

New Catholic Secondary College for Cairns Northern Beaches

Background

Catholic Education has entered a Memorandum of Understanding with James Cook University to investigate a secondary college located on the university's Smithfield Campus.

The MOU also provides for assessing the feasibility for a childcare facility on the campus which would be operated by Catholic Early Learning and Care.

Location

Under the arrangement the college would enter a long-term lease with the university for a defined parcel of land within the campus footprint. The land is already zoned for education purposes.

The location is yet to be finalised, but it may be between the current JCU sports field and the creek to the north. This would give the college some highway visibility. As a location it is also separate but adjacent to the main campus.

The college

The college will be established as a secondary Years 7-12 co-educational Catholic college whose main purpose is to serve the rapidly growing northern beaches communities.

The college will also help address the growing waiting list for access to existing Cairns Catholic colleges.

It will not be a select academic school but will apply the same principles of inclusive practice as every Catholic school in the Cairns diocese.

The scope of the college will be determined during the consultation process with the local community and through an understanding of the site's opportunities and constraints. This will determine, for example, whether the school offers VET or limited VET opportunities or whether it offers vocational education through other colleges or providers.

Discussion with the university might also help determine whether the college promotes particular pathways, eg STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Maths), education, or business studies.

It would open as a Year 7 college and progressively add another year level over the next five years until it reaches full 7-12 status.

Size

An earlier demographic analysis for a Catholic secondary college further north, in the Kewarra/Clifton beaches areas, suggested potential enrolments of between 450 (low scenario) and 564 (high scenario) students – based on Year 7 intakes of 75-94 students.

The catchment would increase with the JCU Smithfield location and the site might be more attractive for families working at JCU

or in the Smithfield area. The demographic study would have to be reviewed to reflect these new variables. Early analysis suggests a college of 700-800 students is viable.

The size of the college will also be determined by the capacity of the site.

Timing

The earliest date for the college to open would be the start of the 2022 year. To achieve this the MOU process would need to confirm the college's viability this year, the college would require government accreditation by early 2020, capital funding approval later that year, and design and construction undertaken in 2021.

Relationship with the university

The college will function separately from the university as a fully functional Catholic college in the Diocese of Cairns.

The university and the college are keen to explore the mutual benefits of co-location. These include the shared use of facilities (eg sports facilities) and opportunities for teacher education and professional development, and university research.

Catholic Education sees an opportunity to use the partnership to assist in the identification and recruitment of graduate teachers.

The college location will also offer some convenience for staff and students at the university with secondary school-aged children.

There may be opportunities for senior college students to undertake university level courses, but Cairns Catholic Education would like to see this opportunity extended to all its colleges.

In all of this the college will be mindful of its responsibility to provide a safe educational environment for its students.

Appointment of Principal and staff

If the MOU investigation confirms the feasibility of the college the intention would be to fill the position of foundation Principal as soon as possible, to take full advantage of the unique opportunities associated with this partnership.

Other key staff would be appointed closer to the college's first intake of students.

College name

The college does not have a name and the process to determine a name will be undertaken consistent with diocesan and Catholic Education policy. The final decision rests with the Bishop of Cairns.

Until a formal name is adopted the college will be known as the Northern Beaches Catholic College.