3% of non-Indigenous cohorts.



The service integrates real-time learning analytics with educationally responsive tutoring and support, enabling early identification of at-risk students and targeted intervention. This approach is underpinned by research on Indigenous academic persistence conducted by Prof. Nakata and his team, combined with international research on the relationship between self-efficacy and academic performance.

Our Indigenous learning support team, composed predominantly of Indigenous staff, brings skills and competence and understanding to the service, creating a learning environment that resonates with Indigenous students' experiences and needs. The team provides academic support across all disciplines, with particular emphasis on high-challenge areas such as mathematics, sciences, academic writing, and research methods.

**What new strategies, activities, or programs has the university implemented to support students to complete units in 2024?**

In 2024, we've enhanced our evidence-based learning response platform with expanded analytics capabilities. The system now contains over 250,000 data points on student learning patterns, enabling increasingly sophisticated analysis of factors influencing academic success. The machine learning components have been refined to provide more accurate early warning of potential academic challenges, allowing for proactive rather than reactive support.



We've implemented a revised tutoring allocation model based on our data analysis, which indicated that underprepared Indigenous students require a minimum of nine hours of targeted tutoring per subject to achieve passing grades. Where students also demonstrate high self-efficacy levels, our data shows they achieve not just passing grades but higher grades. In response, we've increased our tutoring budget and implemented a self-efficacy assessment and development component within our support framework.

Table 2: Tutorial assistance provided in 2024

Level of study	Number of unique students assisted <sup>v</sup>	Total number of tutorial sessions attended <sup>vi</sup>	Total hours of assistance <sup>vii</sup>	Expenditure <sup>viii</sup> (\$)
Enabling	33	144	224	18,704.00
Undergraduate	286	3304	4945	412,907.50
Post-graduate	12	75	91	7598.50
Other	0	0	0	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>331</b>	<b>3523</b>	<b>5251</b>	<b>\$438,667.00</b>

The IERC has also strengthened its integration with faculty-based support services across the university, creating a more seamless support ecosystem for Indigenous students. This includes collaborative case management of at-risk students and joint professional development for academic staff on supporting Indigenous learners. Regular data sharing with faculty leadership has increased awareness of Indigenous student needs and helped drive improvements in curriculum design and delivery.

The impact of these strategies is evidenced in our maintaining the improved pass rates established since 2017, despite the ongoing challenges posed by the post-COVID learning environment. Our targeted approach to supporting unit completion has been particularly effective for first-year students, where we've seen increased retention rates compared to pre-COVID cohorts.

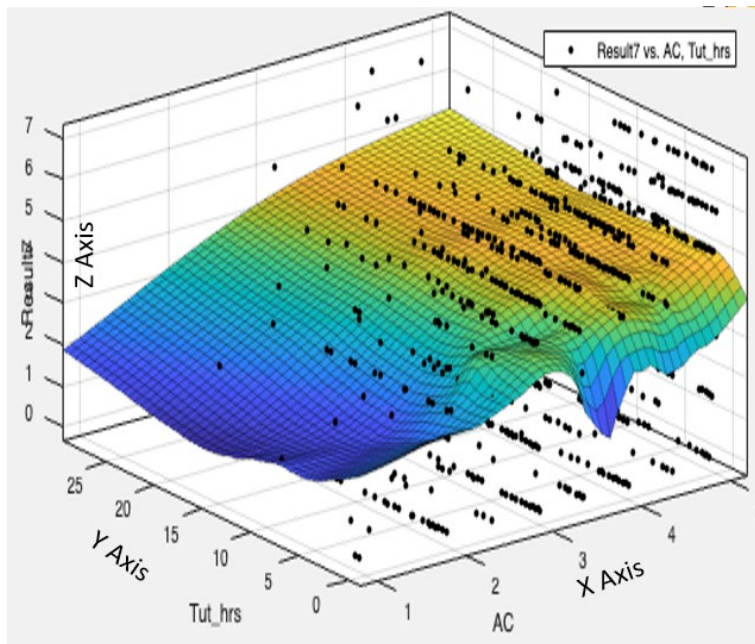
#### 4. Completions (outcomes)

##### **What ISSP embedded strategies, activities and programs has the university implemented to improve award course completions of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students?**

JCU's focus on completions has yielded continued success in 2024, with 82 Indigenous graduates across diverse disciplines and qualification levels. This was largely due to the COVID-19-affected enrolments in 2020. Nevertheless, this maintains our strong performance since 2017, where we've consistently achieved 120+ completions annually, a significant improvement over the pre-2017 average of 74 graduates per year.

Our approach to improving completions integrates several key components: the evidence-based learning support model (see graph below) that drives improved pass rates; strategically allocated financial support that reduces the need for excessive work hours; targeted interventions for students at risk of attrition; and highly responsive engagement practices that build strong connections between students and the university.

## IERC IPAL Deep dive



X Axis, AC = Organization and Study behaviors & Course Engagement  
 Y Axis, Tut\_hrs = Tutor hours for each subject  
 Z Axis, Result 7 = Subject GPA

The annual Indigenous Student Awards program continues to be a flagship event, celebrating academic progress and creating a community of achievement that motivates persistence in studies. This event, attended by students, families, university leadership, and community representatives, has become a significant milestone in the academic year, raising the profile of Indigenous academic success in North Queensland.

### **What new strategies has the university implemented in 2024 to support students to complete qualifications? What was the impact?**

In 2024, we've implemented enhanced completion planning for students approaching the final stages of their programs. This includes personalised academic roadmaps that outline remaining requirements and potential challenges, combined with intensified tutoring support for final-year subjects. We've also strengthened our career transition support, connecting final-year students with professional networks and employment opportunities, which has increased motivation to complete qualifications.

The impact of our strategies is evident in the diversity of 2024 completions across disciplines. Particularly notable are 17 graduates in Nursing Science; 7 in Arts; 6 each in Education (Primary) and Medicine/Surgery; 5 in Social Work; and multiple graduates in Science, Psychology, and Engineering programs. Significant completions in professional programs, including Dental Surgery, Veterinary Science, and Law.

We've seen particular growth in STEM completions, with graduates in Advanced Science, Engineering, Information Technology, and Geology. The health sciences continue to demonstrate strong outcomes, with graduates across Nursing, Medicine, Dental Surgery, Occupational Therapy, and Pharmacy practice.

Postgraduate completions also validate our support approaches, with graduates achieving Master-level degrees in Governance and Leadership, Nursing, Psychology (Clinical), Public Health, and Social Work. This diversity of completions across both undergraduate and postgraduate programs demonstrates the effectiveness of our support model.

The successful approaches developed at JCU are now being shared across the sector, with 16 universities (up from 14 in 2023) adopting elements of our learning support model. Following our inaugural National Indigenous Learning Support Conference in 2023 and the second conference at Murdoch University in September 2024, we're preparing for the third at Deakin University, where our completion strategies and outcomes will be shared as best practice examples.

## 5. Regional and remote students

### **What support was offered through ISSP to regional and remote students, how were these students prioritised?**

As a regional university, JCU's ISSP-funded activities are all oriented toward supporting regional and remote Indigenous students. In 2024, we supported 275 Indigenous students from regional and remote areas through strategic scholarship allocation and comprehensive tutorial assistance. The \$282,700 in education costs scholarships was primarily directed to students facing the additional financial challenges associated with regional and remote participation in higher education.

Our prioritisation of regional and remote students is reflected in our targeted outreach to regional and remote schools and communities, specialised pathway programs designed to address the unique preparation needs of students from these areas, and accommodation support strategies that ease the transition for students relocating for study.

The learning support services provided through ISSP funding are designed with the specific needs of regional and remote students in mind, including flexible delivery options to accommodate distance and connectivity challenges, highly responsive approaches that recognise the diverse backgrounds of Indigenous students from regional and remote areas, and targeted support for the transition to university study.

### **What strategies were implemented to improve access to university study? What activities were provided? What has been the impact of these strategies and activities?**

Our strategies for improving access for regional and remote students include both on-campus intensive programs and increasingly sophisticated online

delivery options. The Winter School and Summer Programs bring regional and remote Indigenous students to campus for immersive university experiences, while our Try-your-hand-at-Uni program builds specific academic capacities needed for success.

In 2024, we've expanded our online modules for post-school leavers in mathematics, chemistry, and academic literacy, making university preparation more accessible to students in distant locations. As noted earlier, the development of these modules specifically addresses the needs of students who did not complete Year 10, providing alternative pathways to higher education for a demographic that has traditionally been excluded.

Our mathematics and science work with partner schools in regional and remote schools in North Queensland is building a stronger pipeline of prepared Indigenous students, addressing academic capacity issues early in students' educational journeys. This approach is particularly important in regions where less than 50% of Indigenous students complete Year 10, significantly limiting the potential university participation rate.

The impact of these strategies is evident in our maintained enrolment numbers from regional and remote areas, despite the challenging post-COVID educational environment. The pass rates for regional and remote Indigenous students have continued at the improved levels established since 2017, and the diversity of completions across disciplines demonstrates that our support strategies are enabling success across the full range of university programs.

Table 4 ISSP Scholarship data for remote and regional students

	Education Costs		Accommodation		Reward		Total	
	\$	No.	\$	No.	\$	No.	\$	No.
A. 2023 Payments	\$318,600	236			\$28,000	36	346,600	272
B. 2024 Offers <sup>ix</sup>	\$595,600	496			\$35,500	36	631,100	532
C. Percentage <sup>x</sup> (C=B/A*100)								
<b>2024 Payments</b>	\$282,700	239			35,500	36	318,200	275

## 6. Eligibility criteria

### 6.1 Indigenous Education Strategy

Indigenous leadership continues to be central to JCU's approach, with the Deputy Vice-Chancellor of Indigenous Education & Strategy providing strategic guidance aligned with national closing-the-gap targets and NIAA priorities for higher participation and success. The Indigenous Education

Strategy articulates our commitment to increasing Indigenous student enrolment and completion rates across all disciplines.

The 2024 strategy includes an ambitious target of exceeding 1,000 Indigenous students by 2030, contributing to the national goal of doubling the Indigenous enrolment base by 2035. The newly established Indigenous Advisory Committee (IAC), to be implemented in 2024, has strengthened coordination of Indigenous education priorities across the university, creating direct reporting lines to the Vice-Chancellor and the Vice-Chancellor's Committee. This was to start in 2023, but the university's priority to move to tri-semester modes had to take precedence.

The strategy encompasses both student-facing initiatives and broader institutional priorities, including curriculum integration of Indigenous perspectives, research priorities related to Indigenous communities, and professional development for staff to enhance cultural capabilities. The IAC's quarterly reporting from 2025 will ensure regular monitoring of progress toward targets and enable responsive adjustment of approaches as needed.

Our focus remains on addressing the full educational pipeline for Indigenous students, from school/community engagement through to postgraduate completion and career transition. This approach for our region recognises that improving university outcomes requires intervention at multiple points in the educational journey, particularly in regional and remote contexts where educational disadvantage is most acute.

## **6.2 Indigenous Workforce Strategy**

The Indigenous Workforce Strategy continues to be driven collaboratively by the Deputy Vice-Chancellor of Services and Resources and the Deputy Vice-Chancellor of Indigenous Education & Strategy. In 2024, the Indigenous Advisory Committee (IAC) to the Vice-Chancellor will drive a more streamlined governance structure for Indigenous priorities across the university.

The IAC is led by senior Indigenous appointments, including the DVC (IES), the Head of Indigenous Teaching & Learning, the Head of Indigenous Research, senior academics and researchers, and managers. Approaches in 2025 will be made to appoint two community members from North Queensland. This leadership structure ensures that Indigenous perspectives are central to workforce planning and development.

The university maintains its Indigenous employment target of 4.68%, with regular reporting on progress through the IAC to the university's senior leadership. The integration of workforce planning with broader reconciliation priorities will be led by the Director of HR, DVCs (Academy, Research, Indigenous Education & Strategy), Deans of Colleges to ensure a cohesive approach to Indigenous engagement across all university activities.

In 2024, the IERC's Cultural Capabilities module had to be suspended due to the migration of our courses to Tri-semester modes. This has moved trials to 2025 and the implementation phase to 2026, and will provide staff with focused

professional development on the capabilities needed to more effectively design and deliver services to Indigenous students and communities. This module complements existing cultural training and provides practical strategies for enhancing Indigenous student success through a more responsive practice.

### **6.3 Indigenous Governance Mechanism**

The Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Indigenous Education & Strategy) continues to provide strategic leadership for JCU's Indigenous education priorities and the overall direction of the IERC. Reporting directly to the Vice-Chancellor, the DVC(IES) ensures close alignment between Indigenous education objectives and the University's Strategic Intent and University Plan.

As a member of the University Executive, which meets weekly, the DVC(IES) provides regular updates on progress toward Indigenous targets and initiatives. Additional Indigenous leadership is embedded throughout the university's governance structure, with the Head of Indigenous Teaching & Learning and the Head of Indigenous Research participating in peak committees, including the Academic Board and University Research Committee.

The Indigenous Management Team at the IERC, comprising senior Indigenous staff members and chaired by the DVC(IES), oversees the prioritisation, administration, and reporting of ISSP funds. In 2024, a formal charter for the IAC was established for this governance mechanism, clarifying roles, responsibilities, and reporting relationships.

The governance structure ensures Indigenous leadership at all levels of decision-making related to Indigenous education and employment, from operational management of programs through to strategic planning and policy development. This integrated approach maximises the impact of ISSP funding and ensures that Indigenous priorities are embedded in institutional planning and resource allocation.

#### **6.3.1 Statement by the Indigenous Governance Mechanism**

The Indigenous Management Team at the IERC maintains primary responsibility for developing priorities and managing programs funded through ISSP arrangements. In 2025, the team will be strengthened through its integration with the newly established Indigenous Advisory Committee, creating more explicit connections to institutional decision-making processes.

The team continues to meet monthly to review progress, adjust strategies as needed, and ensure outcomes are achieved. The enhanced governance structure implemented in 2025 will improve alignment with university-wide strategic priorities while maintaining the centrality of Indigenous leadership in determining how ISSP resources are allocated and how programs are designed.

The Indigenous Governance Mechanism affirms that all activities funded through ISSP in 2024 have been directed toward improving access,

participation, and success for Indigenous students, with particular emphasis on supporting regional and remote students. The strategic reorientation of scholarship funding toward education costs reflects the team's assessment of student needs and priorities in the current educational and economic context.

The mechanism also confirms that outcomes from ISSP-funded activities are regularly evaluated against key performance indicators, with data-informed adjustments made to maximise effectiveness. The ongoing success in maintaining improved pass rates and the diversity of completions across disciplines validate the approach taken by the Indigenous governance team in prioritising and allocating ISSP resources.

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<sup>i</sup> This figures provide for the total number of students receiving scholarships and expenditure for those scholarships. For the student count, in cases where a student receives more than one scholarship, the student would only be counted once in the total (consequently the total figure may not be the sum of the preceding columns). For the expenditure, the total should be the total of the preceding expenditure columns.

<sup>ii</sup> Include payments to all enabling students, including remote and regional students.

<sup>iii</sup> Include payments to all undergraduate students, including remote and regional students.

<sup>iv</sup> Include payments to all postgraduate students, including remote and regional students.

<sup>v</sup> Total number of unique students supported by tutorial assistance (if students have attended multiple tutorial sessions, still count them as 1 student).

<sup>vi</sup> Record total number of tutorial sessions attended by students (each class a student attends counts as 1, the same student may attend multiple tutorial sessions throughout the year).

<sup>vii</sup> Record only hours of instruction received by the students (do not include staff planning or organising time).

<sup>viii</sup> Include any costs associated with providing tutorial assistance, including staffing costs, materials, facilities etc.

<sup>ix</sup> Record all verbal and written scholarship offers for the 2024 calendar year, including those offers that were not accepted by the student. Record the 2024 component of new scholarship offers and the planned 2023 value of previously awarded scholarships (including continuing scholarships).

<sup>x</sup> This data confirms the university's compliance with Section 21(3) of the Guidelines.