

## **MEDIA RELEASE**

### **PKUC graduates set to strengthen regional workforces after studying close to home**

*81 graduates recognised at PKUC's 5th Graduation Celebration as Regional University Study Hubs create regional and remote higher education opportunities*

**Karratha, WA – 1 May 2026**

Eighty-one graduates have been recognised as part of Pilbara Kimberley University Centres' (PKUC) 2026 Graduation Celebration, honouring students who completed higher education with the support of services and facilities close to their homes and communities.

Of those graduates, 68 reside in the Pilbara and Kimberley, while a further 13 students from across regional Western Australia completed key parts of their studies in the Pilbara and Kimberley through residential schools, placements and intensive learning programs.

Held in Karratha, the PKUC Graduation Celebration brought together students, families and community members to recognise achievements made possible through access to local study services and support.

PKUC CEO Susan Grylls said the growth in graduate numbers reflects the expanding reach of locally supported higher education.

“Historically, the aspiration to attend university could only be realised by moving to Perth or another metropolitan centre – something that was financially prohibitive for many regional and remote students. Innovative higher education initiatives such as the Australian Government’s Regional University Centres and Study Hubs Programme have irrevocably changed the higher education landscape,” Ms Grylls said.

“At PKUC’s inaugural graduation event in 2021, we celebrated just 10 graduates. This year, we are recognising more than 80. That growth tells a powerful story about the impact of place-based education across regional and remote Western Australia.”

“These graduates demonstrate what is possible when people can access higher education where they live, with support that understands the realities of regional and remote life. They have balanced study with work, family and community responsibilities, and their success shows that higher education is not only accessible, but relevant and achievable in the Pilbara and Kimberley.”

Graduates completed qualifications ranging from Certificate IV and university pathway programs through to postgraduate degrees, across disciplines critical to the region’s future workforce.

A strong proportion of the 2026 cohort completed qualifications in nursing and allied health, alongside studies in teacher education, engineering, business, psychology, social work and leadership – reflecting the breadth of opportunities now available locally.

The contribution to regional health is particularly significant. Through its partnership with CQUniversity, PKUC celebrated 24 Bachelor of Nursing graduates this year. Since 2021, PKUC has supported 61 nurses through to graduation, helping build a pipeline of locally trained health professionals for the Pilbara and Kimberley.

Outstanding achievement among PKUC-supported nursing students was also celebrated, with Jayden O'Loughlin receiving the Hancock Iron Ore Rising Star Award and Violet Bartell recognised with the Hancock Iron Ore Nursing Student of the Year Award.

Together, the graduates represent the Pilbara and Kimberley's newest nurses, doctors, occupational therapists, teachers, social workers, business leaders and community leaders – people who will care for, educate, support and lead communities across the region for years to come.

The cohort spans generations, from school leavers to students in their 50s and 60s, reflecting the growing accessibility of higher education at all stages of life.

At a time when housing shortages have driven critical workforce shortages, innovative place-based higher education solutions delivered by Regional University Study Hubs like the PKUC are revolutionising regional workforce models, with locally trained graduates providing skills and services for the communities they call home.

The PKUC acknowledges and thanks its partner universities – CQUniversity, Curtin University, Edith Cowan University, Charles Darwin University and the University of Tasmania – for their continued support of the PKUC and its Pilbara and Kimberley students.

### **From receptionist to future doctor**

Among this year's graduates is Karratha local Reginald Cokiangco, whose journey reflects both resilience and a deep commitment to his community.

Starting his career as a medical receptionist, Reginald completed a Bachelor of Nursing, followed by a Graduate Diploma in Emergency Nursing, and now hopes to study medicine so he can continue caring for the Karratha community he calls home.

Despite travelling to the Philippines to care for his grandmother in her final days, he remained committed to his studies and successfully completed his qualification.

Reginald was recognised with the PKUC Spirit of the Pilbara Award for his strong work ethic, generosity and support for fellow students.

### **Record scholarship support announced at graduation**

PKUC's scholarship program reached its largest scale to date in 2026, with 114 scholarships valued at \$240,500 supported by 25 industry, government and community stakeholders.

Scholarship recipients were announced during the graduation event, recognising students from across the Pilbara and Kimberley who will receive financial support to pursue their studies. The program attracted more than 190 applications, highlighting both the strong demand for higher education in the region and the significant pressures students face in meeting the costs of tuition, travel and placements.

Scholarships were made possible through the generous support of: BCI Minerals, Bennco Engineering, Broome International Airport, City of Karratha, CQUniversity, Curtin University, Divinia D'Anna MLA, Hon. Julie Freeman MLC, Hon. Melissa Price MP, Hon. Neil Thomson MLC, Job Pathways, Kevin Michel MLA, Mary MacKillop Today, Mineral Resources, Mighty Orchid Services, Nickol Bay Fertiliser Co, Pilbara Meta Maya Regional Aboriginal Corporation, PKUC, Port Hedland International Airport, Rio Tinto, Shire of Ashburton, Woodside Energy, Wunan, Xtreme Retail Group, Yaandina Community Services and Yurra.

“Scholarships play a critical role in ensuring students can pursue higher education without having to leave their communities,” Ms Grylls said. “They reduce financial barriers and support students to complete their qualifications, helping build a pipeline of skilled, local people who contribute to the region.”

### **Building the future of the Pilbara and Kimberley**

With study hubs in Karratha, Port Hedland, Onslow, Tom Price, Broome and Kununurra, PKUC currently supports around 500 students and continues to expand access to higher education across northern Western Australia.

“These graduates are not only achieving their own goals – they are contributing to the future of the Pilbara and Kimberley by strengthening local workforces, supporting their communities and building a more sustainable and skilled regional future,” Ms Grylls said.

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### **Media opportunities**

Interviews with local graduates, scholarship recipients and PKUC CEO Susan Grylls are available on request.

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