

JOINT MEDIA RELEASE

7 June 2019

JCU and Cairns Catholic Education announce plans for new Catholic College at Smithfield

James Cook University and Catholic Education in Cairns have signed a Memorandum of Understanding to plan a new secondary college, to be located at the University's Cairns Campus at Smithfield.

The college would function as an autonomous and separate school, located on JCU land under a long-term lease.

"This collaboration offers valuable opportunities for staff and students at both institutions, and would complement the ongoing growth of the campus, where construction has just begun on the \$30M Cairns Innovation Centre," JCU Vice Chancellor Professor Sandra Harding said.

"Raising the far northern region's participation in tertiary education is an important focus for the University and all local schools.

"Having a secondary college on campus would enable us to continue and extend those efforts. We look forward to working with Catholic Education as this proposal unfolds."

Catholic Education Services Acting Executive Director Sally Towns said the proposed Year 7 to 12 college would serve the fast-growing Cairns northern beaches communities, but also, through the partnership with JCU, offer enormous opportunities for teacher training, professional development and educational research.

Bishop of Cairns James Foley said Catholic Education was keen to be part of Cairns' key emerging education hub at Smithfield with much to be gained from the secondary and tertiary education sectors working together.

Bishop Foley said the MOU also provided for a separate childcare centre at the Smithfield JCU campus to be operated by Catholic Early Learning and Care.

"As a collaborative project we are keen to work with JCU to see how the relationship could lead to wider regional benefits," he said. "We have a shared regional bias and are keen to explore how we can enhance local benefits."

Dr Towns said the college expected to open in 2022 for Year 7 enrolments, then growing a year level annually until Year 12 was offered in 2027.

She said further demographic analysis would be required but it was expected the school, when fully developed, would have 700-800 students. Construction costs would be in the order of \$30 million.

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JCU Cairns Campus Director David Craig said discussions have also included the possibility of some secondary students, from a range of schools including the proposed on-campus college, accessing University courses in their senior years.

“Our close relationships with nearby schools, in particular Smithfield State High and Trinity Beach Primary School have shown us how much we and the schools benefit from working closely together,” he said.

“We have seen students’ aspirations rise, as engagement with the University has helped them discover what they can achieve in their education and what they can contribute to their community.”

Dr Towns said the planning process would include consultation with local communities, other Cairns Catholic schools, and key stakeholders: “As with any new school we need to get the planning right, so we build a school that meets the needs of our students and their families.”

She said all Cairns area Catholic Colleges were now operating at capacity with demand outstripping the available places.

“We see a great opportunity to work with the university as the incubator of our next generation of teachers and as a place where our existing teachers and school leaders can have access to the very best professional development opportunities,” she said.

Dr Towns said some extensive negotiation, consultation, planning and design would take place over the next six months to firm up the project.

“But if the enthusiasm and commitment of both the University and Catholic Education is an indicator this college has a very bright future,” she said.

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MEDIA OPPORTUNITY: FRIDAY 7 JUNE, 9.45am at JCU, the Cairns Institute
JCU Vice Chancellor, Prof Sandra Harding
Catholic Diocese of Cairns Bishop, + James Foley
Cairns Catholic Education Acting Executive Director, Dr Sally Towns

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