School to Work: Creating Future Pathways is a program that takes many forms in over 500 schools across New South Wales. Below is an account of how a rural comprehensive high school runs a successful program facilitated by a committed management team. The school is also supported by many community organisations and businesses which ensure that the students in this small rural town, access many local opportunities to help them plan for their future.

GULGONG HIGH SCHOOL

Gulgong High School is a small, rural, comprehensive high school that has been successfully serving the Gulgong community for many years.

The school offers a broad curriculum catering for a wide range of student needs. The regular curriculum is expanded by the use of distance education and other flexible delivery options. The school is highly regarded for its vocational education programs.

Gulgong High School consists of well-resourced classrooms, practical rooms and a library which utilises the latest technology. A full sized gymnasium provides a first class venue for indoor sports and activities and the school is adjacent to the local sporting fields and swimming pool. Debating, music, drama and visual arts are included in the large range of extra curricular activities on offer.

The welfare of students is considered crucial in maintaining a positive learning environment. Many pro-active programs are in place to ensure that students feel safe and happy while at school. They have developed strong links with their feeder schools to ensure students have a smooth transition to high school.

Gulgong High School students have a proud record of excellent HSC results and outstanding results in national subject competitions. The successful school to work programs ensure a high success rate of students gaining employment or going on to tertiary education.

SCHOOL TO WORK: CREATING FUTURE PATHWAYS, AT GULGONG HIGH SCHOOL

The School to Work Program at Gulgong High School has evolved since its introduction in 2001. The priorities of the Gulgong program are to assist students to understand and plan for the employment, education and training options available to them. Students are involved in a range of activities which enhance their employability and make the transition from school to work, much more productive. A key feature is that all students from years 10-12 are provided with assistance in writing a School to Work Plan which outlines their future goals and aspirations.

WORK AND TAFE EXPERIENCE THROUGH THE REAL WORLD PROGRAM

One of the highlights of Gulgong’s School to Work Program is The Real World Program which enables a select group of approximately 30 students to participate in specialised activities which relate directly to their School to Work Plans. The Real World Program has been running at the school since 2001 and the school has structured its timetable to accommodate program activities to take
place on Wednesdays each week. Students participating in the initiative can choose to do either Work Experience or attend TAFE to study Automotive Studies, Animal Attending or Beauty Therapy. The school has structured its timetable to accommodate these activities to take place on Wednesdays each week. Non-participating students enjoy the opportunity to have small class numbers on Wednesdays to extend their knowledge or undertake extra initiatives to support literacy and numeracy.

The students targeted for the Real World Program are those who:

- Want to leave school before completing their School Certificate
- Are achieving good results in all school subjects but have a narrow, restrictive or unrealistic focus
- Have limited knowledge of employer expectations or of workplace culture
- Demonstrate low self-confidence and lack of clarity about their future
- Have poor self-management, planning or decision-making skills
- Identified that they require extra assistance.

Students are required to go through a referral process which is conducted by teachers, parents/carers, and school counsellor or year adviser. Students can also self-refer if they feel strongly about completing the program.

In 2005, the school purchased embroidered uniform shirts for the Real World participants. Having a work experience uniform has given them a sense of belonging to “The Real World Team”. With the uniform we can be assured that they all dress appropriately, neatly and sensibly. The employers have all been really impressed with this new initiative.

COMMUNITY SHOPPING PROGRAM

As an extension of The Real World Program, Gulgong High School works collaboratively with Wenonah Community Care to provide a community service to some elderly women living independently around Gulgong. Three or four Year 11 students participate in the program every week. They visit the elderly clients of Wenonah Community Care, fill their grocery orders and run errands for them. This component of The Real World Program proves to be of benefit to both the students and the Wenonah clients. The students form some close bonds and build very positive relationships with the women. We feel the program assists students to recognise the value of elderly citizens in our community, and to understand the role that community organisations play in our society.

OUTCOMES FOR REAL WORLD PROGRAM STUDENTS

- Many Real World participants since 2001 have gained part time or casual employment as a result of their positive employer reports the work skills developed.
- 97% of Employer Assessment Reports have been extremely favourable and were used as part of students’ portfolios when looking for employment.
- Employers have shown keen interest in employing students after Year 10 as either full time apprentices or through School Based Part Time Traineeships. At the end of 2005, four students at risk of leaving school were kept on as School Based Part Time Trainees.
- Evaluation through staff, student and parent surveys identified an increase in self confidence and esteem by the participating students.
The program has helped students develop their communication skills, recognise their own skills and abilities, gain a sense of connection to the school and improved their ability to plan and manage their transition from school.

Employers are able to use the program to “trial” future employees.

Local employers are highly supportive of this program. Some employers have willingly had students every Wednesday for the past five years.

Students in Years 9, 10 and 11 from the Special Education unit have become involved in the program, gaining valuable future work skills and knowledge. These students really love being on *The Real World Program* - quite often it is the highlight of their week.

**HIGHLIGHTS OF THE REAL WORLD PROGRAM 2005**

**TAFE COURSES**

“The Automotive TAFE course we did was excellent. We learnt lots. And our teacher was great!! We pulled a motor apart and learned about a car’s systems and components.”  
*Chris and Jason Year 10*

“The TAFE program that was offered to me was a great experience and has helped me a lot. The course taught me many skills, such as work skills and communication skills. It was fun, interesting, and gave me a head start with the ideas that will develop my future career. It was great fun and I would recommend it for anyone.”  
*Jodi Year 10*

**WORK EXPERIENCE**

“The Real World Program was a great opportunity for me because I got to experience what work was really like. I got the chance to meet new people and had the opportunity to see what different jobs are out there and what they have to offer.”  
*Rebecca Year 9*  
**Employers:** Gulgong Public School (Kindergarten) and Gulgong Pre-School

“The Real World Program is good because it is helping me to decide what I want to do when I leave school at the end of Year 10. My employers have helped me heaps, they have told me all about apprenticeships and how to apply for them.”  
*Ethan Year 9*  
**Employers:** Gulgong Stock and Rural, Mudgee Auto Electrics