InspireU UQ is a tertiary aspiration building program for Indigenous youth, administered by the Outreach and Engagement team in the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (ATSIS) Unit. The program involves a series of residential camps themed around the professional disciplines of Engineering, Science, Law, Business and Health Sciences. Program participants attend ‘on campus’ residential camps, take part in interactive workshops and lectures, workplace/industry visits and receive guidance from UQ and industry experts about study and career opportunities. InspireU is delivered in collaboration with community and industry partners, and UQ Faculties and Schools.

Since its inception in 2013, the InspireU program has made a significant contribution to UQ’s strategic commitment towards increasing the participation of Indigenous Australian students. The program provides an example of how the University, industry and community can work collaboratively to improve educational outcomes and build aspiration for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. In rolling out the InspireU program in its inaugural year, a conscious effort was made to target areas where there has traditionally been underrepresentation. For that reason Engineering was selected as the first priority area. InspireU Engineering was held in January 2013, in partnership with Rio Tinto and the EAIT Faculty. 20 students from schools across Queensland and New South Wales were welcomed by Vice-Chancellor Professor Peter Høj and participated in a range of learning activities, workshops and presentations by industry professionals.

Following the success of this pilot program, InspireU has grown substantially to now feature 6 residential camps in 2016 across the areas of Science, Business, Health Sciences, Law, Junior Engineering (Grade 9-10) and Senior Engineering (Grade 11-12). The program has also expanded to include a range of UQ, industry and community partners including the BEL, MABS, HABS, and Science Faculties; Boeing Defence; Arrow Energy; McCullough Robertson; the Queensland Bar Association; QIMR Berghofer Medical Research Institute; and the Institute of Urban Indigenous Health. Participants also benefit from ongoing connection with the program and its staff through a range of additional program engagement activities, such as local and regional student and parent events, social media engagement, and online tutoring and support. Over 170 students have participated in the program since 2013, and in 2015 almost 60% of year 12 participants applied for a place in a UQ program to commence in the following year.

Students from 108 schools across Far North, Central and South East Queensland, the Torres Strait Islands and New South Wales have been involved in the InspireU program since 2013. Over 170 students have attended InspireU camps, and early numbers in 2016 indicate greater participation than in previous years.

InspireU program coordinators collect detailed statistical data to measure the efficacy of the program. Program participants are surveyed before and after their involvement on a broad range of issues relating to their knowledge and understanding of the university sector and the discipline/area of study of interest, their understanding of the range of support services available to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, and their confidence in the supports available to them in the pursuit of their tertiary study goals.
The most recent results (2015) highlight the impact of participation in the camp.

2015 InspireU Results
I have access to information and support to help me reach my goals
- 98% of students reported having an above average to excellent confidence in having access to information and support to help them reach their goals (23% improvement), while only 2% report an average/below average confidence.

My confidence making decisions about post school options
- Following the camp, students felt more confident making decisions about post-school options, 88% of students rated themselves as having above average/excellent confidence in their abilities to make such decisions (35% improvement)

My confidence that university is the best choice for me
- 95% of students felt confident that university was their best option following their involvement in the camp (15% improvement).

My knowledge and understanding of the university sector
- 97% of students rated their understanding of the university sector as above average/excellent, a remarkable 57% improvement on results prior to the camp.

My knowledge and understanding of the field of engineering/law/science/health science
- The percentage of students rating their understanding of the field of engineering/law/science/health science as above average/excellent increased by 61% following the camp (34% pre-camp, 95% post-camp)

My understanding of support services available to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students
- 98% of students reported having an above average/excellent understanding of the services available to them after the camp, compared to 52% before the camp.

2016 data has been collated and early indications are towards a continuing trend of greater understanding of the tertiary environment, the support available and increased confidence in achieving their tertiary goals from program participants.

The InspireU program has had a demonstrable impact on increasing the participation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students at the University of Queensland. Since the commencement of the InspireU program in 2013, UQ has increased its market share of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander first preferences by 46%, and has experienced a 22% increase in total Indigenous student enrolment numbers.