

CUMMINGS ECONOMICS

38 Grafton St (PO Box 2148) CAIRNS Q 4870 ABN 99 734 489 175
Tel : 07 4031 2888 Email : cummings@cummings.net.au
Website : www.cummings.net.au



14th June 2018 / Ref: J3150

UNIVERSITY DEVELOPMENT IN CAIRNS Research Note & Comment

1.0 Introduction

The 2016 Census gives an opportunity to review progress in the development of university education in Cairns compared with other regional cities of similar size.

2.0 Comparable Cities

Based on Significant Urban Area boundaries (SUAs) as defined by the Australian Bureau of Statistics, the following cities fall into the 100,000 to 200,000 range.

Table #1: Population Sizes, Significant Urban Areas, Census 2016

Cities SUA	Population (usual place of residence)
Hobart	204,009
Townsville	173,813
Cairns	144,785
Toowoomba	130,718
Darwin	123,577
Ballarat	99,881

Source: Cummings Economics from ABS Census 2016.

Note: Significant Urban Area (SUA) boundaries tend to be drawn closely around cities. For instance, in the Cairns region, it does not include the Gordonvale area with a population of about 8,000.

3.0 Student Numbers

The following gives university student numbers recorded in the Census 2016 in the relevant cities per 1,000 head of population.

Table #2: Australian Student Numbers per 1,000 Population, Census 2016

Cities SUA	Ratio University Student per 1000 Population
Townsville	58.72
Hobart	52.20
Ballarat	50.54
Darwin	48.57
Toowoomba	43.56
Average	50.72
Cairns	34.63

Source: Cummings Economics from ABS Census 2016.

It should be noted that the number of students recorded would not include those overseas students who are counted as visitors and not residents.

It is clear that Cairns is well below the averages for the other five cities.

Cairns would need to have 50% more students than at present (ie. an increase from 5,000 to 7,500 to reach the average).

The growth in student numbers recorded 2011 to 2016 is not indicative that any major catch up is taking place.

Table #3: Percent Growth in University Student Numbers, Census 2011 - 2016

Cities SUA	% Growth
Hobart	+50%
Darwin	+28%
Toowoomba	+24%
Townsville	+21%
Ballarat	+4%
Average	+25%
Cairns	+23%

Source: Cummings Economics from ABS Census Data.

4.0 Employment in Higher Education

The following Table #4 gives employment recorded in higher (university level) education and ratio to population.

Table #4: Employment in Higher Education Compared with Population – Cities 100,000 to 200,000, Census 2016

Cities SUA	Employment in Higher Education	Ratio Employment per 1000 Population
Toowoomba	1,458	11.15
Ballarat	1,057	10.58
Hobart	2,151	10.54
Townsville	1,626	9.35
Darwin	1,059	8.57
Average		10.04
Cairns	606	4.19

Source: Cummings Economics from ABS Census 2016.

It can be seen that Cairns is by far a poor last with less than half per head of population of the five-city average.

Employment in Cairns indicated by the Census at 600 would need to double to bring it up to the average for cities in the same size range.

5.0 Comment

The question must be asked, “Why is Cairns so low?”

It is now about 34 years since following strong lobbying from the Cairns regional community to establish higher education in the area, the Queensland Minister for Education of the day, told James Cook University as the university responsible for the area, to attend to the development of university education in Cairns.

The community responded in good faith by raising funds to assist JCU acquire land and establish a campus at Smithfield.

However, it is clear that over the years, James Cook University as the institution with the prime responsibility for the development of university education in the Cairns region, has failed the Cairns community.

The extent of the failure is even more pronounced when account is taken of the inclusion more recently of student numbers studying at the Central Queensland University Campus that has been established in Cairns.

Although Cairns is a little above the average growth for the other cities, it is far from increasing at a rate that will see a catch up taking place quickly.

Table #5: Percent Growth in University Employment, Census 2011 to 2016

Cities SUA	% Growth
Toowoomba	23.70%
Ballarat	21.80%
Hobart	20.20%
Darwin	18.60%
Townsville	11.00%
Average	23.80%
Cairns	27.04%

Source: *Cummings Economics from ABS Census 2016.*

There have been plenty in the community who have sought to work with JCU to remedy the situation and progress the Cairns Campus over the years but they have been frustrated by the institution's structure in achieving real and rapid progress.

The Norman family was a prime leader in the community effort that helped James Cook University establish the campus in Cairns.

The late Bob Norman was exasperated with lack of progress and advocated that the Cairns Campus should become a "College" of James Cook University with its own council/governing body as a first step in progressing to an independent university in its own right, just as JCU Townsville had been first established as a "College" of the University of Queensland.

Certainly, the time has come, where the city and region can no longer tolerate a continuation of under-performance and something has to be done.