Benefits of the new school leaving age
How innovation within NSW secondary public schools underpins student success

Dr John Mitchell
John Mitchell & Associates
December 2009
**Student Benefits**
- Enhanced engagement
- Increased confidence
- Greater resilience
- More opportunities
- Meaningful choices

**Innovative schools**
- Maximising curriculum
- School structures
- Professional learning
- Student support

**Supportive stakeholders**
- Community
- Parents
- TAFE
- Universities
- Other providers
- Industry
- NSW DET
- Other agencies

**Shared practice**
- Rethinking
- Experimenting
- Reinvigorating
- Modelling
- Collaborating
- Networking
- Transferring

**Common Goals**
- Aiming higher
- Supporting strongly
- Strengthening connections

**Innovation and Continuous Improvement Model**
Instead of the conventional Foreword, following is an article published in Campus Review on 20 October 2009, in which Pam Ryan talks to Campus Review columnist Dr John Mitchell about why she thinks the change to the school leaving age is a positive opportunity for all parties.

Many people in the tertiary sector seem mesmerised by the recommendation in the Bradley review and supported by the federal government that the percentage of people with degrees be increased by the year 2020.

In being mesmerised, people are paying respect to the critical role played by universities in Australian society, yet few are looking at a potentially more important policy change about to swing into action around the nation - the raising of the school leaving age.

The critical importance of raising school retention rates was noted by Campus Review (06/10/09) in its report on research by Treasury which found that completing Year 12 will probably do more to improve their prospects of labour market participation than any subsequent post-school study.

“This result, along with international research, suggests that policies designed to increase school retention ... may have significant social and economic benefits,” says the Treasury report.

In NSW the changes to the school leaving age are being introduced on 1 January 2010, requiring all students to complete Year 10. In addition, if a student is under 17 and wants to leave school after Year 10, they will need to be in vocational training, an apprenticeship or paid employment for an average of at least 25 hours per week.

The NSW Department of Education and Training is not simply waiting around to observe any accidental social and economic benefits from this policy initiative, says the senior manager overseeing the change, Pam Ryan. She sees the legislation "as a really extraordinary opportunity to do some reshaping of secondary education".

By reshaping secondary education she means leveraging off the existing innovation in the public school system to lift to the next level its services for students. The policy change is a chance, she says, "to think laterally, to think creatively and to think positively and to really put the student at the centre".

For Ryan, raising the school leaving age is about engaging better with students and providing them with more opportunities. And this means reviewing the curriculum and providing new levels of support.

“It’s about engagement; about how we engage young people. And I think there are two key elements to this. It’s about what we provide in our curriculum, and how do we support the student? How do we case manage the student? How is every student an individual in this large system?”
In setting out these hopes about engagement and opportunities, Ryan is aware of the challenges ahead. “It offers us challenges in terms of where we haven’t been able to successfully support students at school in the past, but on the other hand there is the imperative that we need to meet that challenge effectively.”

**Entitlement to an education**

Part of Ryan’s role is to ensure that schools are aware of challenges that lie ahead. “What’s going to happen if we have a student going into full paid work but in fact the job falls over the next year, and they’re still of school age, so they need to return to school?”

“How do we make education sufficiently flexible to enable that kind of entitlement? And that’s where we’ve got people in schools starting to think about how can we do things differently that would enable that kind of case to be managed.”

Ryan expects the new policy to influence young people’s attitudes to school. “As time goes by students will think more deeply about what the future might look like, and start making some decisions about that rather than well, ‘I’m just 15 and I’m going to leave school’. It’s more about pathways planning.”

One obvious pathway for students is into a VET program, and Ryan notes that some students “might be well into their apprenticeships when they leave school”. But rather than focus on the impacts of this new policy on VET or higher education, Ryan prefers to emphasise the creation of more pathways for students, between sectors.

“We’ve started up options with the universities where the student is going from school to TAFE to university, such as in health services. Some universities are certainly open to that kind of seamless transition.

“So I think it’s not about having students going from one sector to the next at a particular chronological stage, but rather they have an education, which is a whole mix of provisions that ultimately lead to a well-educated human being.”

Ultimately Ryan sees the raising of the school leaving age as requiring “an attitudinal change and a cultural shift, which says that all young people deserve to be at school. They have an entitlement to an education, and if we any way deny that, the cost is greater further down the track for all sorts of reasons, especially for the young person.”

Ryan says that sometimes people ask a young person returning to school “Well, why are you back at school?” and “Wouldn’t you be better off somewhere else?”

But those questions are “not ones we should be asking. It’s more about how do we make it possible for the young person to remain at school.”

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**Key benefits of staying at school**

This interview sets the theme for this publication in highlighting a number of key benefits flowing from the policy on the new school leaving age:

1. Federal Treasury reports that completing Year 12 will probably do more to improve the individual’s prospects of labour market participation than any subsequent post-school study.

2. The policy change is a chance for schools, says Pam Ryan, “to think laterally, to think creatively and to think positively and to really put the student at the centre”.

3. In staying longer at school, “students will think more deeply about what the future might look like, and start making some (better) decisions about that”.

4. Staying at school longer enables “the creation of more pathways for students, between sectors”, and a more “seamless transition”.

5. The provision of a range of different types of training opportunities for the young person will “ultimately lead to a well-educated human being”.

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all young people deserve to be at school...
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Introduction

Background
In October 2009 the New South Wales Department of Education and Training (NSW DET) engaged Dr John Mitchell from John Mitchell & Associates to document multiple examples of best practice across NSW secondary public schools in relation to the new school leaving age.

The field work was undertaken from October-November 2009.

Brief
The project brief was as follows:

1. Document multiple examples of best practice across NSW secondary public schools. These case studies will cover a range of clients from individuals to learning communities to regions and demonstrate how public secondary schools are responding proactively to the new school leaving age.

2. Interrogate these examples to identify those themes or elements that are consistent throughout and which illustrate innovation and capacity in the public system.

3. Using these common themes, assist the Senior Project Officer, on behalf of the Learning and Development Directorate, in developing a practical model for innovation and continuous improvement within the context of the new leaving age.

4. Identify ways to scaffold implementation of the model across the state.

Research methods
To begin the process of drafting the case studies, the researcher interviewed four key Department officers, to identify the broad background to the case studies.

Following consultations, the Department then selected twelve examples of innovative activity and provided the researcher with the names of contact people for those twelve potential case studies.

The researcher then:

• obtained written and verbal data from the relevant contact person about each case study, via a written survey and follow-up phone interviews
• conducted phone interviews with a representative for each of the case studies
• analysed the data in relation to concepts provided in the literature on innovation.

In total, fourteen completed surveys were received and sixteen interviews conducted. The interviews were digitally recorded and fully transcribed and then edited. The edited transcripts were then approved as accurate by the interviewees. About half of the interview transcript material was not used, to reduce the overall size of this report.
Illawarra Senior School enrolls people from the ages of 15-82, operates from Monday-Thursday, uses 70% per cent of students are from non-English speaking backgrounds and they flourish in a school.

The Enterprise Centre is a section of Kempsey High School. It provides an alternative pathway for students to obtain further education, employability skills and access to jobs. The Centre’s program includes the provision of a mentor, access to a school counsellor and a teacher’s aide and regular contact with a transition team consisting of a careers adviser and transition adviser.

In response to a breadth of abilities and interests among the students, the school has implemented a series of innovative projects that extend from Stage 4 to Stage 6 and provide students with multiple opportunities to stretch themselves and succeed.

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The College has established a number of academies which provide specialised learning and career pathways in the Byron Shire to meet the needs of young people not suited to current traditional comprehensive schooling.

The biggest benefit is the growth in confidence in the students. The ones that have really taken up opportunities offered by the school are far more confident to take risks and are looking forward to the next step.

The biggest benefit is the growth in confidence in the students. The ones that have really taken up opportunities offered by the school are far more confident to take risks and are looking forward to the next step.

The retention rate of students to the end of Year 12 is high and each year the students achieve excellent results in the HSC. This success creates more options for them, in the longer term.

Students are encouraged to challenge themselves and to aspire to more demanding jobs and contexts than they might have without a full twelve years of schooling.

**Table 1: Case study - school, description of innovation and benefits.**

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<tr>
<th>NO.</th>
<th>SCHOOL</th>
<th>DESCRIPTION OF INNOVATION</th>
<th>BENEFITS OF INNOVATION</th>
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<td>1.</td>
<td>Illawarra Senior College</td>
<td>Illawarra Senior School enrolls people from the ages of 15-82, operates from Monday-Thursday, uses a case management approach to support students and has a group of volunteer mentors who, year after year, provide additional support.</td>
<td>For many students, the positive experiences at the college set them up for future success. The community benefits from students developing attitudes and skills that will enable them to make a difference in society.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Arthur Phillip High School</td>
<td>The school balances the provision of literacy and numeracy with the use of contemporary digital technologies. Despite its size, with 1600 students, personalised learning is offered to students.</td>
<td>By having their needs catered for, students feel valued and special. Staff grow in confidence as innovative approaches are embraced by the majority of students.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Kempsey High School</td>
<td>The Enterprise Centre is a section of Kempsey High School. It provides an alternative pathway for students to obtain further education, employability skills and access to jobs. The Centre’s program includes the provision of a mentor, access to a school counsellor and a teacher’s aide and regular contact with a transition team consisting of a careers adviser and transition adviser.</td>
<td>Students are more engaged in their learning and develop more skills and options. The community’s perception of the value of the school is increased.</td>
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Key findings

Drawing on the case studies in this publication, this section contains some key findings about how public secondary schools are responding pro-actively to the new school leaving age. In particular, this section identifies some themes or elements that are consistent throughout the publication and which illustrate innovation and capacity in the public system.

These findings also inform a practical model for innovation and continuous improvement, set out in the Conclusion at the end of this document.

On the one hand it needs to be said at the outset that the innovation capacity of public secondary schools described in this publication pre-dated the change in the legislation and schools are to be congratulated for their outstanding commitment to innovative approaches. The case studies of existing innovation in the following pages capture exemplary practice.

On the other hand it needs to be said that, for most schools, the new school leaving age will add either new or more challenges, so their previous level of innovation needs to be used as a springboard for further innovation. This publication contains numerous examples of how schools are fully intending to meet those challenges by escalating their capacity for and level of innovation.

Strategies or innovation?

Much of the excellent literature on the topic of retaining 15-19 year olds at school and other topics related to raising the school leaving age (e.g. Lamb & Rice 2008; Polesel et al. 2009) generally focuses on effective strategies, so this document is different in that it focuses on innovation as an overarching framework, within which strategies are a sub-set.

One reason for this specific focus on innovation not just strategies is because researchers have already identified a vast range of strategies and this publication has living examples of almost all of them. For example, Lamb and Rice (2008) provide a series of successful strategies grouped into two categories of student-focused strategies (e.g. mentoring, case management and career planning) and school-wide strategies (e.g. team-based teaching, smaller class sizes and early intervention to support literacy and numeracy). Most if not all of these strategies are already being used across the set of twelve schools described in this publication.

A second reason for the focus on innovation as the overarching framework is that innovation, as defined by Williams (1999), is about the implementation of ideas, not just the creation of new ideas or strategies. Strategies are often ideas or intentions, innovations are products or processes that are implemented. The schools described in this publication are committed to implementing and sustaining innovations, not only designing and pursuing aspirational strategies. Innovation provides a more enduring framework for schools than strategy formulation and execution.

A focus on benefits

This publication is entitled Benefits of the new school leaving age because all of the people interviewed for this study, ranging from the Deputy Director General (Schools) to school principals to champion innovators in schools, generally shared the same view, which can be summarised as follows:

- they hold as their highest goal that students can and will benefit from continuing, customised and positive experiences at school
- they are determined to make whatever changes are necessary and feasible in schools to optimise the benefits for those students who, prior to the change in the legislation about the new school leaving age, might have left school before turning seventeen
- they believe that these changes will vary from one context to the next, and can include changes to the curriculum, the school structure, student support and professional learning
- they understand that the changes are needed not only at Years 10-12 but in the earlier years as well, around Years 6-7.

This shared view was summarised by Pam Ryan in the Foreword and is reiterated in the interviews with four key stakeholders following this section. Pam Ryan sees the legislation “as a really extraordinary opportunity to do some reshaping of secondary education”.

By reshaping secondary education she means leveraging off the existing innovation in the schools system to lift to the next level its services for students. The policy change is a chance, she says, “to think laterally, to think creatively and to think positively and to really put the student at the centre.”

Putting the student at the centre, and providing her or him with benefits, is at the heart of the shared view of the people interviewed for this publication. And that is why student benefits are the focus of the model for innovation and continuous improvement set out at the front and end of the publication.
Sample benefits
A sample of the benefits of existing and planned innovation in schools are set out in Table 1 in the Introduction. Some of the different types of benefits described there are as follows:

- **Innovation in schools increases student engagement.** In innovative schools, senior level students who might otherwise have become disengaged from school can be helped to engage better with learning both as individuals and in groups, and in different settings such as at school, in work placements and in the community. In innovative schools, students benefit from interacting with and learning from and with peers, teachers, parents, community members and employers.

- **Innovation in schools brings about improvements and turnarounds in attitude.** When positive learning experiences occur in safe and secure environments where students feel trusted, these learning experiences can regularly bring about significant improvements in self-confidence and attitude. Sometimes these improvements can be described as dramatic turnarounds. Students benefit from schools that believe in their capability to change.

- **Innovation by schools based on high expectations of students brings high returns.** Time and again in the case studies in this publication, examples are tabled of schools expecting students to stretch themselves and students willingly taking up that challenge. Students benefit from being challenged to realise their potential.

- **Innovation by schools enables students to identify more options, now and in future.** The case studies provide numerous examples of students coming to realise they do have options if they continue to learn beyond, say, Year 10. A theme throughout the case studies is that one of the main benefits of continuing at school in Year 11 is that it enables the student to become more aware of the many different options and opportunities in work and life, not only in the near future but also in the longer term. Students benefit substantially from identifying options.

Innovation can be planned, managed and sustained
Innovation is no mystery. The case studies in this publication show that, in every school, innovation can be deliberately and effectively planned, implemented, fostered, managed, monitored, evaluated and sustained.

Williams (1999, p.17) defines innovation in a way that is relevant to this present study. Innovation, he says, is as follows: “the implementation of new and improved knowledge, ideas, methods, processes, tools, equipment and machinery, which leads to new and better products, services, and processes” (italics added).

He notes that innovation is about the implementation of not just new ideas and knowledge, but also of improved ideas and knowledge. Implementing someone else’s idea is innovative.

Williams (1999, pp.57-72) identifies four different types of innovation, all of which are modelled in the case studies. In some instances in the case studies, the innovation is a combination of two or more of the types of innovation cited by Williams:

- new and improved services
- new and improved work operations, processes and methods
- synthesis - when existing ideas, products, services or processes are combined in some new way so that an improved idea, product, service or process results
- replication - copying or duplicating or learning from others or applying someone else’s idea or invention in a new situation.

In particular, and hopefully, the last of these types of innovation - learning from others and applying it in one’s own context - will be stimulated by your reading of this publication.

Drivers of innovation
The case studies in this report show that a number of inter-related factors are driving innovation in NSW secondary public schools. They can be loosely categorised as external and internal.

**Internal and external drivers**
Internal drivers of innovation in the schools portrayed in these case studies normally arise from the motivation and effort of school staff and students. Some prominent internal drivers are as follows:

- ideas, values, skills and experience of school staff
- a shared culture among the school staff that they can work together to design and implement processes that will enable students to flourish
- transformational leadership which values and encourages the insights and skills of staff
- staff commitment to improving themselves through structured professional learning and by learning from experience, on the job
- Students’ willingness to improve themselves.

As the NSW Department of Education and Training takes an active role in supporting innovation in schools, it is viewed as an internal driver. The contribution of the Department is acknowledged throughout this set of case studies, and the contribution ranges from approving experimental school structures to identifying sources of funding to encouraging the use of new approaches.
External drivers of innovation in the schools described in this publication emanate from forces such as parents, the community, employers, legislation and technology. Some prominent external drivers are as follows:

- **Stakeholder goals**: for example, the goals of disadvantaged communities that the current group of school students will have more options than previous generations, through achieving more at school.
- **Stakeholder involvement**: for example, the support of TAFE institutes or universities or private training providers who can offer learning programs that are complementary to the school’s program.
- **New legislation**: the new school leaving age legislation is a clear example of a law that is sparking innovation.
- **New technology**: school staff in these case studies are using new technology both in the back office to analyse data about student performance and in learning environments, such as through the use of public domain programs like Moodle for increasing student access to learning.

**Transformational leadership**

Goffee and Jones (in Galavan et al. 2008, pp.7-8) remind us that a significant proportion of the value of companies nowadays is derived from the tacit skills of the clever people in them. To tap into these staff skills, leaders need to promote a culture capable of nurturing this tacit human capital. As part of that culture, "...it becomes the role of leaders to win the resources, time, space and freedom for the clever people rather than control their actions" (Galavan et al. 2008 p.8).

Many examples of such transformational leadership are provided in the case studies.

**Critical success factors**

Some of the key findings from this case study research about the critical success factors for effective innovation are as follows:

1. **Schools’ willingness to collaborate internally.** In many of these case studies, school staff demonstrate their ability to work in teams - for instance, in teams consisting of teachers, transition advisers, career advisers, literacy and numeracy experts, and other support staff.
2. **Schools’ ability to partner externally.** Staff are willing and able to liaise and maintain effective working relationships with an array of external parties, ranging from TAFE institutes and universities to government agencies, employer organisations and community groups.
3. **Schools’ ability to be flexible.** The case studies contain many examples of schools changing their structures, adapting the curriculum or developing new support systems, particularly in order to support senior level students.
4. **Schools’ advanced practice.** In the case studies staff are frequently described developing approaches that are customised to suit unique cohorts of learners as well as assisting students to develop individual learning plans. In some cases staff are described inventing new, hybrid approaches that are a combinations of aspects of pedagogy and andragogy, social welfare and public education.

**An emerging model of innovation and continuous improvement**

These findings point to the value of schools bringing to the foreground the broad framework of innovation, when planning and implementing new approaches to students affected by the new school leaving age. A model for consideration by schools - a model for innovation and continuous improvement in relation to the new school leaving age - is discussed in the Conclusion section.

**References**


SECTION A INTERVIEWS WITH KEY STAKEHOLDERS
Excerpts from a context-setting interview with Trevor Fletcher, Deputy Director General (Schools), NSW DET

Turning old patterns around
While I’ve been here, I’ve tried to shine the spotlight on success - on a school like Temora High School, where they punch above their weight, or schools like those at Orange with the e2 initiative - and what can schools do individually and collectively to turn around old patterns.

Pointing to success
If we’re going to point fingers I’d rather point fingers at success and then get to the how. So, what is it that these schools are doing? How have they gone about it? What can we learn from them that may be applicable in other schools? I think that was Pam Ryan’s great approach in Orange, so let’s look at the challenges of secondary education in particular and then let’s work together and really harness not only our resources but our thinking. I think the e2 model has been outstanding in giving us an approach to be used more broadly across the state.

Getting kids hooked on learning
Starting next year, we’re trialling a new English course from the Board of Studies and we’re very confident about that because the Standard English course was a huge inhibitor for a particular cohort of students. If we can get kids hooked on learning, if we can get them hooked on curriculum and studies that they find have relevance to them, then we’re much more likely to succeed.

Raising retention rates
I’ve been saying to the principals, look we’re not about to compare Chifley College in Mount Druitt to North Sydney, but what can we do in a school that has say a 50% retention rate or 55% retention rate? How can we turn that into 70%? And where we’ve got a school with 70%, how can we get that to 80% in the short-term? And what sorts of programs did other schools find that worked well in engaging and retaining these kids?

Using funding well
We’ve been looking at how do we use some of the significant funding that’s available for raising the school leaving age, both nationally and at state level. All schools will be given new transition co-ordinators based in high schools and schools have been getting lots of funding through national partnerships and state money. We want them to make sure that they use those funds in really targeted ways: it’s not about just reducing class sizes in Year 9 or Year 8. It’s about saying, how do we use this extra resource to sharpen the focus on the things that are probably already in our school improvement plan? How do we actually get on about achieving the targets that are required of us and we want to do anyway?

Engaging early
While we know from some of our practice and research that things like mentoring, particularly for Aboriginal students, works well, and more personalised monitoring and support is needed for students at risk in say Years 9 and 10 or even earlier than that. The student may well leave at the end of Year 10 or halfway through Year 11, but perhaps they subconsciously booked their exit ticket in Year 6. So we need more engagement in middle years and better transition, better programming, more individualised pathway support.

Breaking the nexus
We want to break the nexus between prevailing economic circumstance and school retention. Our history tells us when the economy is bad, that retention is likely to improve because there are not as many options. But we really want to focus on the peak of the next recovery. Will we still be improving our retention through that period?

Improving career education
I think if we’re going to improve retention we have to change the approach towards careers education. I don’t think it’s wise to leave it to one careers teacher, because many high schools have over a thousand students. How does one person properly provide careers advice? In the schools that do well on these sorts of areas, all teachers are in the business of careers education, just as all teachers are in the business of student wellbeing. It’s not just left to the welfare co-ordinator or that careers teacher.
Identifying disengagement
One of the things we’re implementing is an engagement retention tracking tool. It seeks to identify students who are at risk of disengaging early on and then makes sure that all the teachers that interact with that student are all, if you like, on the program support team. You’re then looking at, well what else can we attempt to keep them attending school and staying on?

Cross-fertilising good practice
I’ve talked about some of the things that we’ve been doing as a system, but the bit in the middle is the regional people. In the region the school education director has to monitor and support 28 schools on average. I think they’re really well placed to both do that monitoring and provide support but also what I call cross-fertilisation. So, if you’ve got a school that’s doing really innovative things and starting to get a real turnaround, why wouldn’t you be sharing that with the other principals in your patch?

Grappling with complex problems
The biggest challenge, it seems to me, is that if you’re in Granville, if you’re in small remote western New South Wales communities, if you are in Moree, you are grappling with some pretty complex and difficult social issues. We have to acknowledge that if students are not in safe, secure environments where they’re supported, where they’re well fed, where they’re clothed, where they’re nurtured, then it is going to be tougher. And of course with some of the students we’re talking about, we’re not even talking about single parent homes, we’re talking about no parent homes. There are students in these circumstances trying to put themselves through the HSC.

Taking an inter-agency perspective
From an inter-agency perspective, if we’re dealing with Aboriginal communities, we’ve got to be conscious of housing and the welfare and the health departments, as well as our own. There have been some good examples of that, but I’m not sure that we’re there yet.

Prevailing over disadvantage
We must not allow for self-fulfilling prophecies. That is if we’re born disadvantaged, we’re not going to succeed. There are some people, despite their circumstances, who prevail. So, we have talked about it as needing a real culture of high expectations.

Leading relentlessly
If a principal is too quick to rationalise away something like 50% retention, I think we’re in real trouble. That’s why it comes back to the school education directors who chair the selection panels for principals and who do the monitoring, to ensure that we have leaders who genuinely and relentlessly want to take on this challenge.

If we can get kids hooked on learning... then we’re much more likely to succeed.
Interview No. 1  Trevor Fletcher on how to build success continued...

Encouraging innovation
What we've been trying to do is to really encourage innovation. When I first got here, there was a fear about sticking your head out and trying things. We tried to break that down. Early on I discovered a marvellous innovation called the Gwydir Learning Region. That reminded me of two things: one, innovation can come from anywhere and often it will come from a long way away from the head office of the education department; and two, when you find it, you've got to really encourage it as much as you can.

Taking risks
We say to our principals, take risks. The e2 team took a risk at Orange, the Gwydir people took a risk. We want you to take risks: if you’re doing things in the best interests of children, you have our permission. Now, don’t break the law or ignore all the rules, but bend them and push them and push us and you’ll get our support.

In saying that, we’ve got to be prepared that a few people will make mistakes, but we really want to be a system that seriously encourages innovation and doesn’t expect all the good ideas to come centrally.

Making decisions locally
What I know works well is a sense of inter-dependence, with as much decision making and flexibility at the local level as you can sensibly tolerate, and with the support of regions and with the over-arching strategic work of the centre. We’re a very centralised, hierarchical system, so let’s flip it on its head and all of a sudden the 2,240 schools are on top of it.

Expecting high performance
With 23,000 people waiting for fulltime employment with the department, we’re not short of people who want to work for us. The overwhelming majority of principals and teachers go to work every day intending to do a very good job and they perform accordingly. We’re determined to enhance and build on our culture of continuous improvement in the quality of teaching.

Transforming attitudes
If we can get from 70% to 90% school retention we will have transformed schools. But some of that transformation is attitudinal. We need to ask what do parents think? What do teachers think? And what do children think? To see the transformation of schools, we will have to seriously change how we approach those things.
Des Gorman on fostering change in schools
An interview with Des Gorman, General Manager, Learning and Development, NSW DET

With the new school leaving age, what is the role for principals?
The most important part of this new legislation is the cultural change that it brings with it. Our principals need to engage with their staff and their community about this cultural change. Principals are the key to what we actually have to change at the school level to better accommodate students who in the past might have wanted to walk out the door.

What has to change?
The mindset we have to move to is - what have we actually got to engage students? Do we have to change our systems, do we have to change our curriculum, do we have to change our teaching style? That is where we have to go, in meeting the needs of individual students, rather than just hoping that they’ll all fit into a cohort.

We have to start looking at an earlier age, at the triggers or the indicators that a young person is starting to disengage. It’s not just a secondary school issue, it’s an issue in the primary schools, and hopefully that’s where a lot of the work around communities of schools working together, secondary school and its partner schools, will start to open up those doors.

What cultural change is needed?
We need to ask if the culture of the school is truly inclusive or do some teachers still put pressure on the principal to move these kids on, to get them into something else because they’re too disruptive in the classroom or they’re not interested or they take too much of the teachers’ time. I think teachers are ultimately very concerned about individual students, but sometimes these kids, because they’re not connecting with the curriculum, make it too difficult for the teacher - day in, day out - to engage them and keep them on track.

The other cultural change has to come from a community perspective around aspiration. If you’ve got a young person who doesn’t see a career path or even a work path, well then it’s quite easy for them to drop out and just to do what the generation before them and the generation before them have done.

How can good practice by some schools be spread?
We now have great capacity in the technology age to share good practice rather than people having to get in the car, get in a plane and go and visit schools. There are easier ways than to visit. We have to really delve into what is working well, which schools are actually being successful in engaging young people and how can we spread that. Take the Gwydir Learning Region: how can we spread that news without everyone having to visit? We’re looking for ways to do that.

This is really a great opportunity to innovate. Principals are now starting to think about what are the resources we have, what can we actually do with the resources we have available to us from the community, what can we actually do for these young people?

Are you saying that attitudinal change precedes the use of resources?
Yes, I think we’re working at the moment on the attitudinal change, bringing people up to date with what the impact of the legislation will be and then the regulations that go with it. And it’s not black and white, it’s not either/or: young people can be involved in multiple pathways and I think it’s the job of the school to orchestrate that, to conduct that, for the young person.

We’ve got to get on board key people within each school and clearly the principal is the key person, but so is the timetabler, so is the careers adviser, so are the Year level leaders. So we’ve really got to engage with them around doing things differently.

What is your key message for schools?
The key message we’re going out to schools with is that while we’re seeking innovation, we’re not necessarily looking for brand new ideas. We think we’ve got the strategies, we think schools have got the strategies already, we just have to do them better, we have to share those ideas better. And we’ve got to use better the three levels of the system: the centre in its policy and resource function, the region in its support function and the school in its delivery function. We have to make sure all those planets align. And that’s what we’ve been focusing a lot of our work on.

And of course the other key player in that is TAFE, our training partner. A lot of work is being done with TAFE around what might a Year 10 equivalent course intake look like. Even though we’ve said the default, the preferred, position, is school for Year 10 kids, we know that doesn’t necessarily fit all students.

How can innovation in schools be fostered?
There are three things that are needed for the momentum around innovation. One is what do the facts tell us? I think it all starts with making sure we’re starting with: What are the facts? Why are young people disengaging? If they are disengaging, where are they going? What have we tried in the past that might have worked a bit but might have worked better if we’d all done it, or if we’d really done it, or if we’d resourced it or if we’d measured it? And so we’ve got to get the information right first.

Second, we have to get the opportunity for people, for minds, to meet: the networks, the think tanks, the collaborative tools, even if we use technology tools collaboratively to get an opportunity to meet.

And third, the key with innovation is momentum and just getting it going, just having a go, taking a risk if you have to.
We need those three prerequisites in place: know your facts, give people an opportunity to interact and then get started. And as I said, we’re not looking for brand new, crazy ideas. We’re looking for ideas that either have worked in small schools, that we might be able to make work in large schools, or started to work but we lost interest or we changed a staff member or we stopped being funded, but we thought it was a good idea at the time.

So if the environment is right the innovation follows?
That’s right. I think that’s going to be the organic way that this innovation will occur. There might be some systemic ways it occurs and that will be through, policy and regulation and resources. But organically I think we’re going to see greater successes with great minds getting their heads together and saying yes, let’s see if we could do this a bit tighter and a bit more focused, if we could get a communication happening out around this initiative, if we can get all the people on board.

Are you confident teachers can be this involved and innovative?
Yes. And using tools that are available to us now that we’ve never had like video conferencing or social networking as a learning tool, as collaborative tools. We have our various departments working feverishly on those to make sure that there is support for the teacher.

The digital education revolution is a key strategy for innovation in New South Wales. We’re giving every Year 9 student a device, every secondary teacher a device, all networked with great software on it. We have our Curriculum K-12 and Centre for Learning Innovation designing and producing a lot of learning materials that will engage kids.

Are you looking for radical or incremental innovation?
The fact that the legislation will be in place soon means that there has to be some sense of “let’s have a go at this right now”. But then, over time, as the numbers of kids staying on grows, which we hope will occur, there will be the need for incremental change, incremental innovation.

We don’t necessarily have to go looking for ways we’ve never used before. We’ve been developing engagement strategies over the last few years, but that doesn’t mean we’ve embedded them in all of our practice.

The New South Wales Quality Teaching Framework, for example, is of relevance and significance to all learners and, if followed, will be very powerful. Most schools have adopted the Framework, but how deep that goes into the psyche of every teacher varies from school to school.

Is the principal your key focus?
The key implementers will be the regional people and the principals. We’ve always said that that’s where this game will be played out and we’ve just got to make sure we support them at an essential level with good policy, good systems and high quality resources.

What are some good examples of innovation?
e2 is a fine example of an innovative practice, as is Gwydir Learning Region, as is the Peninsula schools in North Sydney. They’re very fine examples of great innovation, great practice, great sharing. If they were everywhere we would have a greater rate of success, I’m sure. And that’s why we’re encouraging schools to work together, to share timetables, to share teaching resources and equipment if necessary, to share their expertise. The regions can come in and broker some of these forums and interactions.

What is the research telling you?
We wanted to base the innovation on research that we know is reliable. That’s why we have gone looking for John Polesel from Melbourne University and what his research is telling him about keeping kids engaged. Margaret Vickers from University of Sydney: What’s her research telling us? And Richard Teese, around equity and access issues.

We’re looking very closely at the research and we’re also looking at developing our own tools that will enable us to keep track of students. Currently we’re looking at a retention tool that is basically capturing when a young person becomes disengaged and why did they become disengaged.

What tools are you developing?
We have some tools under development at the moment. One has come from one of the regions: the North Coast started developing up a tool and the Hunter Central Coast region become involved and now we’re looking at making that a statewide initiative. My understanding is it will be ready by the end of this year so that schools should be able to use it next year.
It captures a student’s intent and thinking as they leave. One could say it’s too summative and it needs to be a bit more formative to try and alert us to that disengagement and then what process is in place to keep them there. But it’s a start and we’ll be able to build on that.

What other tools are in the pipeline?
The quality of student life tool assesses a student’s connection to school. We’re also looking at a destination tool which will capture over time where kids go when they leave and then we can chase them up, to see if they need support.

We have a bureau within the Office of Schools called Student Engagement and Program Evaluation, and they’re looking at a student engagement assessment tool. It’s very early thinking but it could be kicking in at Year 5. It will ask how do I know that our students at this school are engaged in their learning? That’s a key question. It’s an exciting proposition.

The Office of Schools has six priorities in its three year plan and student engagement is one of those. And for every priority we need to come up with measures.

Around student engagement the measures were attendance, expulsion and suspension, retention, the pure retention target. Again it’s often measuring what’s happened. We wanted to try and measure what is happening.

Are you monitoring critical success factors?
Definitely, yes. We’re just starting to engage with our evaluation bureau on how we will evaluate the impact of the legislation itself; the impact on teacher learning and on school culture and on the young persons themselves. We haven’t yet done that yet but we need to determine what are the critical factors.

Pure numbers will be one indicator of success but that’s not sufficient. TAFE will be collecting data on the numbers of Year 10 students who are seeking enrolment with them and who actually gain enrolment with them. And then we’ll look at the numbers in the participation phase under 17 and where they are. So the raw data clearly will be a critical measure.

Teacher perception, student perception, retention, attendance and so on will be other measures as will the results in the state-wide testing programs, particularly for this cohort, the Year 9 NAPLAN, the Year 10 School Certificate and the HSC. And the other measure will be the numbers of students who are also accessing a VET course as part of their senior study, and that’s growing all the time.

Are you looking for some overarching benefits?
In our brief discussions around evaluation, we’ve grappled with that question. What are we evaluating? Are we evaluating the fact that we kept kids there, that they were happy to be there, that they learned something, that they moved into a good job or a good training?

Every time the word benefit is discussed we know from research that the longer a student engages in school, the better their life chance. And the earlier they leave school, the more probable it is that by the time they’re 23 or 24 they’re in casual, part-time, low level employment or not, not employed at all. So that is the key benefit. Basically that’s why the legislation was changed.

Is it about young people having a positive attitude to lifelong learning?
That’s key. In fact, our principals have raised the issue with us that if young people are serving out their time, they will be disruptive influence to those in the class who want to be there. And for those who are just there to collect their allowance, they will be a disruptive influence unless they can be engaged. We can’t mandate that at a central level, we can only encourage that schools do all they can to engage students and that parents support that too.

Are you asking teaching staff to engage more with students?
We are asking more of staff, yes. We’re asking them all to take up the mutual responsibility for every student rather than just those students who want to learn.

There are mutual responsibilities for the teacher, student, school executive and parent, carer. What we can’t afford is for a Year 7 teacher to say that’s not my responsibility if that Year 9 person is disengaging. They’ve got to say what can I do in Year 7 and what can I do in my other capacity in the school to support every student, not just those in my class?

So in part is this a re-conceptualisation of their job as a teacher?
This is really about teaching the whole child, the young person. And for those teachers who are intent on just teaching the content, we’ve got to change that mindset. It is the whole child, the whole person, we’re after.
The school has to look at whether this young person is identified as at risk of leaving and maybe at Year 8, and one of the reasons is that they’ve just got too many teachers to deal with. What can we do as a school for that particular cohort to reduce the number of teachers that they are exposed to during the school day?

We have cross-curriculum approaches, secondary COGs, connected outcomes groups. Our curriculum people work on developing COGs units that can actually be taught across four KLAs - key learning areas. So it’s a good opportunity to actually reduce the number of teachers that a young person who is at risk might have to engage with. It builds relationships, it builds trust, with a smaller number of adults.

To help build these relationships, what innovations do you envisage in school structures?

We’re not expecting any particular structure, but there are some underlying principles. We want to see flexible structures that facilitate student engagement rather than get in the way. Some of the current structures actually get in the way. We want to see structures that allow students to access their study both at school and at TAFE. We want to see structures that enable work placement rather than get in the way of work placement. We’d like to see structures that, as I said before, if the student needs it, it’s not just thirty kids in a classroom, faculty based, and they move from their classroom to the next classroom with another faculty giving them a lesson. We want schools to play around a bit with their teaching mix, with their staff mix.

We have a pilot running next year, in 43-44 schools, where we’ll be encouraging them to take control of their whole budget, not just the little bit that they’ve got now, and start to play around with the staffing mix based on learning and welfare needs of needs of students. We want to see structures that allow students to access subjects of choice even if that school can’t provide it, through an arrangement with the school down the road or through video conferencing.

Is the message to experiment?
To experiment with that approach to school structure, yes. Push the boundaries a bit and do it collaboratively with other schools in your community of schools.

Is this policy change an opportunity to transform schools?
It is potentially transformational both attitudinally and in delivery. The opportunity to really put the student at the centre is one that won’t come around too often, rather than the class at the centre or the teacher at the centre.

It’s not revolutionary change, it’s emergent change. It’s a whole bunch of small changes that when viewed en masse are quite transformational. We can’t leave it too much to chance. So it will be guided exploration.

How are the principals seeing the challenge?
I think it’s mixed. I think many of our principals are seeing that the policy change should have been done earlier. But they understand the challenges, they understand that they’re going to get some push back from families of kids who are really engaged in their learning and might feel that these other young people who would not normally have been at school are there and disrupting their child’s learning. I think principals see the behaviour issue as quite a challenge and they see the lack of resources, what they would as perceive the lack of flexible resources, as inhibiting.

What is your final message to principals?
The message we’re going out there with is this: go back to the benefit. What is the long term benefit here? What is our responsibility? What strategies have you got in place already to engage students that you could now beef up? And how can you use the support around you both at other schools, at region, to assist with this?

The message is that this is a large challenge.
Dave Wasson on measuring student perceptions

An interview with Dave Wasson, Director, Educational Measurement and School Accountability

What are some of the issues you see with regard to the new school leaving age?
The reality is that a number of the kids who are coming back in as a result of the school leaving age being raised may not be as motivated or as interested in education as we might like, so their needs are going to have to be met in different kinds of ways. We need to be meeting these kids’ needs more appropriately than just through the current mainstream curriculum.

What assistance can your area offer?
In terms of my area, what we have that could be of great use to this particular initiative is a whole range of survey tools. One of them is called Quality of School Life, which is a survey instrument designed to gauge the perceptions and understandings of students. It certainly could be adaptable and useable for all senior kids let alone the kids who are targeted with this particular initiative.

It consists of a series of items that begin with “my school is a place where ...”, and it comes up with a range of analyses in terms of relationships with teachers, relationships with peers, understanding of curriculum and engagement with learning, and those kinds of areas. Schools can actually look at what kids in aggregate terms are saying about the learning environment.

Staff are able to implement a number of strategies at a school level as a result of the analysis that comes out of this survey. They can then revisit the Quality of School Life survey twelve or eighteen months down the track to see if there’s been a shift in the school’s profile. We’ve got a number of tools like that.

How easy to use are the tools?
With the Quality of School Life tool, schools can input the data that comes out of the surveys and we could even transition them to an online environment very, very quickly. We can get those graphs back to the school within about 24-48 hours. So it’s highly topical and quick feedback tool. There are about 14-15 other survey tools that schools could use as well in order to be able to get some kind of handle on what’s going on.

They’re on our website, which is accessible to all schools in NSW DET and there are instructions in there in terms of how to do each survey.

Does it include how to have a professional conversation at school, about the results?
We don’t go to that point, but we have officers out there in the field called school development officers and a number of them have a very good understanding of our tools. They can certainly help schools in the interpretation of that data.

Can these tools help identify people who might be at risk of disengaging?
Yes, indeed. And in fact where I’ve used the Quality of School Life tool with schools in the past, it’s actually identified kids with suicidal tendencies. There is one framework in there where the items are actually interspersed across the entire instrument. The items go like this: “my school is a place where I feel lonely; ... where I feel concerned”. About five or six of the items relate to disengagement. And if kids in aggregate terms are saying yes, I strongly agree with these “alienation” items, these are kids who have got flashing lights around them and they’re the kinds of kids that you want to be able to support.

The QSL tool picks up alienation from schooling. It also picks up positive or negative relationships with teachers, which is fundamental to the new school leaving age. It picks up the level of engagement with curriculum and learning that kids are experiencing.
What are some other tools relevant to re-engagement?
We’ve just developed a whole range of new surveys in relation to literacy and numeracy. Being able to capture that data and being able to monitor it and being able to revisit the data and capture it again would be good when these kids are coming into Year 11. You could do it early in their Year 11 experience and then perhaps early in the same group of kids’ Year 12, to see whether there’s been any shift.

Do you have any practical suggestions for school principals about using the tools?
They can certainly use the Quality of School Life tool every six months. A competent operator could input an individual student’s data in about 20-30 seconds and it’s really a quick operation. So it certainly could be done every six months but maybe principals would buck at that and maybe it would be more appropriate to suggest that they do it every year.

Do you have any survey tools that identify the impact of particular strategies?
We have a series of best practice statements in six domains and the six domains are learning, teaching, planning, management, leadership and culture, and there are questionnaires in there for students, for parents and for staff. That gives schools the capacity to look at what students in aggregate are saying about the learning environment for example and they can compare that with what teachers are saying. That can be a very revealing and very useful thing.

Are all principals familiar with the survey tools?
I would say that there’d be many principals that have used them, there’d be other principals who would be aware of them but may not have used them, and there’ll be a significant number of principals who wouldn’t know that they exist.

What are you doing to increase their skills in using the tools?
We are working on a thing called a DASA, which stands for data analysis skills assessment. It’s an online tool that allows teachers to evaluate their understanding of data and data tools. You go in and self-rate yourself and the idea is that you look at the profile one point in time and you go away and you learn about these things and come back and look at how the profile’s shifted.
Why do principals need to respond to the new school leaving age policy?
For educational purposes as much as anything else. If we don’t respond to it and it just happens to us, then we’re going to disadvantage the kids who do stay on who otherwise would not have. And these kids will then, in turn, have a negative impact on what’s going on in other classrooms. I think it’s really important that we respond as positively as we can for the benefit of the students. And I mean all the students, not just the ones who are specifically targeted by this policy.

Do schools need to create new options for students?
We need to get students to see that some of the options that are already there are really valuable ones. In other words I think all principals would want these students to see it as a positive opportunity for them. We’ve got to be able to promote it to students in such a way that they think that it’s actually valuable to them rather than being forced to stay at school.

What existing capabilities within schools can help in the effective response to the new school leaving age?
I think our schools are much more imaginative and creative than we really give them credit for and for a long period of time schools have adapted and adopted a whole range of things to best meet the needs of the kids. This capability is not new. Schools do a whole range of different things in terms of timetables, structures, involvement with the community, supporting the community and all those sorts of things and have done so for a long time.

How can the curriculum be made more relevant to those students staying on?
We are now pushing towards more balance in the curriculum. The Board of Studies has agreed to a content endorsed course in English on a pilot basis. That is a move to assisting these students. As a profession we will need to keep pushing the politicians and the Board of Studies to make further changes in curriculum to enable schools to do what in fact they like doing. The vast majority of schools want to provide a curriculum that’s relevant and useful, enjoyable to the kids. They don’t want them to sit there and be bored to tears.

How can ongoing professional learning assist with the new school leaving age?
We’ve got good professional learning funds in schools and it really is important that we use the opportunity of having those funds to make sure that our teachers have the best teaching approaches. If there’s a combination of systemic professional learning as well as school-based professional learning, I think we will enhance the quality teaching of our teachers.

How can school structures be made more innovative?
I think the more we can do to create examples for other schools to consider, for all schools to consider, of innovative school structures, the better. One of the things that can stop us from being creative is being cautious about our structures and saying, “Oh too much time is dictated by the Board and the Department requires too much,” and so on. The reality is that a school is able to do much more than it thinks it can do most of the time, and we can create really good examples of innovative school structures.
We can also ensure that school education directors are able, with their visits to principals, to encourage them to go further rather than ensuring that they are compliant. Sometimes school education directors just want to make sure everything is done properly rather than looking for ways of doing things differently. I think Pam Ryan is the best person really to have an impact on the school education directors, in terms of saying, get out there and be imaginative with the principals, rather than trying to restrict them.

Which school structures work best?
We’ve got so many different sorts of schools structures these days but I think the colleges with senior campuses are probably in a better position to provide a greater range of subjects than institutes. That’s one of the advantages of the large numbers; for the smaller schools it’s more difficult.

What are some examples of best practice approaches by school staff that will assist in responding to the new school leaving age?
I think there’s good practice that can assist the implementation of the new school leaving age, particularly as the digital education revolution moves its way upwards in the school. It is starting with Year 9 students this year with the laptops, and those students will be in Year 10 next year.

Raising the school leaving age doesn’t just target kids going into Year 11. We sometimes overlook that a really significant part of the drop-out occurs before they get to the end of Year 10. The disenchantment with learning can occur at any time: it can turn kids right off in Year 9 and they leave when they turn 15 and it’s the Year 9, Year 10 kids that we really need to be conscious of, as well as the senior ones.

As well as making sure that we’ve got a really effective senior curriculum, we need to engage the kids in Years 9 and 10 more effectively. From the evaluation that’s going on already with the implementation of the laptop program, those students are becoming much more engaged already in Year 9. The more we do of that engaging and the more we create imaginative approaches to learning with the laptops, the more we will engage those students, so that they will generate their own interest in learning. I think that’s really important.

What is another example of an approach that could engage students more?
If we have larger numbers of students in the senior school of course, we can offer more subjects, such as a combination of the vocational courses through TAFE and vocational courses at school. There are schools like Illawarra Senior College in Wollongong which is only Years 11 and 12 and it’s a very vocational type school. It generates some good approaches that could be adapted and adopted in other schools. And then of course you’ve got the combination work that the e2 team set up in Orange of several schools working together on curriculum. It effectively creates the power of a large school, without necessarily being a large school, because you combine the opportunities that all the schools have and run things together.

What are your thoughts about the emphasis within the new school age project on higher expectations of the individual student?
One of the things we have to be cautious about is that we don’t see any increased enrolment as being a dumbing down of the school. We need to remain positive about the potential of the students who stay on at school.
There will be the tendency of the doomsayers to say, “Oh these kids shouldn’t be at school,” but I think we need to keep pushing the positives and putting a real emphasis on the opportunities that we are creating, the good things that are happening.

There are lots of teachers who really do love getting the best out of kids, no matter what, and if we can highlight what they’re doing in promotional material and in examples, then I think we’re more likely to achieve the culture of aiming higher.

The new school age project promotes the concept of supporting strongly. What are your thoughts on this?

Supporting strongly is the department’s job and I think having Pam Ryan as a senior project officer is a very good move. She has great credibility, apart from having been a very successful high school principal and a school education director. She’s done all the groundwork, leading up to the creation of virtual selective high school in the western region which has really aimed to change the whole nature of learning everywhere because everyone’s watching her closely.

She’s working closely with our Principals’ Council and getting people there working together on good case studies.

What about the other concept in the new school age project of strengthening connections?

Strengthening connections is really important and that also relates to the TAFE but more work can be done in terms of strengthening connections with community. It’s really important that we strengthen connections with parents in the first instance, so they’re not seeing it as an imposition on them and getting their support for the students being forced to stay on at school. The other connections need to be with industry, so that we get industry support for providing real life learning opportunities and work for students rather than just work experience.

What benefits for the student and/or the school community do you believe will come from innovations in schools?

There should be real benefits for the individual students. The data is out that it will increase their life chances. They are likely to be healthier, less obese, earn more money and so on. They will have a greater sense of achievement and a better education and skills by the time they’re in the workforce.

That also means we’ll have a more highly trained and educated community, not just at work but socially and culturally. I think we need to remember that education is not all about literacy and numeracy; there are all those artistic things, the performing arts, the creative things, that kids can do at school, that give them lifelong enjoyment. If they can enhance their own creative skills and talents, by several more years of doing those things, then they’re more likely to be more satisfied people and then we’ll have a better world to live in.

How can school staff ensure the benefits for the students are sustainable?

I think just by demonstrating good practice, and making that practice a mainstream approach. This is what education is about, rather than creating a raggle taggle group of kids on the side that they treat differently and saying “Go and do the school gardens”. We need to mainstream these kids and be inclusive. The more it just becomes the normal operation of the school, the more sustainable it will be.

If we really do want to sustain things, we have to continually look for improvements and better ways of doing things. As a department there will need to be a collective responsibility to ensure that there are people who can continue to look for good practice and better practice and share that around.
Overall, what do you think will be the main factors that will underpin the innovation by schools?

I think a positive outlook by the principals and staff is the most important factor. If we don’t have that positive outlook about educational change, it really is difficult to make it effective. The most critical factor is ensuring that principals and staff are positive about doing this and as a result the critical factors become the imagination, the creativity, the attempts at revising curriculum and so on.

There are lots of good things happening in our schools and they tend to just go silently by in the night without people really knowing how good they are. I think what’s really good about this project is that Pam is able to draw together some really good case studies. There will not only be the good sharing but also the recognition of good practice, and I think that’s going to be really important.

we need to keep pushing the positives and putting a real emphasis on the opportunities that we are creating, the good things that are happening
Case study No. 1

MENTORS AND CASE MANAGERS

INNOVATION SNAPSHOT

- SUMMARY
  - Illawarra Senior School enrols people from the ages of 15-82, operates from Monday-Thursday, uses a case management approach to support students and has a group of volunteer mentors who, year after year, provide additional support.

- DRIVERS
  - The staff are committed to using unconventional techniques, such as not raising their voices, so that students have less chance of repeating negative experiences they experienced elsewhere.
  - Students realise this might be their last chance to turn their lives around through education.

- FEATURES
  - A culture of flexibility in curriculum delivery exists with the purpose of finding a solution for each student.
  - The four-day week has made school accessible to a range of students who would otherwise find it too difficult to attend on a regular basis.

- SUCCESS FACTORS
  - Staff have high expectations of students including their daily behaviour such as punctuality.
  - Staff are committed to the alternative approaches, for example resolving issues at the time, one-to-one.

- BENEFITS
  - For many students, the positive experiences at the college set them up for future success.
  - The community benefits from students developing attitudes and skills that will enable them to make a difference in society.

- RELEVANCE TO NEW SCHOOL LEAVING AGE
  - The college is well used to catering for students who may have become disengaged and wish to return to school.
  - The college staff are highly experienced at adjusting the curriculum and the timetable and providing case management support to meet the needs of students who require special assistance.

The college offers an alternative Year 10 certificate program (Certificate II in General and Vocational Education) for re-entry and mature aged students who have largely had poor previous educational experiences. A wide range of subjects is available to Year 11 and Year 12 students to complete their HSC, with a strong VET program involving six frameworks courses, and a large number of Content Endorsed Courses, along with traditional Higher School Certificate courses. The college sets high expectations for its students, with a strong focus on students experiencing success and completing their course of study.

The college has a very low socio-economic status profile, is supported by the Priority Schools Program and the Priority Action Schools Program and has been identified as a National Partnerships school from 2010 in the low socio-economic school community category. Together with Illawarra Institute of TAFE, the college will form the new entity called the Industry Training College-Illawarra catering for students wishing to undertake a HSC at the same time as gaining trade training through part-time apprenticeships or traineeships.

Context for the innovation

For a range of reasons, Illawarra Senior College is a unique school in NSW, providing a range of educational opportunities for students aged 15 - 82 in Years 10, 11 and 12. The college operates in a mature learning environment where there is no school uniform, students and teachers operate on a first name basis, and there is a strong welfare focus across the college that is acknowledged by students, parents and staff. The college currently operates over a four day week with extended hours from Monday to Thursday, and has a flexible curriculum structure that caters for full-time, part-time and pathways students. Approximately 25% of college students are of mature age.
success story

We have many stories of students changing their lives. One that is fresh in our memory concerns a fifteen year-old girl - a street kid, truant from school, in trouble with the police, involved with illegal substances - and a record of not much attendance since Year 8. She enrolled in Year 10 and approached me after two weeks to say the work was too easy and could she try Year 11. We assessed her on literacy and numeracy and decided to give her a one-month trial. She fully reengaged with education despite needing to be driven 70 km each way each day to school. She gained a UAI of 96 and a Dean’s scholarship at University of Wollongong.

Mark Webster, Principal

'Maximising' curriculum

The College supports a comprehensive curriculum to cater for the full range of students. Each line in the curriculum pattern contains options for academic, vocational or general interest courses so that students can choose a pattern of study that will suit their abilities and interests. The college will run subjects with smaller classes in some instances with no reduction in face-to-face teaching. A culture of flexibility in curriculum delivery exists with the purpose of finding a solution for each student. Each student is “case managed” where possible. An alternative Year 10 program is offered that meets the needs of re-entry students in completing Year 10 and gaining a qualification.

Enhancing school structures

The structure of the college is innovative. It operates on a four day week and is closed on Fridays. This has made school accessible to a range of students who would otherwise find it too difficult - for example, parents with children and those supporting themselves with part-time work - and has resulted in a large reduction in whole day absences.

The timetable is arranged on an odds-and-even basis so that part-time study is fully supported. Students can complete their full commitment to a half-load of subjects in only two and a half days attendance at the college.

Best practice

The college has instigated a number of new curriculum options to address the needs of students affected by the change to the school leaving age. It has an established a culture of case management to support all students in achieving success at school. The students report a strong sense of connectedness and engagement with the school.
Achieving goals of the new school leaving age

‘Supporting strongly’. Each student is interviewed personally and at length regarding their goals and appropriate subject choices. A case management approach by the careers adviser ensures that career options are fully investigated for each student and a personal career plan is put in place.

Sustaining benefits

The college offers many students an opportunity to re-engage with education that probably would not exist elsewhere. Many students experience success for the first time. There are huge benefits for the community resulting from increased levels of education and skills and perhaps decreased crime and unemployment.

The culture developed at the college will have a lasting legacy even when key people leave the college. Word of mouth in the community continues to be positive, and the staff are committed to the continuation of the approach.

What are some of the key drivers for your innovation within and from outside your school?

We are on the site of the old Port Kembla High School and we became a senior college in the mid-‘90s due to falling enrolments in the local area, and the college is still evolving. We’ve seen, particularly at the Year 10 level, as a second or last chance option for people and because of that we’ve set out to be deliberately different.

Many of our students have had poor educational experiences in the past, a lot of them don’t like school, their parents didn’t like school and particularly in the Year 10 group, a lot of them have been expelled or suspended or chronic truants in their previous school. With that in mind, we know that we need to do things differently, because if we’re the same as other schools, the same things are going to happen to these kids.

What are some of the things you do differently?

We set out to remove a lot of the triggers that cause students to get into conflict with teachers in other schools. For example we don’t have a uniform, students and teachers call each other by first name, and we run a type of adult learning environment. The teachers understand that and we’ve got to the stage now which we’ve been working on for some years that no teacher in our school will raise their voice in anger in the classroom. We’re trying to avoid classroom conflict and students aren’t getting hassled over hats or the wrong coloured socks or earrings or those types of things. We treat students as who they are, not what they look like or where they’ve been.

Do students like this approach?

For many of our students with poor previous experiences, this approach gives them a fresh start and almost unilaterally they really like being here. If you asked any one of our students what they like best about the college, I’ll guarantee you that 99.5% of them would say ‘the relationship with the teachers, the way we work with the teachers’. We see that approach to the relationship as a major engagement tool.

Even students who don’t meet requirements here, and I ask to leave due to lack of work or lack of attendance, almost invariably will re-enrol the next year and have another go.

We’ve established a fair bit of connectedness to the school, particularly for students who have been alienated from family or have had other experiences with illegal substances or juvenile justice or the police. But many of those young people have a fairly restricted family support network and they connect very much to the school. A number of our students don’t want school holidays: they ask “Do we have to have holidays?”

How would you sum up your innovation?

I would say our innovation is the way in which we work with kids, because it’s different to most other schools. On top of that we’ve pushed the boundaries. For example, we operate on a four-day school week, and we were the first school in New South Wales to do that. We operate Monday to Thursday with extended hours and the school is closed Fridays.

That had the immediate effect of halving our whole-day absences and that’s continued to our fifth year now. We encourage students to make non-urgent appointments with Centrelink and housing and non-urgent medical and dental appointments on Fridays, so they’re not missing school to do it. They tell us that because they know they’re getting Friday off, they don’t feel the need to take a day off to have a bit of a break, so that’s been a positive thing as well.
How do the extended hours work?
We put an extra hour of curriculum time into each of Monday to Thursday, and we run from quarter to nine in the morning to quarter to four, which is about an hour longer than most other schools. We only have two half-hour breaks in the day and we also don’t do the traditional Thursday afternoon school sport. We pick up four hours of curriculum time from the extra hour each day and what would normally be allocated to sport time we spend on curriculum.

What else is innovative about your school?
We’ve got some other things happening. For example we have a very strong support network, because although we operate in an adult learning environment, we still have all the normal structures of a school, such as school counsellors and year advisers, so it’s a very strong support network. Teachers take an individual interest in their students and we use wherever possible a case management approach across the college: we usually case manage individual students, for issues like attendance and work placement.

We have a very strong careers program as well, for all students from Years 10 to 12. The careers adviser will interview every student a number of times and form a connection and pretty well knows what they want to do, and what they’re looking at and what options are there.

It sounds as though your innovation extends beyond school structures.
I call it a culture because all these approaches form the school. If you identified one thing, you’d say it’s the way we operate, but all the other parts contribute to the way we operate.

What are some examples of best practice professional approaches?
We’ve talked about the way we operate with students, and as part of that we don’t escalate any issue, we don’t ever over-react to any student behaviour, we deal with it. For example, we don’t have a school discipline system, we don’t have levels or anything like that so there’s no punitive process in the school, we don’t do detentions, we don’t have discipline levels, we deal with issues on a one-to-one basis. So if a student and a teacher have an issue we deal with that as it is between the two people and they resolve it and get back to class. We sometimes still have to engage in suspensions if what they do is violent or over the top, but once they’ve served their suspension they come back to class and there’s no ongoing punishment.

That approach is tied in with the support network as well. Year-level advisers work very well with students in a positive way and everything that we do is aimed at working with the student to get them through, rather than looking for ways to get them out of the school. That’s a different feature of the place.

It sounds as though you have high expectations of students.
We do have expectations. We monitor attendance very closely, and our expectation is that we want every kid in every class, every day and engaging with the work. We mark the roll here six times a day while most other schools only mark it once. We record and report attendance every lesson.

Tied up with that is the support network. We have a strong early intervention program particularly with regard to attendance. When we start noticing people’s attendance dropping off, we get on to that. Particularly in Year 10 this year, we’ve contacted parents immediately attendance drops.

Our expectations are high, we try to convey that to the students at all times. Even our expectations of behaviour are high, although that doesn’t mean we yell and scream at kids and back them into corners, but we don’t let anything pass that’s inappropriate, we just deal with it differently.

Which other parties are contributing to the school’s success?
We have good connections also with a number of community agencies. We currently have one of the Job Pathway providers here in Wollongong running a service in the school once a week where they actually come in and work with a particular group of students on their caseload. They interview them each week about life choices, getting yourself to school and making correct choices.

We have really strong connections with the university here as well, and local organisations. For example, we have a number of one-off scholarships that are only presented to this school by Credit Union Australia. Those sorts of organisations encourage students to continue their education and to have strong links with the university.

We also have another unique mentoring program in Year 10. I have fifteen mainly retired adults who give up a day a week for the year, to come into the college and they volunteer to work in Year 10 classes with the teachers. So each of our Year 10 classes essentially has one teacher and two other adults present.

A lot of them are retired professionals. We have a retired sea captain, retired engineers, retired school teachers and retired primary school principals and that scheme has been outstanding in terms of settling classes down and providing immediate help to people who struggle in class. If we have twenty two students in a class, we can have three adults in there who can help them with the work.

Some of the mentors are in their fourth year of this scheme: they’ve given up a day a week a year, for four years. They keep coming back, which means they’re getting something out of it, they’re contributing to the community and they’re going out to the community and saying, “I’m a mentor at Illawarra Senior College, I work with the kids there”.

The mentoring scheme seems outstanding.
That’s why I am still here. I’ve never been this long in any other school and I think it’s because we’re doing different things all the time. Lots of primary schools have reading mums, but this is more than that, this is in-class support and I think it’s an amazing commitment by these people. It amazes me every year that they give up 40 days a year of their time, then they’re back up the next year and the next year and the next year.
We treat students as who they are, not what they look like or where they’ve been.
Case study No. 2

Arthur Phillip High School

GOING DIGITAL WITH DATA

INNOVATION SNAPSHOT

• SUMMARY
  - The school balances the provision of literacy and numeracy with the use of contemporary digital technologies.
  - Despite its huge size, with 1600 students, personalised learning is offered to students.

• DRIVERS
  - The executive and teaching staff are highly motivated to offer students choice, not just in their subject choice but also in how they access learning.
  - Students respond positively to the choices available.

• FEATURES
  - A powerful digital database provides teachers with access to detailed information about each student, which the teachers can access on an iPod.
  - So many options are offered to students, they can experience success, provided they attend and commit to learning.

• SUCCESS FACTORS
  - Staff work collaboratively, constantly sharing good practice as part of a community of practice.
  - The effective use of technology builds upon a long-term experimenting with different technologies.

• BENEFITS
  - By having their needs catered for, students feel valued and special.
  - Staff grow in confidence as innovative approaches are embraced by the majority of students.

• RELEVANCE TO NEW SCHOOL LEAVING AGE
  - Students in the senior years respond positively to the caring, mentoring approach and the range of curriculum opportunities.

Context for the innovation

Arthur Phillip High School is a Parramatta city school. Enrolling 1600 students, the school is able to provide a very comprehensive curriculum to cater for all students across Years 7-12. The school population is diverse, including those with a low socio-economic background, many students have refugee backgrounds and the proportion from a non-English speaking background is in excess of 90%.

The school emphasises the core basics of literacy and numeracy but packages them for contemporary students by using twenty-first century digital technologies.

The school has developed a creative approach to personalising learning for every student in all aspects of literacy, numeracy and study skills. Students and their parents have access to this personalised program online. Each student has learning targets and can access specific strategies online to assist their learning.

The large senior campus provides a wide range of courses to prepare students for HSC and future studies. Some of these courses are available online and there are also opportunities for gifted students to accelerate their HSC studies.

'Maximising' curriculum

The digital revolution affords opportunities to enhance student engagement so the school is exploring these possibilities in the way it structures curriculum for Years 7-12. All students in Years 7-10 participate in an e-literacy course and there is also an online numeracy program. These courses aim to provide students with literacy and numeracy skills to cope with senior study.

Additionally, accelerated courses are available for students in Years 9-10 in science and computing. Senior students have access to the full range of curriculum, from extension courses to Board of Studies endorsed courses, and from an academic pathway to a vocational pathway. Not surprisingly, the greatest challenge for the senior mentor team is to assist students to choose appropriate courses for senior study.
A major focus of the staff is to personalise learning for all students...

Year 10 students have an intensive week of counselling prior to subject selection and this is followed by interviews and counselling in light of their academic progress and the literacy, numeracy and welfare data available to the team.

Every curriculum line in the senior campus has a range of course offerings with the capacity for students to ‘drop down’ should they experience difficulties with any of their courses. In addition, there is a facility for students experiencing difficulty in Year 12 to pick up VET units with the Year 11 cohort. Also, students can access TVET courses.

The school offers six VET courses. In order to accommodate students’ needs for work placement, time for TVET courses and also time for part-time work, staff devised a flexible school week for seniors so that they can have Fridays off campus.

Senior students will trial an approach in 2010 where part of some of their courses will be available online. Staff are developing innovative approaches to senior courses to take advantage of student interest in online learning (wikis, blogs) and to trial the use of a new program that quickly and easily connects students and teachers. The aim of this ‘cyber’ program is to assess whether students will participate more in an online context.

The courses offered online will be across the full range, from Extension English and History to 2 unit courses in Ancient History, Business Services and Biology and some elements of vocational courses. These cyber courses will be evaluated against parallel classes of face to face teaching.

Student support
The school has a unique database which provides a learning profile for every student in terms of literacy and numeracy. School benchmark testing data is updated with national test results and other data. All other information about each student is included in this profile so that mentors can obtain an accurate picture of attendance, issues and interventions. This data for every individual student is simplified through a series of on-screen icons which can be accessed throughout the school via iPod touch devices issued to every staff member.

The school has developed a series of online exercises to help students improve their skills. As these exercises are all online, students can access them at any time. Students understand their own data and have personalised targets that they work towards.

Parents are also able to participate in this learning community. They can apply to have access to their child’s profile and can also access attendance records and other information.

These comprehensive profiles enable staff to differentiate the curriculum for the needs of students in their classes. Head Teachers in Teaching and Learning work with staff to use the data for their classes 7-10.

Even though there is a large student population it is possible to provide focused counselling support through the use of the database. For example, students who have the capacity for higher achievement can be targeted by the mentor team and their progress can be monitored at regular intervals. The learning support team can monitor the progress of students who receive a range of interventions in literacy and numeracy.

At key stages throughout the year the senior mentor team members meet to analyse data and review the progress of students with the option of counselling them regarding their course patterns, in order to ensure success.

Best practice
A major focus of the staff is to personalise learning for all students and to have the students understand their own learning needs and targets. Students are offered online support, including in literacy, numeracy and study skills.

In preparation for the implementation of the new school leaving age, staff spoke to senior students regarding their needs in a cyber learning environment. Students told them very clearly that they like the following: to multitask as this keeps them engaged; for their work and presentation notes to be available before and after lessons as a record of the course and as a reference for their private study; to “see” their teacher; to enjoy the visual aspects of online learning; and to actively participate in lessons, that is, be ‘present’ and able to discuss ideas.

Hence, the staff are seeking to implement technologies that have the potential to meet all of these needs. For students who are on the brink of being disengaged, the requirement of having to log on to an online session in their home environment is far more enticing than travelling to and from school.
Achieving goals of the new school leaving age

‘Aiming higher’. In terms of setting high and clear expectations for 15-19 yr olds, the school ensures that clear goals are set, based on a realistic assessment of students’ ability levels. In setting these goals, relevant data is used extensively and effectively.

‘Supporting strongly’. A range of courses is provided to enable all students to experience success. Mentoring is provided in Year 10 and in the senior years students have a four day week and spend their fifth day on research, online learning, work placement or part-time work.

‘Strengthening connections’. To connect students to more options, online strategies are used to enhance face to face classes. The online medium is used in innovative, interactive ways rather than simply to provide online text for students to access.

Benefits for the student and school community

The benefits of this use of digital technology range from positive retention rates, to parents being able to access data about their children. The powerful database information also gives staff the capacity to target students at risk early and to counsel them to make different course selections. It also gives the staff the capacity to use data to provide targeted welfare programs for students.

Sustainable benefits

To ensure benefits of the digital technology are sustainable, staff have implemented systems for ongoing monitoring and review of student progress. As a result of such analysis, in 2010 three classes will be conducted for students at risk in Years 8-10 in numeracy and literacy.

Staff have also implemented support systems, for example, for coaching of individual students, and have designed follow-up strategies if the student is not progressing.

Through the use of wikis and blogs staff have found that many of the students who do not participate in the classroom environment find a new “voice” in an online environment. This is because they feel more comfortable participating online and they are able to contribute at a time and in a place that is comfortable for them.
Case study No. 2  Going digital with data continued...

Interview with Lynne Goodwin, Principal, Arthur Phillip High School

What is special about your school’s approach?
The big thing we’re trying to do here, and we’re a huge school, is the data analysis of children through this incredible system that we have, and personalising students’ learning because we have all the data available at the touch of a button.

I don’t think anyone has a database like ours, and it’s home grown. We just keep developing it. I’m currently interviewing Year 11 students at risk, and we’ve got an icon called Binoculars. After I conduct that interview with them and talk about their records so far, every time they’re away for more than three or four days, the database is going to tell me “Get back to that student because they promised they wouldn’t take any more time off”.

What are some key drivers of your innovation within your school?
It’s all about the context of our school. We’re a very large school, so that we have the full range of students. We’re comprehensive and co-educational, and our focus is technological, but we have no special category, we’re just a comprehensive co-educational high school doing our best.

We’re obviously popular because we have about 1,600 students and we’re right slap-bang in the middle of Parramatta CBD. So the students love it. What I’m always thinking about is how do I make school even more attractive for senior students.

We have international fee paying students, we do all the top extension courses, but we’ve always used vocational education as well. So, we offer every course imaginable, and one of the big things we’re now trying to do is find out how many other courses we can implement for students as part of the “17 plus” strategy.

Behind it all I want every student to be successful in some way. And I want to try and treat them as seniors, but still expect them to do whatever is needed for compliance purposes.

Was there anything you’d like to say about maximising curriculum, for instance, or student support?
We have a very large team of people who mentor the students: we’ve got the careers adviser, and senior mentors like year advisers. I’ve got a transition adviser who I’m trying to make more strategic and focused, and we have huge links with the wider community in terms of where we use work placements for VET. We have industry partnerships.

Our students do work placement all over the city. And it’s still important that you have all the data on the students and you’re able to work out what’s going to work best for them and look at it, because if you’re not careful, they’ll just truant, and not be in school, and vote with their feet, and that’s not good.

You’ve just got to find what works for them so you can keep them engaged and happy. I do think that the new laptop revolution, digital revolution, is going to make it easier and easier.
What systems underpin your innovation?
It’s our database that gives us that underpinning. The database enables us to personalise the learning of every student. I can look at every student and I can see their attendance, every warning letter they’ve had, when they’ve been away. I can see their level of literacy and numeracy achievement.
That helps me make decisions about what will be the best and most appropriate course. We do detailed testing of every student so that we really get an analysis of their true ability, and it’s not limiting because you also have to be aware there’s a lot of ESL students whose literacy might be low but they’re going to go quite fast once their language levels are lifted. Those sorts of profiles help us understand the children and their needs, and therefore, how to tailor courses for them. And every teacher’s got an iPod Touch and the students’ profiles on the iPod Touch, so you can look them up as you’re walking round the classroom.

What other best practice professional approaches are used by you and your other staff?
What we’re trying to do is get the staff to understand that it’s not so much “17 plus,” but understand the students’ capacity then differentiate the curriculum so that they will experience success at the level where they can best achieve. The best thing you can do with students “17 plus” is make sure they’re doing the right courses.

How will you achieve the goals for the project on the raising of the school leaving age?
We know our students, and set them reasonable goals, and it doesn’t mean we limit them, because our value added is absolutely through the roof from Year 9 to Year 12.
As of 2010 we’re going to pick the students whose icons indicate that they could do better and who are really struggling, and we’re going to put them in special classes where good teachers really take them through. We have followed the data over quite a few years to see that if we make an intervention with students in the junior school, Years 7, 8, 9, they pick up their literacy levels and they’re able to achieve. So it is a Year 7 to 12 strategy really.
I don’t think you can get away from mentoring and offering the range of courses, and trying to get to know each student, which is hard when you have 500 seniors.

What management of innovation is required?
There is a lot of professional development for the teachers in order to get them trying out the technology. And there’s a huge amount of support and planning from the staff who all want to be involved. I’m also buying lots of time for teachers to train, and they can exchange ideas.
What we want to do is be superbly creative with whatever we put online so that it isn’t just like the distance education mode which a lot of schools use. We want to make it innovative.

What benefits arise for the student?
Engagement and success. Last night we had a school concert and a few students performed, and some of them are truanting, and then they performed and I said “Wow, that was their niche”. We have to make sure that what they were doing there at the concert, and how well they did that, is reflected in the sorts of opportunities we give them in their curriculum.

How are you ensuring these benefits are sustainable?
Well our database is fine. Our staff training is pretty well ongoing and everybody just does it and likes it. There’s still a huge challenge because we have to keep training new people, but there is a critical mass now where it works fairly well. The main challenge, as always, is to get into the classroom and ensure it works well for every student and every teacher.

What are the main factors that have brought about success?
We’re a large school and I’ve got wonderful people: I’ve got the right mix in my staff of people who make things happen and we all bounce off each other.
It’s a huge school. And it’s not an easy school. So, it requires thinking outside the square. And that’s the lovely thing about being in a school, because you can.

What I’m always thinking about is how do I make school even more attractive for senior students.
ENTERPRISING RESPONSE TO DISADVANTAGE

INNOVATION SNAPSHOT

• SUMMARY
  - The Enterprise Centre is a section of Kempsey High School. It provides an alternative pathway for students to obtain further education, employability skills and access to jobs.
  - The Centre’s program includes the provision of a mentor, access to a school counsellor and a teacher’s aide and regular contact with a transition team consisting of a careers adviser and transition adviser.

• DRIVERS
  - The Centre is a positive response, particularly by the school, to the classification of Kempsey Shire as one of the most disadvantaged areas of New South Wales.

• FEATURES
  - The Centre is on a separate campus and students have a flexible timetable.
  - The Centre is designed to provide a flexible HSC study pattern that responds to student and employer needs. The needs of these students have influenced the formulation of the project and will continue to influence its evolution.

Context for the innovation
Kempsey Shire is one of the most disadvantaged local government areas in NSW. The Vinson Report recognised contributing factors such as the low socio-economic conditions of the shire, entrenched welfare dependence and the multiple disadvantages of many families. Kempsey High School has approximately 25% indigenous students and is a Priority Action School.

The aim of the school’s newly established Enterprise Centre is to facilitate improved levels of retention and engagement by students and to provide an alternative pathway for students to enable them to study for the Higher School Certificate and gain access to employment and further training. The Centre’s overriding aim is student success.

Specifically, the Centre is designed to provide a flexible HSC study pattern that responds to student and employer needs. The needs of these students have influenced the formulation of the project and will continue to influence its evolution.

The Enterprise Centre provides worthwhile learning opportunities and teaching strategies often include the deconstruction, decoding and unpacking of assessment tasks to suit the student group. Keys to the success of the Centre are the relationships, guidance and support provided by the staff.

‘Maximising’ curriculum
There is a recommended but not compulsory curriculum, as individual student needs are always considered. This curriculum includes six units of Board of Studies courses, Senior Science, English (Standard), Maths (General), together with vocational courses (Primary Industries, Construction) and Work Studies. The students also have access to all subjects on the main campus of Kempsey High School, as required.
Supporting students
The target cohort is students at risk in the mainstream curriculum group. This may include students from the existing Stage 5 comprehensive model and other Year 10 students identified as at risk, using School Certificate data and anecdotal teacher observation. Students who have already commenced Stage 6 are identified in Year 11, using assessment result data and teacher observation. Other students who are welcome may be past students who wish to return or students from other schools who find the existing study pattern does not engage them.

Fundamental to this program is the need for the development of an effective teacher/student relationship. It is therefore ideal that students in the program be exposed to a minimum of teachers and their standards and expectations. The program allows for the potential for cross curriculum development to reinforce the learning that takes place. It incorporates timetable flexibility to cater for student needs better than a regular timetable with its constraints.

School structures
The Enterprise Centre involves the use of a customised school structure to differentiate the project from mainstream activities. For example, the Centre is on a separate campus and students have a flexible timetable. The learning could be described as flexible modular learning involving relevant subjects, individual learning plans and an emphasis on relevant learning through the use of real life examples.

The core teacher and the teacher’s aide foster a relationship that encourages attendance and student interest while involving the monitoring of an individual’s progress across all subjects. Accommodation and adjustments are made to promote student engagement and success.

Best practice
Best practice involves the provision of personalised learning and a focus by the core teacher on student success as the paramount goal. The flexibility available to the staff to do “things differently” and to do “different things” is important.

Integral to the operation of the Centre is the fostering of a supportive environment where students can relate well to staff. This is facilitated by the selection of staff who are empathetic to the student’s needs, the provision of support through the teacher’s aide and the making of appropriate modifications to the curriculum.

Achieving goals of the new school leaving age project
‘Supporting strongly’. The Enterprise Centre and students benefit from a strong relationship with the transition team consisting of the careers adviser, transition adviser and mentor.

When students enter the program they are often disenfranchised from school and disconnected from staff. They soon realise that, with support, they can get on top of their challenges and staff are there to help students through. Commonly, students re-engage and start to consider what they might do when they successfully complete their HSC. The program provides an overall turning point in a student’s life and education.

success stories
In the first intake of students, two students returned to school after lengthy breaks. One student had been away for 18 months and decided that with the supportive environment of the Enterprise Centre he would return and attempt his HSC.

The second student had left school six months previously and had obtained some casual work at a local menswear shop. The flexibility in timetabling available through the Enterprise Centre allowed him to continue to work and also attempt his HSC. The careers adviser was able to negotiate with the employer and the casual work evolved into a traineeship.
Benefits for the students and school community
The immediate benefits are that students appear to be happier and more engaged when they feel that someone is “on their side”. In their schooling up to this point these same students may have built up a resistance to teacher intervention and turned off schooling.

The mid-term benefits for the student are learning more skills and being given the opportunity to complete their HSC, which in some families may be the first time someone has achieved that. They are also being better prepared for employment.

The Enterprise Centre provides another option for continuing students in the community of Kempsey and contributes to an improved public perception for Kempsey High School. Pivotal to the program is the building of partnerships between the community and industry.

Sustainable benefits
The Centre has implemented systems for the ongoing monitoring and review of student progress. Core teaching allows for the monitoring of students at a greater level than is available in mainstream schooling. Additionally, the teacher aide liaises with mainstream teachers to ensure the completion of tasks.

The Centre has also implemented ongoing internal support systems including the coaching of individual students. Follow-up strategies are used if the student is not progressing. Students access the support systems at varying levels from requiring little more than an informal talk with a teacher through to requiring intervention by all support mechanisms available.

Interview with Kevin Sinclair, Coordinator, The Enterprise Centre, Kempsey High School

What are the drivers behind the innovation, the Enterprise Centre?
From within the school it is the leadership team. Our principal Mick Eller has a vision and he provides a resourcing structure that will make the Enterprise Centre work. The deputy of teaching and learning, Ms Nerida Mosely, has been encouraging the adjustment and modification of the curriculum to suit student needs. Mrs Denese Kennedy deals with student subject selection and other matters relating to the program.

Also from within the school, data is available about the students’ academic progress. The philosophy of our school focuses heavily on social justice and fairness and equity for all students, no matter what their backgrounds.

A driver from outside the school is the Kempsey community itself. The Vinson Report recognised it as one of the bottom ten communities in New South Wales, using a range of factors that identify disadvantage. Overcoming these disadvantages is certainly a driver for what we’re trying to do.

Personal experience is also a motivation. I didn’t do as well at school as I would have liked. I was still fortunate enough to obtain an apprenticeship and work as a tradesperson for 25 years. I then chose to retrain as a school teacher. I now see a lot of the kids in the same situation as I was in Year 10 and Year 11, disengaging from mainstream learning.

What best describes the innovation?
The Centre starts with the need for student support. To do that we have professional learning for staff and we have to make the curriculum more accessible. Some students start off disengaged because they may not have been academically successful to this point, so there may be a combination of adjustments required. The Centre is not on the main campus of the High School. To make the project work we have a flexible timetable, flexible staffing and strong links to the community and business.

What are some examples of best practice professional approaches used by you or other staff?
Best practice is still evolving. The best practice that we have attained so far is in identifying student need. A huge amount of planning has gone into it and we are now at the implementation stage. Evaluation will commence as students move through the program.

The vision we have, the leadership team we have and the willingness to try different things to succeed are also best practice. The school also strongly supports professional development and learning.

How can this best practice by you or your colleagues assist in the achievement of any aspect of the three goals of the raising the school leaving age project?
We are definitely aiming higher and we have high expectations of students. Raising the school leaving age will increase the number of kids who are coming back to school because they’re not allowed to leave, they haven’t got a job and they haven’t been able to access other training. The only thing they can do is return to school and often they’ll just be putting in the time and it’ll be our job to make sure they’re engaged and attain an HSC and/or other worthwhile qualifications.

In terms of supporting strongly, we’re assisting young people with the combination of adjustments we are making and the delivery of the lessons. After several months of TAFE training we now have a mentoring program about to commence and that should better support kids as well. We are also breaking down the experience into achievable pieces so the students can attain success. All students want to be successful.

In terms of strengthening connections, we have strong links to TAFE. If the students do a TAFE course outside our school we provide support for them back at the school. We are also building community partnerships with employers and with providers of other programs.
What management of the innovation is required to ensure success?

Change always brings about some resistance. So part of managing the Centre is about seeing the project through to the stage where people can see the benefits from it and it’s accepted by each stakeholder in their own way. Stakeholders include students, parents, teaching staff, executive staff, and the leadership team. Everyone has to be on board and how you go about getting people on board is quite critical.

Professional learning needs to be ongoing. The only way it will be successful is if people keep abreast of technology and keep abreast of latest innovations in teaching.

What is a favourite highlight from this story about innovation?

Seeing the kids engaged. One teacher who had a lot to do with these students right throughout this year actually commented to me that whenever she sees the students leaving the class or sees the students about the school, they all appear to be much happier. They’re talking about work, they’re talking about assessment tasks, and they’re talking about succeeding.

How has the innovation resulted in benefits for the student and or school community?

We are still in the infancy of this project but we hope that the short term benefits will be retaining students at school and those students getting their HSC. The long-term benefits for the community we hope will be to break the cycle of welfare dependency, providing an alternative but realistic pathway for students to obtain a worthwhile qualification in the HSC. Also that they are gaining work experience and hopefully employment when they leave school.

How are you or your staff ensuring the benefits for the student from the innovation are sustainable?

We’ve put a lot of things in place to ensure its sustainability. We identified in the planning process the elements that were going to make it work. For example, with staff we didn’t put together a team that had all the same ideas. They’re complementary to each other but in many ways they have differing views. You need this range of ideas and views in your team to keep the innovation energetic and hopefully sustainable. We planned how it was going to be resourced and that may be the biggest key factor in sustainability, as the Centre is expensive compared to a regular mainstream class.

What do you think are the main factors that have brought about success to date?

The main factor is each stakeholder taking responsibility for their role. The principal Mick Eller has taken on a huge responsibility to bring about a program like this. I also think you have to have a personal stake in it: I left a role in the school that I enjoyed to take on this role. So I am quite determined to ensure it is successful.

Another critical factor is identifying why students to that point haven’t been successful. Okay? Is it for academic reasons? Do we need to address academic needs to help the individual succeed? Are there social reasons? Is there something happening at school? Is there something happening in their home life? Is there a social problem that we can address with mentoring or counselling?

My personal opinion is that the success of the project will be about the success of the student. It’s not getting the best equipment or the best room in the school or the best window seat. It’s about students succeeding, students staying at school, students completing their HSC, students gaining employment and becoming valuable citizens.

We start with slowly building the confidence of students and then we gradually work towards the students gaining independence.

We are also breaking down the experience into achievable pieces so the students can attain success. All students want to be successful.
LEARNING JOURNEYS, ADVANCED PATHWAYS

Case study No. 4

INNOVATION SNAPSHOT

- **SUMMARY**
  - In response to a breadth of abilities and interests among the students, the school has implemented a series of innovative projects that extend from Stage 4 to Stage 6 and provide students with multiple opportunities to stretch themselves and succeed.

- **DRIVERS**
  - The school staff and community are leaving behind a focus on welfare issues and focusing now on creating a stable but exciting environment where young people can learn and develop options.

- **FEATURES**
  - The Year 9 Learning Journey project is a way of showing to teachers, students and community members the work that students are doing in Year 9 and how well they are achieving at school.
  - With Year 10 students, the staff identified students who might obtain considerable value out of being part of the Advanced Careers Package in Year 11, and invited the parents in to talk to them in small groups about what it might mean.

- **SUCCESS FACTORS**
  - In developing initiatives, the staff ensure that student support, curriculum changes, professional learning and school structures are all connected so they underpin the initiative.
  - There is a willingness in the staff to take on innovation and to see that it does make a difference for the students.

- **BENEFITS**
  - The biggest benefit is the growth in confidence in the students. The ones that have really taken up opportunities offered by the school are far more confident to take risks and are looking forward to the next step.

- **RELEVANCE TO NEW SCHOOL LEAVING AGE**
  - The staff have asked themselves key questions: “We had to look at how do we manage kids effectively, how do we engage kids, what do we need to provide that will keep them connected to the school?”

- **Context for the innovation**
  Kingsgrove North High School is truly comprehensive co-educational high school, says principal Helen Wyatt, with a full range of students.
  “The school has very high performing kids, and lot of kids in the middle, including many who may want to go into trades or work, and others who are really not going to be engaged in school.”

In response to this mixture of interests and abilities, the staff try to keep a balance so that, says Helen Wyatt, “they’re meeting the needs of the high academic kids and meeting the needs of those kids who may otherwise have left school, but stay on until they find that it’s not working for them”.

The staff focus on a number of goals through each of the school stages. For instance, they identified a need to support students in their learning and provide them with focus and goals in Year 9. The resultant Year 9 Learning Journey project offers students an opportunity to reflect on what they had been doing in classes and in assignments and gives them an opportunity to present this to a panel of teachers, students and community members.

In Year 10, the staff try to target the needs of students and have them counselled by head teachers. A lot of schools do that too, acknowledges Helen Wyatt.

“But for a particular bunch of kids, we’ve been trying to direct them into our Advanced Career Package in Year 11, which we’re trying to promote as something that’s really desirable, and it’s worked. I’ve now got more kids in that than I can accommodate. So, all of those students have a good sense of where they’re headed: they’re talked through what they might want to do before starting work, and what courses are going to help them get there.”

**Student support**

The Year 9 Learning Journey project has an emphasis on improving student engagement in learning and promoting student achievement. It is also a way of showing to teachers, students and community members the work that students are doing in Year 9 and how well they are achieving at school.

With Year 10 students, the staff identified students who might obtain considerable value out of being part of the Advanced Careers Package in Year 11, and invited the parents in to talk to them in small groups about what it might mean. “We helped them to understand this given it’s a non-ATAR HSC, but it’s very much focusing on case management,” says Helen Wyatt.
Best practice
One example of best practice is the approach taken by the Stage 6 teacher who is teaching Work Studies but “keeping an eye on the kids, making sure that they’re turning up to TAFE, and that they are performing well in their other courses”. Helen Wyatt says that this case management approach is crucial.

“The students get the support they need because once you start doing all these innovative things and sending kids off to different parts of Sydney, having them leave school in the middle of the day on Tuesday, go out to work placement on the Thursday, often to do their work placement for their VET courses, they’re in and out of the school, then its really easy for them to fall beneath the radar. So they really do need to provide that strong support.”

Aiming higher
Students in the Year 9 Learning Journey program are aiming higher in their projects and in their various subjects as the work they have undertaken, they then present to the panels. Students are gaining skills in presenting themselves and their work to a panel and setting goals for the future. As a result, a sense of achievement pervades students, teachers and community members.

Benefits for the student and school community
The Year 9 Learning Journey project has increased community participation within the school and has helped in building networks with the local community, for example for arranging work experience. It has also aided in developing a good school image within the community.

One of the staff who sat on a panel said it was a pleasure for her to see students who sometimes struggled in classes present their learning to the panel and show enthusiasm for their work and achievements. She added that it was great to hear them talk about their goals and future directions. “It was inspiring to see them grow in confidence and be able to talk about themselves to a panel of teachers, students and community members.”

Sustainable benefits
The Year 9 Learning Journey project is just one of a sequence of interconnected innovations at the school, adding to the sustainability of the benefits. Other innovations are outlined in the interview with Helen Wyatt. The Year 9 project has had a positive impact on the school: students expect that this is something they need to plan for and set goals for and teachers and community members are very supportive of the program. One staff member commented that “the program has now become an integral part of the school.”

Looking at the raised school leaving age and those students that have done the Advanced Career Package program in Year 11 this year, they’re doing Work Studies in that program, and none of them want to drop it. They say it’s the best thing that they’ve ever done, and the experiences they’ve had have been so positive that they’re the first to tell you it’s been really good.

To have those kids get up on course information night and tell everyone there about what they’ve got out of it and how they’ve even got jobs out of it, was fantastic.

Helen Wyatt, Principal
What are some key drivers of your innovation within your school, and from outside?

As a school, we have taken on a lot of innovations over a period of time. There were issues with the school having a really bad reputation, although it had really great kids. It had some really good staff, but it had a really bad reputation. We had some genuine student welfare issues that impacted on the school and we had to address all of those.

There was a bit of a leadership vacuum because there’d been a lot of change in our senior executive leadership over a few years, for a whole lot of reasons such as illness and people moving on. And a lot of the things that might have supported students and created a stable and certain environment weren’t in place. But there were a lot of staff here who really wanted to make good with the school because they believed in the school. So, those things were strong drivers initially that we had to turn the school around.

We had to look at how we managed students effectively, how we engaged them, what we needed to provide that will keep them connected to the school.

You seem to place an emphasis on student support.

The student support, curriculum changes, professional learning and school structures are all connected. For instance, I’ll talk about what we’re trying to do in Stage 3–6. In Stage 3 we’re trying to make sure that our kids are really growing with their literacy and numeracy, and forming a really solid basis for their performance long-term. To that end, we’ve set up teams of teachers that focus on the needs and issues associated with individual kids. At the moment we’re having a meeting of an English teacher, a maths teacher, a science teacher and a music teacher, and they talk about the same kids.

We’re using the NAPLAN data and we’re really looking at what they need to really be learning in our classrooms, and we’re looking at sharing strategies and trying to build consistency across those classrooms. That’s really important, and that’s something that I’ve been trying to get off the ground for ages. But, this year, I think it’s really starting to take off. We’re hoping that we’re going to see improvement in our NAPLAN results. Our NAPLAN results are good in terms of growth, but we have a lot of kids who are at the lower end who really need to have that basis in order to be successful in learning.

In terms of the best practice, are you looking for your staff to have high level insights?

Yes, and using data to inform their methodology and using professional learning to ensure quality teaching.

At the moment we’re looking at trends across particular classes. We were looking at individual kids and what we were finding was that their needs were pretty much similar. They all need to know how to make inferences, to move beyond the literal in reading. We know that that’s something we really have to work on. So we focus at that level and recognise that a lot of our kids are from non-English speaking backgrounds. A lot of them have learning needs, and for them to be successful they’ve got to be able to do these particular things. We know our individual kids, but we recognise that there are trends across the class that we need to focus on.

That’s in Stage 4. In Stage 5, we run a program called The Learning Journey. Again this has been done in lots of other places. Here, we’ve focused on Year 9. So, for Year 9, the kids do their school-to-work portfolio throughout the year, and then they present to a panel of teachers, parents and other students what was good in their learning, what they felt they could have done better, and how it all relates to their long-term goals.

It always blows us away how much the kids can tell us verbally about what they’ve learnt and where they want to go, and then they get the advice from the panel about how they might move. And, of course, they have to dress for the interview, and have evidence. They really love that and it’s really good preparation, and a number of them get jobs out of it with the community people that come along.

Then in Year 10, we have a systematic way of guiding the students’ course choices for Stage 6. This year we trialled our Advanced Career Package in Year 11, so we were able to use the students from that to influence our Year 10 kids.
In the Stage 6, we’re running a wide range of courses. We have the high academic performers choosing a range of courses, but we’ve also got these targeted kids who really don’t want to sit in classes listening to teachers or feeling pushed to do maths, and previously they were doing courses that were inappropriate for them. They’d start, they’d disrupt and then we’d have a problem on our hands. So, these are courses that are far more practical: it’s the VET courses and the TVET courses, and we also run Work Studies. Work Studies is a really great course because it helps the kids think about their own personal goals, and they meet people who tell their story, and they make contacts and they get certificates.

How can the best practice you’ve just described assist in the achievement of any of the goals of aiming high, supporting strongly, strengthening connections?

We have high aims for our kids’ literacy and numeracy. In Stage 5 and 6, with The Learning Journey and the course selection, they’re really thinking about their learning and where that’s going to lead them beyond school. So, they’re trying to make those connections and what is built into that is having high expectations of themselves. It’s very much built into the language of how we manage all of that.

We give them curriculum that is going to engage them so that they want to achieve highly. So, it’s appropriate for them. That’s why the curriculum aspect is really important.

If we look at supporting strongly, the one thing that we learnt in trying to turn the school around was that relationships are everything. If the kids felt they had connections at the school, and that they were treated fairly and trusted, and we have high expectations of behaviour, and we put the responsibility on the kids, then they’re going to be more likely to be engaged at school.

A lot of the students are doing work-related courses. They’re in the work place as well as in school, and the teacher and the careers adviser are actually working closely with local careers organisations that keep them connected as well. So, we’re trying to make learning real for them and that’s only possible if you’ve got the connections in the community.

What management of the innovation is required to ensure success?

To succeed it has to be within our management plan: whatever we’re doing has to be there as a priority, and everyone has to understand we’re doing that as a priority, so people don’t go, “Oh, what’s she doing? Why is she getting that time off?” Then people can see that it links into our overall goals and where we’re going.

We’re trying to spread the ownership of it, trying to use a team approach, so that there isn’t just one person who’s managing it, but that it’s spread across a few people. We want them to feel that they are accountable, and that they have to report back through the management plan, through the annual school report, to me, to the executive, about what they’re doing and why they’re doing it.

How has the innovation resolved in benefits for the student and/or the community?

It can see a lot of confidence in the kids. Not all of them: some of them are tricky, but the ones that have really taken it on are far more confident to take risks and they’re looking forward to the next step. I really do see that confidence in the kids. The school community speak really highly of our kids.

How are you ensuring the benefits for the student are sustainable?

It’s very hard to ensure that but we are spreading the responsibility for it and not just relying on one person to be a key element of it. But it is hard. And we’re not getting any additional funding for staffing for this, we’re actually using our allocated staffing and it does take resources: the case management aspect does take a lot of time. So, we’ll just keep throwing our staffing at it to the extent that we can, and we do ride on the back of an awful lot of staff goodwill. And that’s how schools always operate. But we hope it’s sustainable. It’s in our plan.

What do you think are the main factors that have brought about your success?

I think it’s the willingness of the staff to take on innovation and to see that it does make a difference for our kids. They really do want to make a difference. The debates we have around here are not about “I don’t want to do that”. It’s more like “I just don’t want my kids missing lessons because I really don’t want them to miss out”. People very much want the students to succeed. And we have very few people on staff who don’t pull their weight. Most people put in more than they’re asked to do.

Is there anything I haven’t asked about that you’d like to add?

Just jumping back to the critical success factors, and using management speak, we have alignment across the school: we have our differences, we have our debates, and it’s not an easy school by any means. But going back to the wanting the best for the kids, I think that is what is behind the alignment. People are prepared to cooperate. We have a pretty flat leadership structure and people feel that they can come in and whinge or come in with a great idea and that they’ll be heard, and that things will be acted on. When they believe that they’ll be followed through, they’re prepared to give what they can. It comes back to having leadership across the school.
Case study No. 5

AN EDUCATION FOR EVERYONE

Blakehurst High School

INNOVATION SNAPSHOT

**SUMMARY**
- 70% per cent of students are from non-English speaking backgrounds and they flourish in a school that places priority on quality teaching and learning and positive relationships.
- No student moves into the senior school without a well mapped out pathway.

**DRIVERS**
- The driver is the basic philosophy of an education for everyone: the staff want to keep students at school, not drive them away.
- The local community includes a large proportion of people from a non-English speaking background who are supportive of education and the school’s approach.

**FEATURES**
- All students benefit from a comprehensive system of student support including individual learning plans. Monitoring mechanisms effectively identify any students at risk.
- Professional learning includes the use of action learning to maintain a continual cycle of reflection on and improvement of professional practice.

**SUCCESS FACTORS**
- A culture of getting students ready for real life supports the continuing successful learning of 15-19 year olds.
- That culture is underpinned by teacher professional learning and leadership and parent and community engagement in the school.

**BENEFITS**
- Students demonstrate high levels of engagement with the school and satisfaction with learning.
- Parents convey similar levels of satisfaction with the high expectations staff have of the students.

**RELEVANCE TO NEW SCHOOL LEAVING AGE**
- The staff act on their belief that students will only stay at school and engage in learning when that learning is relevant, processes and relationships are supportive, and students can see a purpose for all that they do.
- The high student retention rates show that this philosophy and the approaches are achievable.

Context for the innovation
Blakehurst High School (BHS) is a comprehensive co-educational secondary school located in the Sydney Region. It has approximately 1,100 students drawn from over ten local primary schools. 70% per cent of students are from non-English speaking backgrounds and from over 50 different language backgrounds. The school’s community is diverse with at least 40% of students from relatively low socio-economic backgrounds.

The school is known for its harmonious internal community and its focus on quality teaching and learning. Positive relationships between student/student, staff/student, staff/staff and school/families are the basis for all activities.

`Maximising’ curriculum
The staff believe that the breadth of curriculum is important as students require enough flexibility to make choices on the basis of their interests and talents. The school attempts to ensure that courses with small candidatures are supported in order to ensure a broad curriculum. As part of that broad curriculum, school based VET and TVET meet the needs of over 50% of all senior students.

Trained senior student mentors are used to assist junior students at risk and peer support training is provided for Year 9/10 students for supporting Year 7 students.

In the BHS SLAM (Senior Learning And Management) study and learning skills program, teachers convey high expectations to students and maintain a focus on quality teaching and personal mentoring of students deemed at risk of not succeeding in Years 11 and 12.

Student support
Training is provided for all teachers in the areas of Choice Theory and Restorative Justice techniques, which emphasise that responsibility lies with students and relationships are ideally developed based on mutual respect and power with rather than power over.

Students are given leadership roles, for instance as peer mentors and mediators, and individual learning plans exist for students receiving funding support and those students in Years 10-12 deemed to be at risk of not completing Year 12 whether or not they are funded. These plans include individual goals, allocation of responsibilities and timelines for action. Selected students may be engaged in the senior years in a school transition to employment program which may include weekly work experience and school designed ‘real life’ learning programs as well as HSC courses.
Blakehurst High School has developed a culture which engages its students, values student success and accepts that success is a relative concept. This requires a critical mass of those staff members who ‘care for kids’, demonstrate their belief in their students and have the flexibility of thought to design or source courses of study which deliver on the expectations of success for individual students.

Student K’s parent said of teacher Mrs X: “Mrs X is willing to give any child a go; she sees the good in the kids.”
The school designs individual transition plans for all students at risk, with a focus on retaining and retraining, and partnerships are formed with TAFE and private colleges, for instance to allow students to complete pre-apprenticeship courses.

The school designed roles of junior and senior coordinators work with other members of the learning support team to monitor and support these students in transition. The roles have executive team period allowances and each coordinator is a member of the executive team although they do not have executive salary. The fact that these roles are created and supported are an indicator of the importance placed on support structures and allowing no student to ‘fall through the net’.

Achieving goals of the new school leaving age project

‘Aiming higher’. Planning for the future is part of any student’s education and students need to set and have clear expectations of which direction they will take. The BHS Transition program involves students, family and external partnerships working together in the planning process to assist transition and prepare students for adult life.

The transition plans depends on the individual student’s needs and interests. The plans help students with everything from work to further education and/or training. A student can get help to progress to university, TAFE or work. Transition plans also assist students to become successful members of the community.

‘Supporting strongly’. The learning support team is a whole-school planning and support mechanism. Its purpose is to address the learning needs of students through the co-ordination, development, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of educational programs.

A prime function of the learning support team is to ensure that the needs of students in the school are being met through vocational learning and career development, as well through pastoral care and youth development. The learning support team acts as a filter to ensure each child referred receives the support they most need. Referrals are made by classroom teachers, head teachers and parents.

‘Strengthening connections’. The school’s website provides the Blakehurst community with up-to-date information. The school uses the Moodle learning management system to provide 24/7 access to resources and support for all its students.

Parents and community are welcomed into the school through a range of programs and this strengthens connections to the workplace and life after school.

Benefits for students

Benefits for students of the BHS approach include the following: retention rates are increased; student options are increased; students experience different settings and develop work appropriate skills; students are able to choose the best pathway, for example, to university, TAFE or work; students are given the opportunity to learn about their skills and strengths; and students feel successful and respected so they can go on to form meaningful relationships with each other and value staying at school.

The BHS transition process allows parents, teachers and external agencies to work together to make possible the above opportunities.

Sustainable benefits

To ensure such benefits are sustainable, BHS promotes a supportive culture that includes a strong emphasis on professional learning of staff committed to quality teaching and learning, a whole school commitment to student well-being, a focus on the middle school years, a strong emphasis on technology and a team-based approach by the staff.

The leadership sets the tone for the school and lays out the school’s expectations of its students. Leaders model the importance of quality relationships. They also focus on quality teaching and the importance of making a difference in students’ lives. And leaders ensure that leadership is devolved and self-sustaining.
Interview with Judith Thompson (JT), Principal and Maria Attwells (MA), Head Teacher, Teaching and Learning

What are some key drivers of innovation within the school?

JT: Within the school the driver is our basic philosophy of an education for everyone: we want to keep students here, not drive them away. Our demographics are such that we have a large non-English speaking background component and our parents are by and large pretty supportive of education.

MA: The culture is the driving force. We have a culture here of wanting to retain the students and we’re training them and getting them ready for real life. That culture is very much embedded and everyone shares that passion. It’s no one person; it’s teamwork.

JT: I don’t think any innovation on its own can ever effect the sort of change that you want. It’s not one innovation; many innovations add up to a culture of expectation.

We’ve gone from a culture where, in my first years here, the teachers and head teachers at executive level would say "Why is this kid at school? Why are they here?" The culture was that the HSC was only for academic achievers. But people like Maria and myself and a whole core group of staff believe that kids should have six years of schooling.

MA: We work closely with external organisations. We work with TAFE of course and a private training company so if a child is interested in, say, doing panel beating Mrs Thompson allows them to go out of the school for the five or six weeks to do the course and come back. And the outcomes from that course are considered within their assessment.

JT: The parents certainly support education. And that might not always be the case in lower socio-economic areas. They have the belief that all students deserve to be at school for six years.

How do you maximise the curriculum or use school structures or professional learning to inform your innovation?

JT: The school structures maximise curriculum. But I think professional learning is the key. That is what has changed culture. We have an effective professional learning team with plans that are fully evaluated each semester.

What are some examples of best practice professional approaches used by the staff?

JT: Our transition program for kids at risk is an example of best practice.

Our emphasis has been keeping the quality teaching framework to the fore and getting teachers into other teacher’s classrooms. It’s an open classroom approach. For some years now a lot of our Tuesday afternoon staff workshops have been on differentiating the curriculum.

I didn’t want people to get the idea that if you stick a program in like our school traineeships and employment program in the senior school for example, it works on its own. Nothing works unless you’ve got a culture supporting all of that. And it starts in Year 7, not Year 11 or 12.

The number one key thing that employers look for is interpersonal skills. If you can’t develop those you won’t succeed. It’s the relationships that kids develop with each other within the school, that staff develop with each other, that develop those skills. No innovation is going to work unless you’ve got that trust and respect among the staff.

How do the goals of the new school leaving age project fit with your approach, for example, high expectations?

JT: High expectations are a cultural thing. I interview every Year 10 student and their parents at this time of the year, and that’s as much about relationship building as it is about checking their subjects and all of that work. That comes at the end of a very long and well-structured Year 10 subject selection process.

What I found when I began here 13 years ago was that, if you want to look at worst practice, the kids were given out sheets. They ticked the boxes, the sheets came back and that was it. And I found in that first year that I was here that close to 40% of the kids had no concept of what the HSC meant, no idea why they were here, and there was no value placed on it by them or their parents. So one of the things I decided was that I would interview every Year 10 kid and their parents.
But now people like Maria and the learning support team and her support staff have a really strongly structured subject selection process that begins in July and ends in November. So, there are no kids going into the senior school who don’t have a well mapped out pathway. And few of them leave: we’ll have about half a dozen going off to do apprenticeships next year, out of 200. And they’ve had that pathway designed with them and for them, with the support of our transition program and their parents and our careers people.

**What management of innovation is required to ensure success?**

JT: A strong executive. All the teachers but particularly the executive are encouraged to spend a lot of time reflecting and evaluating. Evaluation is critical: we don’t do anything without evaluating it.

Also, encouraging a density of leadership across the school is critical for managing anything, because all of this activity involves just about every member of staff at one time or another.

**What are some of the other benefits of your approach?**

JT: The major benefit is that we’ve got kids here, particularly in Years 10-12, who are engaged and who see the relevance of their learning. And I can’t think of anybody who ever leaves the school without some support for their next step. The focus in the junior years is of course getting all students to the point at which they see the relevance of their learning, feel supported and ultimately engage with their senior studies.

**Are these benefits sustainable?**

JT: I could walk away from here and Maria as well as a significant core group of staff, both executive and non executive, could confidently continue the work. The processes and structures as well as beliefs and values have been put in place so that teams evolve. Developing teams keeps things sustainable. And if one person does go, the team is still there functioning and continually training and bringing other people on board. That team focus makes the work sustainable.
Case study No. 6

SCHOOL-INDUSTRY LINKING

INNOVATION SNAPSHOT

- **SUMMARY**
  - The School-Industry Links program provides students from five schools in the Lithgow, Portland, Bathurst and Oberon areas with opportunities to undertake work placements with firms in the region.

- **DRIVERS**
  - School principals and staff want to provide students who might otherwise dis-engage from school with practical experiences in industry, so they can decide whether they want to take up an apprenticeship.
  - Industry in the region wants to encourage students to consider a career in local businesses.

- **FEATURES**
  - The curriculum is structured so that students have opportunities to take up both work placements and TAFE studies on a weekly basis.
  - Thorough support is provided for students to optimise their learning experiences out of school.

- **SUCCESS FACTORS**
  - The real skill shortage in areas such as engineering leads to real job opportunities for students.
  - All parties, including school, industry and TAFE, cooperate effectively.

- **BENEFITS**
  - Students in the program not only have the opportunity to see whether they like an industry, they benefit from clarifying if they are not interested, hence avoiding a wrong career decision.
  - Employers are able to see whether individual students are a suitable fit with their businesses.

- **RELEVANCE TO NEW SCHOOL LEAVING AGE**
  - The program creates a positive set of options for students who might have previously dropped out of school and not pursued further training.

Context for the innovation

The original purpose of the School Industry Links program was to create partnerships with TAFE and local industry to transition disengaged students in senior years (Year 11 and Year 12) into trade based employment while continuing with senior study at school and TAFE.

The schools involved in this innovation are Portland Central School, Oberon High School, Lithgow High School, Denison College of Secondary Education Bathurst High Campus and Kelso High Campus and TAFE NSW Western Institute. All schools had students with plans to enter into an apprenticeship, but were not able to find employment. Students were disengaged from school.

Portland Central School initiated the project based on a Queensland model. The other schools became involved in the project following the encouragement of the school education director.

The supportive attitude of local industry has been crucial in the success of the program.

In 2007, the project was expanded: a part-time coordinator was employed through the financial support of participating schools and industry partners. While the emphasis has been on metal and engineering trades, in 2010 the program will expand to hospitality trades.

'Maximising' curriculum

The School Industry Links program provides an additional choice in an already rich array of curriculum in the larger schools and in the limited array of curriculum in the smaller schools. The Metal and Engineering school delivered VET course is supplemented with TAFE delivered modules. As part of the program, work placement is provided one day per week in a selection of local industries, including DELTA Electricity.

Student support

The program has high level support from the school education director, each of the school principals, local industry leaders and future employers.

Students are supported through case management provided by the Project Coordinator, school based counselling provided by the careers adviser and the monitoring of course progress by the deputy principal at school and TAFE teacher.

Professional learning

All participating teachers are accredited deliverers of VET courses. School based teachers work in collaboration with TAFE teachers in the shared delivery of competencies and modules in metal and engineering.
School structures
The school timetable was developed to enable students to study four units of Metal and Engineering, instead of two. This is facilitated by TAFE delivery on Wednesdays, so the students are generally not timetabled for lessons on lines 1-6. TAFE delivers Metal and Engineering at Lithgow and Bathurst and the five schools share the TAFE classes.

Best practice
Best practice is exemplified by the cooperation established through the formal relationships between schools, TAFE and industry. The School Industry Links Program group meets formally twice per term. Networking and costs are shared across schools and this includes the employment of a coordinator one day per week.

There is a high level of cooperation and shared ownership of the program. The focus of the schools involved is the day to day management of the program, support for students, building relationships with industry and TAFE partners and future development.

In addition, all the schools in the School Industry Links program are partners in one of two Trade Training Centres, which have been approved and funded by the Federal Government. Building of the new and upgraded facilities has started in the Lithgow, Portland and Oberon Trade Training Centre. Work is yet to begin on the Denison Trade Training Centre.

Achieving goals of the new school leaving age
‘Aiming higher’. The aim of the program is to retain young people in education and training for as long as possible while giving them genuine and sustained experience with a range of employers involved in the metal and engineering field. Staff have high expectations of students staying in education and training based on the knowledge that education ensures better employment prospects, finances and health.

‘Supporting strongly’. All students in mid Year 10 are counselled in their course selections for Year 11 in an interview with teachers, parent, student and Aboriginal support officer, if relevant. Presentations are given by industry experts - for example, hospitality - to widen the students’ understanding of the industry. Further counselling takes place with the School Industry Links coordinator prior to the student taking up the opportunity to be involved in the program.

‘Strengthening connections’. One day per week work placements put stress on a student’s capacity to complete all school work. Hence, connections with teachers are essential to build an understanding of the different contexts in which these students are working. Denison College has some online courses to support students catch up and get ahead - for example in construction - and others will be developed. This will provide another layer of support for students.

Effective partnerships with industry are a highlight of this program. The commitment of Delta Electricity was crucial in the establishment and development of the program. Their partnership with Portland Central School set a high standard for the program and their involvement encouraged other industries to commit.

Other industry partners include MARS Petfood, Timbeck and Thales in the metal and engineering fields and Lithgow Workmen’s Club in the hospitality field. These partnerships have ensured success.

Future developments could include the development of the capacity of industry partners to deliver core curriculum in VET as well as in Mathematics, English and Business Studies.
Benefits for the student and school community
As a result of the program, student retention at school has improved, as has student achievement of course competencies. Student attendance at TAFE has been excellent. The one day per week work placement has been very successful in building student capability in the workplace.

The benefits of the program are sustainable for a number of strong reasons: the program is supported by school principals and the school education director; industry support is growing with more employers coming on board for hospitality programs; and student interest is growing.

The program is also strengthening because the program is expanding to include Hospitality in 2010; the coordinator position is guaranteed annually with commitment from schools and industry; and the change to the school leaving age means a larger cohort of students will be potential participants in the program.

What are some of the key drivers of the school industry links program?
The program came about through a conversation between the principal of Portland Central School at the time and the chief executive officer of Delta Electricity. The principal was talking about the disengagement of students, particularly at ages 15 and 16, and the chief executive of Delta was talking about his company’s inability to attract some tradespeople and, further up the tree, engineers. He knew personally quite a few people that went off the tracks a bit when they were 15 or 16 but ended up quite OK out the other side.

With that conversation in mind we started looking at ways to do something different. We heard of the model in Gladstone and the principal spoke with the Director General and we were given seed funding.

Four of us including one person from Delta went to Gladstone and saw their model.

When we came back to Portland we adapted the Gladstone ideas into a model that would fit here. It was soon seen as successful and so initially Tina Slattery and then Peter Harvey, our school education director, thought it should be something that should be rolled out between a few schools.

Was there drive from outside the school, from the community or parents?
Well, certainly from industry. They saw this program as having people who would be more likely to continue in the industry. Companies were having a problem with people who saw an advertisement, signed up for an apprenticeship with probably than no more than a week’s work experience, and then thought ‘Oh, this is not the right job for me’. And then it was quite difficult to get out of the apprenticeship.

They saw this school-industry links program as a way that they could look at the student before they became apprentices and the students could have a fairly definite idea if this is the way they want to go for a career, resulting in a far lower dropout rate.

What special student support was provided?
We wanted in the first instance to make sure we were supporting the students to succeed and as a very bottom line to get them through to the School Certificate, rather than leave before they got their certificate. But we also, especially in Year 11 which can often be a very difficult transition year, wanted to give them some alternative that is not just straight curriculum for which some students may not be overly suited. We wanted to give them other choices so that they can still stay through till they gained their certificate. And even if they dropped out of the program they’re probably still more likely to get their HSC if they stayed through to the end of Year 11.
What are some best practice professional approaches in the school industry links program?

Our principal did a lot of research into disengagement and he found Gladstone to be the best existing model. So, we went there to borrow their ideas but because our group consists of a number of different types and sizes of schools, we had to adapt their approaches and that adaptation then became, to us, best practice.

One of the other best practice aspects was our ability to be flexible. For instance, we’ve been flexible to allow some of the students to do their work placement on a day that suits the business they’re working in.

The other part of best practice is the idea of being able to undertake TAFE studies: while the student is still at school he or she can work towards a Certificate II.

Achieving the goals of the new school leaving age project?

‘Aiming higher’. We believe that the students who have done the program have higher expectations of getting a job. They believe that by being in the program they have a greater chance of getting an apprenticeship than not being in the program. The students are better prepared to make their choices.

‘Supporting strongly’. With the change in the leaving age we’re going to have a greater percentage of students at school, particularly Year 11, who are probably not what we would’ve seen as Year 11 candidates in the past. There will be a greater demand for a variety of curriculum, not necessarily for an academic HSC, and we believe that the students, even in small schools need greater choices. And probably for many of those students who are coming back, a greater direction towards vocational education courses seems to be imperative.

‘Making connections’. In Years 11 and 12 some students are starting to do a bit of casual work on the weekends and some of them start to think about where they want to go. The disengaged students are probably thinking about what jobs they want. They’re the ones who come and press for work experience more so than others. And so, hopefully by providing this sort of program, they actually end up really making better decisions about what they’re doing.

What management of the school-industry links program is required to ensure success?

We actually have a management group. It’s not just the careers teachers or the vocational education teachers on the management group but the principals as well. And along with industry and TAFE we also have visits from time to time from Charles Sturt University. So, it’s a fairly high-powered group and all see it as a success.

What is a highlight for you from the school industry links program?

One of my favourite highlights is the fact that a number of students are getting job offers, apprenticeship offers, particularly ones who probably would’ve just fallen out of school. I think that’s been a real success. It’s quite a high percentage: we’re probably finding that up around 40 to 50% of the students between all the schools are getting job offers. When you do the course in six months and you’re trying hard in front of an employer, and you’re showing you’re committed to TAFE, an employer can see all that and they get an offer.

Right at the moment there’s a boy in Oberon that should’ve been going to his next round of the work placements but one of the employers he had for the job placement last term thinks that he was that good that he’s actually given him three week’s paid trial work and if that’s successful, will offer him an apprenticeship.

How has the innovation resulted in benefits for the student and/or the school community?

It gives students a far clearer idea of a particular type of industry. Because you’re halfway between school and apprenticeship, it’s a learning experience both ways. It becomes just as valuable to find out if you don’t like it rather than have you signed up for an apprenticeship. As well, if you find out it is what you want, you put your best foot forward and you have a chance to get a job.
How are you ensuring the benefits from the program are sustainable?
Sustainability probably really rests not only upon the management group but me as the coordinator. The industry itself is partly paying for my position. That doesn’t happen in many times: most times industry is happy enough to take students on but they don’t usually pay money to be involved in a program. And to have five schools cooperate and give up some of their release time doesn’t usually happen. So, I think the sustainability is built in for the next couple of years.

What do you think are the main factors that have brought about the success?
We picked a subject area - engineering - where we saw a skill shortage for industry in the area. The Lithgow, Portland, Bathurst and Oberon areas are, compared to other parts in the state, very highly dependent on manufacturing and especially power and mining.

There are a lot of engineering businesses locally and they had been getting some of their employees from outside of this area. And so we contacted some of them. We believed that it was going to be now and for a considerable while into the future an industry that was going to require staff and so we tapped into that.
**Case study No. 7**

**e2 DELIVERS OPTIONS AND OPPORTUNITIES**

**INNOVATION SNAPSHOT**

**SUMMARY**
- The collaborative e2 initiative across a group of five schools in the Orange area has improved senior secondary curriculum opportunities and retention rates in the schools involved.
- The collaboration includes the use of videoconferencing and other technologies for delivering and supporting sessions and the use of Super Wednesday, a day when the timetables align such that students can move between schools.

**DRIVERS**
- The initial driver in 2005 was the falling enrolment in one Orange school.
- The longer-term driver is that the collaboration can provide students with more curriculum options.

**FEATURES**
- e2 has not only expanded the curriculum offering for students, but also increased professional sharing between teachers, schools, partners and other school education regions.
- e2 has allowed teachers to build their knowledge and skills in the use of technology resulting in the inclusion of technology in the teaching strategies that they employ in all of their classes.

**SUCCESS FACTORS**
- The key success factor is the willingness of the stakeholders, which includes all five secondary schools, TAFE and primary schools, to collaborate.
- BENEFITS
  - Students have more choice. They are also able to connect with a bigger range of teachers and peers.
  - Students are also able to compare their work with their peers from other schools, resulting in them raising their expectations of themselves and the quality of their work.

**RELEVANCE TO THE NEW SCHOOL LEAVING AGE**
- The collaborative e2 group is planning a range of new offerings for students who are reluctantly returning to school in Year 11, because of the change in the law.

**Context for the innovation**

e2 involves collaboration on the curriculum between the five secondary schools of the Orange group: Blayney High School, Canobolas High School, Orange High School, Molong Central School and Anson St School for Specific Purposes (SSP), in partnership with TAFE NSW-Western Institute and Charles Sturt University. The aim of the collaboration is to extend the curriculum of all schools while maintaining the individual identity of each school.

The collaboration is based around two main activities: the use of videoconferencing and the timetabling of shared lessons on Super Wednesday. Participating schools have agreed to have a Super Wednesday involving structured study time, extension subjects and practical block subjects run on Wednesdays on a different timetable structure to the other days of the week. Schools are able to expand their curriculum offering as more students are able to take a subject without clashes occurring. For example Drama, Society and Culture, Software Design and Development and Horse Management became viable subjects when placed onto a Super Wednesday timetable.

TAFE NSW - Western Institute has also embraced Super Wednesday with their subjects now running in the morning and the afternoon each Wednesday rather than on two different afternoons. This has meant that students do not miss out on their timetabled subject because they have to go to TAFE on a Tuesday afternoon. It also has meant that TAFE can expand its curriculum offerings.

'Maximising' curriculum

Through videoconferencing and Super Wednesday, e2 has maximised curriculum offerings for five secondary schools in the Orange area. Videoconferencing is offered to the secondary and central schools as part of the Stage 6 curriculum. To expand curriculum options, the timetable structure for the schools was changed to cater for a two-week cyclic timetable that accommodates a weekly timetable operating at Molong Central School. The six period a day, cyclic timetable operates four days a week with Wednesday (Super Wednesday) operating with a different structure.
Super Wednesday is timetabled as 1.5 hour blocks to cater for extension classes and three hour blocks to cater for practical classes such as VET subjects, performing arts and subjects requiring a specialist teacher. Students who are not part of these block classes attend Learning Centres where supervised, structured study periods assist students in their time and assessment task management.

Videoconferencing provides curriculum to students at their own schools (called home schools) while Super Wednesday classes involve students travelling to the school where the class is being offered (called the host school). Through an agreement between principals, the staffing of these classes is borne by the host school where the subject was already going to operate. If the class is formed by combining student numbers from across the school sites, the staffing is borne by the home school of the teacher of the subject.

A direct consequence of e2 collaboration is the expansion of curriculum offerings for Anson Street SSP. Opportunities to offer a broad curriculum there arose through discussions with teachers, principals, TAFE and VET coordinators resulting in TAFE courses in Hospitality, Marine Studies and Primary Industries now becoming part of the Anson St school curriculum.

**Professional learning**

Opportunities for professional learning have occurred through bringing together teachers from across the schools for regular meetings and discussion of the pedagogy involved in these new teaching and learning environments. e2 has developed a partnership with Charles Sturt University to examine the teaching practices employed to help improve student learning and will use this research to inform and develop future teaching practice.

The use of technology is an essential part of the delivery of the curriculum in e2. The collaboration has allowed teachers to build their knowledge and skills in the use of technology resulting in the inclusion of technology in the teaching strategies that they employ in all of their classes.

Joint School Development Days are held where staff from the primary schools and secondary schools from the Orange School Education Group come together to hear educational and inspirational messages from well respected guest speakers. These development days challenge and inspire staff, promote conversations and discussions between colleagues and help set directions for the Orange group of schools.

Through videoconferencing, e2 schools are able to expand their curriculum by pooling their students to form a class, with one school providing a teacher for that class. Subjects offered have included Chemistry, Geography, Legal Studies, Engineering Studies, Physics, Japanese with Modern History, Information Technology to be introduced in 2010.

Practical subjects such as Design and Technology, Primary Industries, Hospitality, Building and Construction, Textiles and Design are run on Super Wednesdays for a 3-hour block with students able to engage in the practical component of the course. For example, in Primary Industries they are able to do more than just ‘get the tractor out then have to put it back again’. After receiving the instruction they are able to construct an electric fence, putting the theory into practice.

Following videoconferencing, construction students have constructed a building for the Return to School program and a pump house, starting with pouring the concrete all the way through to painting the finished product.
School structures

e2 has developed new structures based on shared understanding between stakeholders. For instance, it has fostered collaborations between students at different schools. These interactions break down barriers and myths that exist about other schools, broaden student contacts and provide opportunities for meeting between like-minded students, challenging and lifting expectations of the quality of their work.

e2 has also encouraged teacher interactions across schools leading to cross faculty discussions and the sharing of teaching and physical resources from different schools. Deputy principals and principals from the e2 schools regularly meet together to manage innovation.

Partnerships with TAFE are fostered through the TAFE representative on the e2 management team who facilitates meetings with TAFE teachers to develop pathways for students.

Best practice

Best practice in e2 includes principals and deputy principals from the e2 schools and Regional DET personnel meeting together to manage issues such as those arising from the new school leaving age. This group has identified four areas to focus on: curriculum, student services and support, processes and procedures, and relationships with external education providers.

Achieving goals of the new school leaving age

The e2 collaborative group is developing strategies in response to the new school leaving age, with committees looking at engaging students through relevant curriculum, connecting students with their school community through a range of mentoring and inclusive social programs, focussing students on their career pathways through the development of pathways through partnerships, and providing career advice and mentoring. With schools working together, new innovative approaches are being developed to ensure that students have access to a broad, relevant curriculum, paving the way for the best possible outcomes for all students.

‘Aiming higher’. The staff coordinating the e2 activities find that motivated students who now have choice in their curriculum inspire other students from their own school and from the host school to lift their standard of work.

‘Supporting strongly’. Support for students includes the provision of Structured Learning Centres for students where assistance and guidance is provided for students as they manage their study time and prepare, research and complete their assessment tasks.

‘Strengthening connections’. Videoconferencing and the use of Smartboard technology allows lessons to be delivered and recorded electronically. Smartboard content is made exciting, interactive and relevant through its ability to utilise the Internet. Bridgit technology is used to connect across the sites during videoconferencing allowing students and teachers to share their content. Moodle, a student learning management system, is used as a means for students from across the sites to access their curriculum at any time. It provides opportunities for self marking quizzes with immediate feedback.

Benefits for the student and school community

The ongoing aim for e2 was to expand the curriculum offering for students. Not only has the curriculum been expanded, but also there has been wide professional sharing between teachers, between schools and between other school education regions. There also have been social benefits for students breaking down barriers between schools and raising standards through the mixing of students.

Along with TAFE, e2 schools have developed a partnership with Charles Sturt University to produce an accelerated Nursing pathway where students study two first year subjects of a Bachelor of Nursing Degree while completing their HSC. These students have guaranteed entry into the degree under the Principal’s Early Entry Recommendation scheme if they have successfully completed the subjects. They receive advanced standing for these subjects in their first year of university, allowing time to transition into tertiary study.
Further pathways are being investigated with discussions already being held between the Health and Rehabilitation Science Faculty and e2 schools and a possible new link into Agriculture and Agribusiness. These partnerships are aimed at providing pathways for students and trying to blur the boundaries, allowing for smooth transitions from one education deliverer to another.

Partnerships developed between schools and TAFE have led to the introduction of certificate courses that lead directly to employment once students have completed their HSC, for example the Health Services Certificate III and the Children’s Services Certificate III.

**Sustainable benefits**

Benefits are sustainable through the embedding of the values and the e2 belief in the entitlement of an excellent education for all students. The process of establishing the e2 curriculum to expand curriculum in each of the schools has become embedded and is part of the Year 10 into Year 11 planning routine. There is an ongoing commitment by the principals of the schools to work together, providing the impetus for the collaboration and producing the funding for the e2 curriculum through each school allocating both money and staffing. The positions of head teacher and deputy principal have been secured for another three years to operate the program and manage the partnerships that have developed.

Staff from all of the schools see the benefit of the collaboration and are keen for it to continue particularly since it will be playing a significant role in responding to the new school leaving age.

**What are the drivers of the innovation e2?**

From within the schools the initial driver was the fact that at one particular high school in town the numbers were dropping drastically in the senior years and we needed to have a look at how we could stop the spiral downwards, particularly to offer science subjects in Year 11 and Year 12. We needed to maintain a curriculum that would allow academic students to remain at that particular school therefore allowing other students wanting to go to that school to have a strong academic pathway.

So the two schools in town came together to talk in 2005 about that and agreed that it was about public education and that both schools would do the best that they could to ensure that every student was able to access a full and varied curriculum.

But they realised that what happened in town also was going to impact on the surrounding schools. We have a rural school about 38 kilometres south-west of Orange that would have been impacted upon by this arrangement in town and we also had a central school about 38 kilometres north of Orange, which also would have been impacted upon. And there had been some students leaving the central school to come into a private school in town for Year 11 and 12, so they didn’t want to lose any more students.

Whatever we decided to do within Orange itself we needed to make sure that our rural schools weren’t going to be impacted upon negatively.

**What type of innovation does e2 represent?**

e2 maximises the curriculum in two different ways. The first way is through video conferencing. The timetable structure had to be looked at to try and line up the schools so that any subject that was going to be offered across the schools by videoconferencing would happen at the same time.

We also have another day, which is called a Super Wednesday, where things run differently in blocks to allow for practical work and extension work and during which time TAFE is able to offer morning and afternoon classes. So by expanding the curriculum through school structural change we were able to really cater for all types of kids.

**What are some examples of best practice professional approaches used by you or other staff involved in e2?**

We formed a partnership with Charles Sturt University to look at the new pedagogy involved with teaching and learning in these new environments and highlighting the best practice that’s involved. We are looking at quality teaching and how that impacts on learning outcomes for our kids and looking at the new environments that we have, the video conferencing environment and the Super Wednesday block classes. They each require different methods of teaching.
How can this best practice by you or your colleagues assist in the achievement of any aspect of the three goals of the overall project?

We’re definitely maximising the curriculum through video conferencing. We also have a Moodle server, which allows for electronic storage of resources and a discussion forum and a Wiki space.

Regarding the raising of the school leaving age, we know we’re going to have a number of students who don’t really want to be at school to start with, that can’t wait to get out of here, but they have to be here. So we’re looking at compressing our courses to offer them a full-blown certificate while they’re in Year 11, allowing them to then move into the workforce at the end of Year 11 when they’ve turned 17. During that time they’re at school they’re maturing and obtaining their qualification.

What management of e2 is required to ensure its success?

We have a management team that meets once a month consisting of the principals of the school, the e2 head teacher and e2 co-ordinator, our school education director. We also have on the committee our Western Institute of TAFE curriculum director, the regional curriculum consultant, the regional VET co-ordinator and a representative from the primary school groups.

What is one highlight for you?

The highlights I guess are the success of the kids. For example, last year’s Year 12 dance group was the first group to go through completely from Year 11 to Year 12. The students were invited to Call Back, which is highly prestigious on their HSC. So that’s a huge success, an outstanding success for them.

What are some other benefits arising from e2?

Apart from other things I have said earlier, I think the benefit for the student is that development of relationships with students and staff, from other schools.
Case study No. 8

HIGH EXPECTATIONS,
EXPANDING HORIZONS

INNOVATION SNAPSHOT

- **SUMMARY**
  - At Burwood Girls High School high expectations of all students are clearly articulated: all students are encouraged to maximise their learning in a variety of ways. The expectation at all Year levels is that students come here to do their best.
  - In return, the school has in place a strong support system and provides students with a wide range of study options and pathways.

- **DRIVERS**
  - Staff and parents believe that girls need to achieve an HSC to maximise their chances of success in life and proceed to further education.

- **SUCCESS FACTORS**
  - Burwood Girls’ High Expectations and Expanding Horizons’ approach involves the provision of a flexible curriculum based on student need, career directions and interests.
  - The approach also includes extensive support for students as they transition from Year 10 into senior studies.

- **BENEFITS**
  - The retention rate of students to the end of Year 12 is high and each year the students achieve excellent results in the HSC. This success creates more options for them, in the longer term.

- **RELEVANCE TO NEW SCHOOL LEAVING AGE**
  - The students’ strong support from and connection with the school and the school’s focus on learning and high expectations have resulted in the majority of students staying on to complete Years 11 and 12.

Context for innovation

The local community of Burwood Girls High School is diverse in terms of ethnicity, culture and socio-economic mix and has high expectations of the school. Established in 1929, the school has a tradition of excellence and innovation. The school clearly states that all girls are expected to learn as much as they can. This learning culture has been developed over a long period of time and is articulated through the purpose statement. That statement is widely displayed and is the rationale for all learning programs.

‘Maximising’ curriculum

The purpose statement clarifies that Burwood Girls High School wants all students to respect the rights of others and recognise individual differences and take responsibility for their learning. All students are encouraged to maximise their learning in a number of ways: exploring different ways of learning; thinking, questioning and reflecting; believing they can learn; setting higher standards; working cooperatively in groups; and developing effective problem solving, communication and decision making skills.

The school has a mixed ability ethos and proudly articulates this at parent information sessions for students wishing to enrol. The only streaming that occurs is in Mathematics from Year 8 to 12. All other classes have a full range of student abilities and students support each others’ learning in the classroom and challenge each other to do their best.
Burwood Girls ‘High Expectations and Expanding Horizons’ approach involves the provision of a flexible curriculum based on student need, career directions and individual interests, for the specific student cohort, as they transition from Year 10 into senior studies.

Students have a free choice for subject selection. Rather than establish a set of lines based on knowledge and experience of previous subject choices, the school opens up the process to student selections and gives them a voice. Students are given a subject selection booklet called ‘Options’ with the full range of subjects and courses that teachers have the ability to offer.

In modelling flexibility, the school maintains some courses with small numbers of students. Smaller subjects are able to be offered due to reduced face-to-face time with the teacher and a commitment by the school to keep the curriculum as broad as possible. The school supports a breadth of languages: in 2009 it enrolled students in nine language courses for the HSC.

New courses are introduced periodically. For instance, Japanese Beginners was introduced in Stage 6 in 2007 as a large number of students were seeking enrolment in this course at Open High School. Dance was introduced in Stage 6 as a result of the interest and enthusiasm of students in Stage 5 elective Dance and the refurbishment of facilities.

**Student support**

Burwood Girls ‘High Expectations and Expanding Horizons’ approach has focussed on providing support for students as they transition from Year 10 into senior studies. Year 10 Interviews are combined with case management and careers counselling. Prior to submission of subject choices, every Year 10 student is interviewed by a member of the team, consisting of principal, deputy principals, HT welfare, year advisers, careers adviser and school counsellor. Then a case manager is identified to meet the specific needs of students.

Youth Pathways counselling helps build student resilience. A Youth Consultant with the Youth Pathways program has established a strong link with the school over the past two years and counsels a targeted group of at risk students in Years 9-12.

**Best practice**

The school has the expectation that students will continue with their education until Year 12. Students are not encouraged to leave after Year 10 - no matter how challenging their junior years may have been. Instead, the school recognises ongoing student achievement in many different ways and encourages all students to achieve their best.

**Achieving goals of the new school leaving age**

‘Aiming higher’. The school sets high and clear expectations for 15-19 year olds and supports that with student recognition and awards at events such as assemblies, presentation days and other ceremonies.

The school offers a Gifted and Talented program for students in Years 7 and 8 each year. This early intervention program develops research skills and independent learning skills and has increased the self-esteem and confidence of these students as learners.

‘Supporting strongly’. Students are strongly supported in making course and career choices by teachers skilled in understanding options and counselling skills. The careers adviser is a key member of learning support team. Parents are also actively involved in the process.

‘Strengthening connections’. The school fosters cohesion within year groups and places a high value on excellent student/teacher relationships.

The students generally have a very strong connection with the school. Students celebrate the ‘old girls’ who like to visit and reminisce about their own school days. As a single-sex school the staff focus the attention of students on the strength of women, celebrate the successes of women in the community and look to strong female role models for inspiration.
One of the Year 12 students graduated recently with a huge smile on her face and a big sigh of relief from her teachers. The sigh of relief was not because teachers were pleased to see her go; on the contrary, it was because the student had managed to get her HSC above all odds.

The student had enrolled in Year 7 after having experienced disrupted schooling and periods of time in refugee camps. Her parents were educated but forced to find employment in unskilled areas. The student found it difficult to adjust to expectations at home and school and displayed many risk-taking behaviours. Behaviour management strategies were put into place from Years 7-10, but when she reached Year 11 the school placed the onus on her to determine her destiny.

The school provided support at this key transition stage in the form of funded learning support, assistance with study skills, regular monitoring and parent meetings and appointment of a teacher mentor.

The interventions were a success. She achieved her HSC and is now ready to embark on the next stage of her life. She is a young woman with much more confidence and self-esteem than the girl who arrived in 2004 full of anger and disillusionment.
Teachers of students in Years 7-12 have the opportunity to make a Students Causing Concern referral, also in Week 5 of each term. These referrals assist in the early detection of issues in the areas of student attendance, behaviour, learning, emotional, physical, psychological and social well-being.

The school has also implemented ongoing internal support systems. For example, it sought the assistance of a regional Community Liaison Officer to help support a group of Pacific Islander students experiencing difficulty with senior school demands and cultural barriers to learning.

In case the student is not progressing, follow-up strategies are available. As an example, the school has adopted a case management approach to handling students with special needs, to ensure that they do not ‘fall through the cracks’.

What are the drivers for your innovative approaches and strategies?

The main drivers are my school executives. My deputies and I have played significant roles in ensuring that we make the best provision for the students who come to this school in terms of curriculum and other support that we can offer.

How would you describe the type of innovation at the school?

At Burwood Girls High School we have an incredible learning climate. The students are engaged, they’re talking about things, there’s a nice relationship between students and staff and that’s evident to anyone who comes to visit the school. It is a friendly but very purposeful place to be and as a place of learning certainly it creates a climate and a culture that you come here to learn and you come here to do your best, because that’s the expectation at all levels. Everyone has to do their best. If I look at data it shows that we value add a lot.

What type of innovation? Well obviously I’ve maximised the curriculum, I have an incredibly wide curriculum choice for students. We think we’re the only school locally that teaches six languages. We also teach sport studies, so we try and cater for a whole range of student.

The student support is strong at the school, and we celebrate our diversity. We interview all of our students in Year 10 who are going into Year 11 regarding their choices and their career options. That’s a huge program because it involves both deputies, my careers adviser, my school counsellor and my head teacher welfare as well the year advisers of Year 10 and myself. We talk to the girls about their career aspirations and their subjects and have they thought of this or that; and we guide them. If students feel that they’re being supported they’re more willing to make decisions about going on and going further.

What are some examples of best practice professional approaches used by you or your other staff?

We’ve adopted the quality teaching and learning framework wholeheartedly in this school. We’ve certainly tried to involve technology in a lot of the teaching. We’ve tried to remain current in terms of revitalising our teaching.

We try to be open about everything we do so students know how they’re going to be assessed. I insist on having everything published. We have information evenings for parents in every year to talk to them about what it means to do a School Certificate, or what it means to do an HSC, or what the expectations are for, say, Year 7. And we have celebration of learning days where parents can come and listen to what the students have learnt. We publicly acknowledge achievements and I think that’s a strength.
students benefit from coming here because they feel they have achieved success and they feel that their work is meaningful

How can your best practice assist in the achievement of the goals of the new school leaving age project?
The only kids that I see are falling by the wayside are those that say “I hate school, I want to get out”. In the past we might have said, “Okay, we have an exit plan”, as we have always developed an exit plan for the students, for example, by bridging the gap so they can go to TAFE or allowing them to do some work experience for a while. But I think we’re going to have to formalise things a little bit more in the future. I’m talking about the really at-risk students. It’s going to be very hard raising the bar for them, as you can’t do anything until you help sort out their personal issues.

What management of the innovation is required to ensure success?
If I go back to and ask how will we be able to assist those students that I feel will be difficult, I use an outside agency, Work Solutions, which is funded by the government. Their person comes in and talks to the girls about how they put together a CV and how you could apply for a job, and she has been very effective with some of our more difficult students. I think I will have to use these outside agencies more often to assist some of our students so they can go into some alternative form of training. These external providers are fulfilling a very important service.

What is a favourite highlight from your story about your innovation?
I’m just so delighted that our girls seem to love coming here and with the numbers who come back and say “Oh, we’re so sad that we left school”. They haven’t forgotten about their school and they’re keen to visit and they wave at you in the street afterwards and run up and tell you what they’re doing. Teachers love that continuing contact with students.

How has the innovation resulted in benefits for the student and or the school community?
Well obviously, students benefit from coming here because they feel they have achieved success and they feel that their work is meaningful, that their learning’s been meaningful and it’s a springboard to something else later on.

I think staff feel happy in the sense that they’ve been able to fulfil a role that they think is important, which is assisting students to achieve their maximum possible potential.

How are you or your staff ensuring the benefits for the students are sustainable?
I think we work well as a team; the team work’s evident here. The staff work together extremely well and if there’s a student at risk then immediately that student is supported by the welfare team that looks at ways to ensure that there’s going to be success. That team work means that the staff are always very positive and they don’t bear a grudge if the student is recalcitrant and falls off the rails. The staff say to the student “give it another shot; try”.

What are the main factors that have brought about success?
The staff are positive and they’re willing to work together. They are trusting of each other and believe that working well as a team is important, as is maintaining the ethos of ‘learn as much as you can’. To all be on the same page has been very much part of our mission statement for the last seven years and we thrive on our success.

Recently a science head teacher entered our Year 9 girls into a science competition on astronomy. I said to him that I didn’t think our kids knew much about astronomy but he said they were going to have a go. Well, we won the competition. I mean it’s about that: it’s about being willing to take risks and, with student learning too, that brings dividends.

Our general belief in the school is that the longer you’re at school, the greater success you might have in life. You get somewhere with an education. Parents might say it, but we also say it: everyone here at the school feels that you have to work hard to get somewhere.
Case study No. 9

Mulwaree High School

PLANNING AN ALTERNATE PROGRAM

INNOVATION SNAPSHOT

- SUMMARY
  - Mulwaree High School is planning a suitable program of study for students who might previously have left school at fifteen.
- DRIVERS
  - The staff and community wish to raise the proportion of young people who move on to study programs instead of leaving school.
  - Some staff are championing the cause of helping students create options for their future.
- FEATURES
  - The program provides the participating students with strong mentoring support, as part of the goal of personalising the learning and monitoring each student’s progress.
  - The program encourages staff to build their capabilities to help students relate learning to the real world.
- SUCCESS FACTORS
  - Planning based on clear goals is a factor likely to underpin future success.
  - The identification of student needs, partly through analysing NAPLAN results, will also assist in achieving success.
- BENEFITS
  - Participating students will create more options for their future, particularly by developing employability skills.
- RELEVANCE TO NEW SCHOOL LEAVING AGE
  - Students who might previously have become disengaged will be helped to gain and maintain their motivation and enthusiasm.

Context for the innovation

With the increase in the school leaving age, Mulwaree High School is examining how it can offer a suitable program of study for students who might previously have left school at fifteen, enabling them to achieve the Higher School Certificate. The first challenge is to fit this alternate program into school timetable and structures and meet Board of Studies requirements, while gaining community support for the required work placements.

For the target students, staff are seeking to develop a curriculum that is more relevant and engaging. They realise the delivery of the courses needs to be more flexible yet still meet course outcomes.

Additionally, the courses need to be relevant to real life and linked to work experience.

At the same time the staff need to take into account the literacy levels of this group and how to maintain the students’ motivation and engagement. Ways need to be found to promote student responsibility and self direction in learning and the development of lifelong skills, particularly so the students can become more employable.

Staff aim to provide work placements that challenge students’ thinking and broaden their post-school options. The work placement needs to be organised as a once-a-week part of the alternate program. Staff have initiated contact and meeting with parents to discuss the proposal and gather their support.

Staff selected to be part of program need to be open to new ideas and innovative thinking. They need to relate well to this particular group of students and maintain students’ motivation.

Innovation in student support

The aim of the alternate program is that students build resilience by achieving success in the areas of study offered. This will build their ability to adapt to pressures and work with all types and groups of people, including school and work mates and employers.

The student voice is being heard. Although the subject choice is not broad, students have a choice of TAFE courses and work experience. They are also helping to select and build the programs offered from course syllabi.

Students will have face to face teaching at school for only 3.5 days per week, with half a day at TAFE and one full day on work experience.

The school has offered and allocated time for a staff mentor to oversee the programs. This role will involve providing a support to enable students to maximise outcomes and continue to have input. All students are keen to have a staff mentor.

The school is aiming to deliver a ‘service’ that is more personalised, including monitoring students’ progress and reviewing the program on a regular basis. Staff will maintain regular contact with employers regarding students’ progress and will encourage students to reflect on their learning from their work placement, both in their diaries and in interviews with staff.
Innovation in professional learning
This program will enable teachers to have the flexibility and freedom to deliver their subject content in a more creative and contextualised manner, increasing the relevance to the students. Using the support of a secondary COGS consultant, the teaching staff will benefit from training and development in developing this cross curriculum approach. The training and skill development will then be transferred to the school’s faculty areas as the participating teachers raise the awareness of other staff.
This enhancement of teacher training and development will raise the awareness of quality teaching and will increase the motivation of other staff to use innovative methods to relate learning to the real world of the students.

Best practice
The Mulwaree Alternate Program will be a more personalised learning program for students. This student group will form a distinct class in the overall school timetable and their individual learning needs will be identified, including by analysing past NAPLAN results. This use of strategic data will assist planning to identify student needs and will enable curriculum delivery in an appropriate manner.

Staff will also ensure parent involvement through regular meetings and contact, enabling parents to gauge their child’s progress.

Achieving goals of the new school leaving age
‘Aiming higher’. To help students aim higher, a conscious decision was taken not to ‘dumb down’ the content or delivery. Instead, the program will provide a curriculum that links to and is meaningful to the students’ lives outside and inside the classroom. Expectations of each student will be clearly identified.

‘Supporting strongly’. The focus will be on what the student is interested in post-school. Hence, students will be exposed to opportunities and experiences to enable them to make better decisions for the future.

‘Strengthening Connection’. The delivery of the program will include work placement experiences. As often as possible in class, students will be encouraged to relate their authentic learning to these real life experiences.

Benefits for the student
The relevant and flexible curriculum will allow students to succeed. Students will obtain social and other skills from experiencing the work experience on a regular basis.
Benefits will be sustained through putting in place the staff co-ordinator and student mentors and actively involving staff and parents.

The positive response from both students and parents is very encouraging. It is still a work in progress and only the initial stages of program planning have been undertaken, but to date sixteen students have been identified for the commencement of the program.
Interview with Wayne Southwell, Deputy Principal, Mulwaree High School

What are some of the key drivers of innovation within and outside the school?

Some of the key drivers from within are several enthusiastic staff members who wish to try and put in place a program to meet a majority of students’ needs. It’s been known for some time that we have a population here that would be comparable to most country comprehensive high schools where the actual number of students entering vocational education or university isn’t particularly high. It’s OK, but it’d only be comparable to the state average. One of the drivers of this program is the fact that something had to be done to meet student needs. Second, there are a couple of key staff members driving it, particularly the principal Tom Coll. He is very supportive and is keen to see this project come to fruition. He sees it as vital in meeting school needs and is obviously a main driver in allowing flexibility and innovation. Other drivers are our career adviser, Amanda Hinde, and a willingness of a number of other staff to come on board.

We have had success in the past in a number of other programs to meet student needs. One of them was called the Sculpture Program which was for students at risk. The success rate in that is extremely high. So, we have a record of innovative programs with very high rates of success. Staff have a confidence that these things will make a difference.

Was the local community or parents external drivers?

The drive came probably more from parents than the broader community. We have a good rapport with the community as far as our school goes, say with workplace placements. For feedback within a community, we have a very active P&C committee. This innovation is driven more from within than without, but certainly a parental input has been pursued and parents are enthusiastic.

What is innovative about your approach to student support?

This innovation is really based on the delivery of a flexible curriculum, and the student support and the professional learning are geared towards assisting the delivery of that curriculum. When we talked to this particular group of students, they could see that what we proposed would meet their needs for linking the real world with school. Once they can see that linking between what is been taught in the classroom and their one day a week work experience, hopefully their enthusiasm and motivation to continue will be raised.

One of the major things to come out of the interviews we did with these students was that they really wanted a teacher mentor, which surprised me, given that some of them are quite bright. I think we’ve got three students who are classified as IM in that group. So we plan on interviewing them on a regular basis, as well as checking their student diary. As the co-ordinator, I’ve been given a school loading to do that, and we’ll have an overseeing mentor who is a metal work teacher who also oversees their projects. He has a good handle on that approach. He has a very flexible approach in what he delivers already, so he’s an asset. And then obviously we’ll bring the staff team on board by continually supporting their students by asking them ‘Is this delivery meeting what you want?’ We’ll also give them a say in what’s delivered.

What are some examples of best practice by staff?

This project focuses on a particular class in Year 11 and the only choice they get is the TAFE course. We’re going to remodel the delivery of the other subjects that we’re presenting. We’ve started to analyse the NAPLAN results for that particular group and analyse their strengths and weaknesses. Our analysis of NAPLAN identified the outcomes they’re missing. That then led us into the presentation of this COGS approach where we’re looking at Business Studies, Work Studies, SLR, and Maths and English, and each of those will be geared very differently in delivery. So we are building a quality teaching program and backward mapping from the outcomes we want to meet.

How will you achieve any of the goals of the raising of the new school leaving age project, for example, ‘aiming higher’, ‘supporting strongly’?

Regarding aiming higher, we’ve made a conscious decision not to dumb this down which would have been probably an easier option. We’re providing the students with an opportunity that will make them more employable, which is really the most important thing. They’ll come out of it with experience that will make them far more employable than probably most other students, and the important thing is not to dumb it down.
Regarding supporting strongly, we’re going to have to rely fairly heavily on two things: one, that the student’s doing the right thing by the employer, and two, having the employer’s support, which we have at the moment.

What management of the alternate school is required to ensure its success?

As deputy I’ve been given a school allowance next year to oversee the alternate. We also have in place an overseeing mentor as well as the individual student mentors, and the manager of student feedback. We’re proposing the student diaries be done differently, Bill the teacher involved is very, very good at filmmaking, and we’re proposing something similar to Big Brother diaries where we have set questions and then students will learn that process as well as gain experience at speaking. So, it’s a broader approach than just writing a diary, and we’ll be analysing that.

The project involves managing what we hope is a flexible delivery while meeting the Board of Studies’ requirements. That’s going to take a fair management role because, in the back of everyone’s mind, are that three of the subject areas will require an exam at the end of it. We’re conscious of what the Board of Studies’ requirements are, and at the same time we’re trying to manage flexible delivery, which is going to be quite awkward.

What other management challenges loom ahead?

We’re anticipating we could have a problem at the end of, say, Term 1 where students are going, ‘Oh, this course is much harder than I thought it was; this course isn’t what I thought it was’, and then we have this whole changeover of subjects, just when you’re locked into timetables and the staffing and everything else.

I’m anticipating that there could be a group who will want to join in when they see these students enjoying school, or having the opportunity to be at school three and a half days a week because their half a day’s taken out on TAFE and another full day on work experience. That’s the experimental part, as it’s a very mixed group, and they’re going to be in a class for three and a half days a week, and it will be interesting to see how they get on, how they respond to each other with their very mixed abilities. I’m interested to see how that unfolds.

How might the innovation result in benefits that are sustainable?

Student engagement will ensure that they remain enthused. And the feedback data will be there for us to make changes.

One of the significant things so far, has been the student voice. That is the priority. Once we stop listening to them, then it’s going to lose relevance. We need to make sure that we’re providing time for that feedback to occur as well as having plenty of time to have regular team meetings with staff so that they see themselves as a driver of this, not being driven from above. If we can work on that team approach, so that the students and the teachers as a team are driving this, then I think it could go in all sorts of directions which is even better.

What do you think will be the main factors that will bring about success?

Obviously planning is going to be important, and a firm idea of where we all want to go. Making sure we keep identifying student needs will be important, and part of that is studying those NAPLAN results and giving them the opportunity to succeed.

It really needs to be a flexible delivery. And our first focus will be on improving literacy, so that alone should have a direct result on the HSC.

We’re providing the students with an opportunity that will make them more employable, which is really the most important thing.
Case study No. 10

OPTIONS BEYOND UNIVERSITY

INNOVATION SNAPSHOT

- **SUMMARY**
  - With the assistance of a scholarship, David Beattie is researching and developing alternative strategies that might engage students and provide them with a valid pathway to the HSC and employment.
  - Innovative strategies include a trade training model for schools called ‘Centres for Industry Training Excellence’ or CITE. The other being considered at The Entrance Campus is ‘not-school’, aimed at students who would have left either prior to or after the School Certificate.

- **DRIVERS**
  - The main driver behind the innovation is the desire to better meet the needs of the 70% of local students who do not go on to university and the increasing number of these students for whom traditional academic pathways are not suitable.

- **FEATURES**
  - Components of the CITE initiative include the provision of industry standard facilities at six locations on the Coast, adjusted curriculum to suit students enrolling in a trade training pathway and links with local industry and business.

- **SUCCESS FACTORS**
  - When the innovations are implemented, the transition pathways on offer to students will need to be well planned and well supported by the careers and transition team.
  - Resources will need to be identified to enable the undertaking of these new approaches.

- **BENEFITS**
  - More students will complete the Higher School Certificate or equivalent qualifications, opening up for themselves more study and work options including with local employers who have indicated an increasing interest in engaging school leavers with higher qualifications.

- **RELEVANCE TO NEW SCHOOL LEAVING AGE**
  - These Central Coast initiatives are directly aligned with the new need to provide senior students with more options that engage them, enable them to develop skills and gain qualifications, and prepare them well for future pathways.

Context for the innovation

As principal of Tuggerah Lakes Secondary College, The Entrance Campus (Year 11 and 12 students), David Beattie has put considerable effort into the development of strong pathways for academic achievement in order to improve learning and employment outcomes for all students. While these initiatives have been successful, he remains concerned about the 70% of local students who do not go on to university and the increasing number of these students for whom traditional academic pathways are not suitable.

As a result, he has been actively researching and developing alternative strategies that might engage these students and provide them with a valid pathway to the HSC and employment. In 2009, he had the opportunity to work with the deputy regional director, local secondary schools, and the Federal Government Australian Technical College (ATC) program. This allowed him to engage at strategic levels to develop and implement a trade training model for schools on the Central Coast named “Centres for Industry Training Excellence” or CITEs.

The ATC initiative saw students enrol in a program delivering four subjects for the HSC combined with TAFE and work experience leading to an Australian School-based Apprenticeship.

The CITE initiative arose from the transition of the ATC to management by the NSW Department of Education and Training. This has seen collaboration between DET, DEEWR and local principals to develop a strategic plan to develop opportunities in trade training for students across the Central Coast. Funding by the Federal Government was integral to this planning in providing capital expenditure, while NSW DET is providing recurrent funding for the program.

Components of the CITE initiative include the provision of industry standard facilities at six locations on the Coast, adjusted curriculum to suit students enrolling in a trade training pathway and links with local industry and business.

David Beattie is also the recipient of a DET Fellowship to conduct research into alternative programs to engage and retain 15-19 year old students. To date, this has entailed extensive research of innovations in the United Kingdom, Europe, Canada and the USA.
The CITE model has been developed through a combination of factors including the vision of deputy regional director (Hunter Central Coast) Maree Roberts, David Beattie’s desire to see suitable pathways for students not wanting an academic HSC, Federal Government funding of the ATC program and the transition to management of the ATC by NSW DET. It has also involved extensive negotiation with principals of local secondary schools, the development of a strategic plan for the delivery of vocational education and trade training across the Central Coast, and the availability of new funding sources.

Schools have the opportunity to be involved in a trade training initiative and apply to become a CITE. This can be achieved by setting up a local industry/education links committee, creating quality and flexible delivery of academic and vocational education for students, providing pathways for students to Certificate III in specific trades, creating patterns of study that will engage students, and providing individual support for students to ensure retention and completion of Year 12 or equivalent.

David Beattie believes that perhaps the most important component of CITEs is the provision of curriculum that meets the needs of students in a trade training pathway. HSC courses may be adjusted to ensure a focus on the workplace, project-based learning, literacy, numeracy and ICT, along with structured workplace learning. This will mean that students will be more engaged in their learning and can complete a range of relevant courses that lead to accreditation and certification.

Potential best practice aspects of the CITE model
A branch of the CITE model at The Entrance Campus being considered is ‘not-school’, aimed at students who would have left either prior to or after the School Certificate. This pathway aims to engage traditional school leavers in part-time education and training so that students can achieve a range of qualifications or certificates from courses or programs that will increase their skills and employability. It is envisaged that they will also have some part-time employment in order to meet the requirements of the “Youth Compact”.

David Beattie suggests that this group probably needs to feel that they are ‘not’ at school and so courses may need to be structured across a range of times and ideas. For example, Monday could become ‘certificate course’ day with classes cancelled and using external providers and teachers to deliver a number of courses such as RSA/RCG, manual handling, learn to drive and barista. ‘Class times’ could be outside or overlapping normal school hours. Uniform may not be compulsory. Completion of VET competencies, using a ‘Try a Trade’ model where students gain experience in a number of VET frameworks, may be compulsory. The ideas are endless, says David.

Liaison with welfare and other external agencies is essential, he says, and may lead to opportunities such as enterprise learning and setting up a business, possibly supported by Youth Connections and Department of Housing through the 2261 initiative. A student’s casual or part-time job will need to be a part of this so that the 25 hour requirement can be met. Some of this may be coordinated as structured workplace learning.

At the Central Coast Australian Technical College in 2009, all Year 12 students graduated with their Higher School Certificate and a Certificate III in the trade that they were enrolled in, whether that was Metal and Engineering, Building and Construction or Commercial Cookery. And all of them have been taken on full-time by their employers and are now second year apprentices.
Achieving goals of the new school leaving age project
The scenario outlined above is currently being put into place in schools on the Central Coast of NSW and as a result it is anticipated that over the next 2-3 years, all three goals of the NSLA project can be achieved. Initial thoughts of David Beattie on these goals include the following.

‘Aiming Higher’. By providing multiple pathways towards the achievement of Year 12 or equivalent, students will be encouraged to stay on at school and complete various qualifications. For some students, this may be completion of the SC and HSC, while others may be encouraged into further education by, for example, specialising in the building industry and doing Certificate III in Building and Construction as well as engaging in project management, costing or architectural courses. The provision of qualifications is an important component of this process so that students can be recognised for the skills that they have developed.

‘Supporting Strongly’. All students need to be supported earlier in their school career. Anecdotal evidence seems to show that students and parents are making decisions about schools and subjects in Year 4 and 5. The provision of career education and advice in Stage 3, 4 and 5 could be crucial to students continuing at school. The development of Individual Learning Plans would also promote the importance of making informed and supported choices.

‘Strengthening Connections’. David Beattie sees the development of a ‘one stop shop’ in the form of a website being very important in providing information to all stakeholders as well as being able to track students.

Benefits for the student or school community
If schools can retain more students in a supportive school environment until they achieve Year 12 or equivalent, then the wider community will benefit in a number of ways, says David Beattie. Apart from having a more highly skilled potential workforce, local business and industry will benefit from students who are ‘work ready’ and able to contribute to productivity from day one. All of the research indicates that students who complete Year 12 and go on to achieve further qualifications are more likely to be in employment and will earn considerably more over their lifetime. The whole society benefits, he adds.

Sustainable benefits
The model used at the Australian Technical College has been very intensive as far as support of students goes. However, it has also proved to be very successful as students who have mostly been unsuccessful in schools up to Year 10 have improved their attendance and levels of achievement, and have been retained or assisted into full-time apprenticeships.

In future, the onus will be on schools to monitor students and individually case manage students so that they can all achieve success, in the way experienced by the ATC students, says David Beattie.

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Interview with David Beattie,
Principal, Tuggerah Lakes Secondary School, The Entrance Campus - and seconded as Principal Transition Officer with the ATC Central Coast

What are some drivers behind your work on innovation?
The drop out rate that we were experiencing at the Entrance Senior Campus for Years Year 11 and 12 students particularly in Year 11 was starting to be a real concern and the number of students who were following an academic pathway going to university was probably only about 20%. So they were the major drivers of innovation, combined with the change to the school leaving age, and the pressure on the better completion and retention rates. In terms of putting ideas together, I think that we’ve got the academic part right now in my current school, but to address the needs of that other 80% of the student group is a real concern.

What type of innovation have you modelled?
We have modelled ‘maximising curriculum’ because we have a critical mass of students - an average enrolment over 400 in Year 11 - that you can offer just about every single one of the Board of Studies subjects. But what I’m trying to do now is to run a number of courses which have some sort of certification or accreditation attached to them. Courses like manual handling, food safety and hygiene that will just raise students’ awareness of some employment options and give them some better skills when they’re out there in the workforce.
I’m looking to make adjustments to some of the existing Board of Studies courses and I don’t mean dumbing them down. I mean picking the key parts out and really trying to relate them to the workplace so that students can tie that together a little bit better than perhaps they have in the past.

And also I want to try to creatively run some courses and use, within Board of Studies requirements, one unit or two unit subjects to try and find a combination which meets their needs and also gets them through to the Higher School Certificate if that’s what they want.

We have also modelled student support. The research says that students need a significant adult that they have that contact with and at The Entrance we run a program called Triple S. That stands for survive, study, succeed, so we want students to survive the transition to Year 11, engage with their study and make sure they succeed. Obviously we need to continually improve this support but it basically means that a teacher is with a group of 18 to 20 students over two years as a mentor or coach. I’d like to get to the stage where we have individual learning plans in place and I’d like to see that definitely start in Year 10 but with some of the work I’ve been doing this year I can see a real need to get that started in Year 6 and take them all the way through. And then of course, as in most schools, introduce the various interventions and case management of students.

Regarding school structures I am working with staff at the moment on timetable set-ups for next year so that there’s more flexible delivery, perhaps using blocks of time with some of the vocational subjects like hospitality and construction. We are looking at perhaps running a three or a four day school week and keeping students engaged and perhaps in the workplace as well, so they’re meeting the requirements of legislation but we’re also doing our best to engage and retain them at school.

What are some examples of best practice professional approaches used by you or your staff to support innovation?

At the moment we are making adjustments to some of the Board of Studies courses for example, Business Studies and Work Studies so that they can be delivered much better to engage students but also meet requirements for HSC.

At The Entrance we run an internal program which we just call “Certificate in the principles of more adult learning”. We get groups of teachers to research andragogy and relate it to the quality teaching model.

How can best practice by you or your colleagues assist in the achievement of any aspect of the three goals of the new school leaving age project?

Certainly, the expectation of the student is something that I push all of the time. So we are making sure the academic expectations are there, but in terms of students who are continuing in school and perhaps looking more for work opportunities, the expectations of employers are around attendance and attitude and you can work with students in those areas.

We will be weaving that emphasis into one of the subjects the students will do called Work Studies, making sure that we can address general employability skills in terms of what our employers are telling us they want. I have met with some local employers to discuss what they want young people to have: for example, what sort of skills and what sort of attitudes and at what age will they take them into employment, so we’re able to build that into some of our courses.

Strengthening connections ties back to the information given to students and that is something we need to improve on. I was lucky enough to go over to London in September and look at what’s happening in a couple of schools over there. Their emphasis on careers advice, information and guidance is very, very strong going back into earlier Years. It’s something I will be exploring more in the future.

What management of the innovation is required to ensure success?

It’s up to me to make sure that I’ve got a strong team in place and that can continue to drive this on into the future. Schools are now moving to put career and transition teams into place to make sure that this is happening on a wider scale but it’s really going to have to be a team approach that comes in through there. Once some facilities are built that’ll give it a little bit of a push along and once we can get some decent models and some sharing some information out there and it’ll eventually spread across schools on the Central Coast.
How has the innovation resulted in benefits for the community?

The other big connection that we’re starting to make really well now is with local businesses. The feeling I’m getting from businesses is that they are wanting and willing to be more involved with schools. One of the other projects going at the moment is the Trade Training Centre program and our consortium of schools in our part of the world had an industry breakfast yesterday morning, which was good because I’ve now got employers coming to me saying we’re interested in taking on a school-based trainee and we’d like you to come and talk to us about it.

How are you ensuring the benefits are sustainable?

I’m intending to put some resources and financial resources into this program. At a school level, it’s going to come down to saying “How will we deal with these students that are looking for a trade-training pathway? What sort of programs can we put into place? Or how can we support that with resources?”

What do you think are the main factors that will bring about success in responding to the new legislation?

I think it will be making sure that the transition path is right, and our careers and transition team are going to be critical to that. There’s also the job of finding the funding available to allow people to go and do those sorts of things. There will also be the communication with the wider community that “Okay, this happening, this is what’s on offer and there’s something here for you”. We need to make sure that we do retain students and they do complete Higher School Certificate or some equivalent qualifications.

...communication with the wider community that “Okay, this is happening, this is what’s on offer and there’s something here for you”
IMPLEMENTING A FLEXI SCHOOL

INNOVATION SNAPSHOT

• SUMMARY
  - The Byron Flexi School is a publicly supported school providing individually appropriate alternative learning pathways in the Byron Shire to meet the needs of young people not suited to current traditional comprehensive schooling.
  - The teaching is provided in a number of ways, including by supporting distance education and by on-site TAFE teaching.

• DRIVERS
  - The School is a response by both the local community and the Department to meet the needs of these young people. The School is designed to enable students to succeed, so they will have options for further study and work.

• FEATURES
  - Students are expected to be on site two or three days a week so the class never exceeds six or seven students at any one time, to maximise learning outcomes.
  - An individual program is developed for each student who works at their own pace.

• SUCCESS FACTORS
  - Success is the result of many factors including the following: collaboration between the stakeholders; local community and parent support; and a flexible approach by the School.

• BENEFITS
  - Students gain confidence, achieve study and training outcomes and create options for their future.
  - The local community benefits from young people gaining qualifications and skills.

• RELEVANCE TO NEW SCHOOL LEAVING AGE
  - The Flexi School assists students to stay and progress who might normally be unwilling to continue to stay at school, or be asked to leave. This represents a full turnaround of fortunes.

Context for the innovation

The Byron Flexi School is designed to support young people in the Byron Shire who, for a number of reasons, have not flourished in a comprehensive high school setting. The School provides these students with programs and initiatives that will help them achieve success. The aim of the School is that students will complete a full secondary education or its vocational equivalent and have successful transitions from their schooling to further education, training, employment and community membership.

In addition to support from the Department of Education and Training and others, the School is also underpinned by the Byron Shire Youth Commitment which represents local organisations focused on youth education, training and community engagement.

School structures and best practice

The School is based at the Byron Youth Centre. To provide services to the students, partnerships exist with Byron Bay High School, Mullumbimby High School, Southern Cross Distance Education, TAFE NSW - North Coast Institute, Byron Shire Council, Byron Youth Service and Youth Pathways. These partnerships ensure better support is made available to these targeted students in an alternative teaching and learning environment.

That environment offers personal support, flexible learning approaches and community collaboration. In 2010 the Byron Bay High School will offer construction and hairdressing taught by TAFE teachers, and students from the Flexi School will be able to enrol.

Distance Education supplies a teacher four days a week to support the young people. Students are expected to be on site two or three days a week so the class never exceeds six or seven students at any one time, to maximise learning outcomes. An individual program is developed for each student who works at their own pace.

Achieving goals of the new school leaving age

‘Aiming higher’. At the core of the Flexi School is the belief that young people who have not fitted well with traditional schooling can access alternatives to mainstream schooling, aim high and succeed.

Benefits

Students are achieving success, including through transition programs into the workplace or through accessing formal education in a less institutionalised setting.
success story

In 2009 a total of 17 students at Byron Flexi School will complete their School Certificate Examinations. These students would not have benefited from a traditional formal schooling and require a flexible community learning environment to successfully pursue their goals.

Ian, what are the origins of the school?

This is a school for students who don’t really function in a mainstream school. Over the last 18 months, and in conjunction with Mullumbimby High School and Southern Cross Distance Education, we set up what we call a flexi school. It’s for students who didn’t cope at Byron Bay or a Mullumbimby. They go to a separate venue and the work is delivered through distance education but in a supportive environment.

What are some key drivers behind the flexi school innovation?

One of the things that we were concerned about at Byron Bay High School was the fact that there is a number, probably in every school, of students who don’t function in a mainstream school environment. This may be because they have learning difficulties.

Or else I try to explain it like this: you’re trying to put round students into square holes. Well what do you do with the hexagonal student who doesn’t fit in anywhere? They are the students who may be talented or gifted in certain areas, but they don’t function in a classroom of thirty students, they don’t function in school structures in forty minute periods.

And so rather than have these students lost into the system where they end up being put into “the non-serious student expulsion” category, we tried to put something new together that will support these students in a different environment, giving them the best chance of success.

One of the issues at Byron Bay of course is that it is a tourist town with young people on the streets because it’s a bit of a party town. Rather than have the students wandering the streets with nothing to do, we actually want to give them a chance of succeeding, obtaining some sort of accreditation so they can develop options for their future employment.

Interview with Ian Davies, Deputy Principal, Byron Bay High School
Is the structure of the flexi school the main innovation?
The Flexi School came out of an initiative developed through Byron Bay High School and Mullumbimby High School because we saw the needs of these students. We met with our school education director, Greg Cloak and with the representative from the Department, Peter Skaines, who is the VET coordinator for the Far North Coast. And we talked about how we can look at different school structures to support these students.

We then got TAFE involved and looked at how they could support the school. Because of the unique location of Byron Bay, the nearest TAFE colleges are at Kingscliff or Wollongbar, both at least an hour’s drive each way. As there is no option to go to TAFE, we felt we had to bring the idea of the school into the community.

We met with the community over a twelve month planning period and then set up a structure to allow entry to a flexi school for students who were at risk at their school. They were interviewed and if we felt that it was appropriate because of their attendance, because of the learning difficulties, or because of the at risk nature of the students, they could be sent to an alternative venue.

Where is the school based and who funds it?
The venue is the Byron Youth Centre. It’s called the YAC, Youth Activity Centre and we have a classroom structure there. It’s very flexible. We initially had TAFE delivering a course two days a week and students who were over 15 would enrol through TAFE and they could access a TAFE teacher and they could do the Certificate of General and Vocational Education.

If they were under 15 they had to be referred again from their school and Distance Education supplied a teacher two days a week. The students do modules of work, working towards the School Certificate. In 2009 the funding for TAFE ran out and so at the beginning of this year Distance Education took on board the over 15 students as well and increased the support from that teacher to four days a week. They are funding him four days a week to work with all of the students progressing towards the School Certificate and eventually to the Higher School Certificate.

The distance education comes out of Southern Cross School, a kindergarten to Year 12 school based in Ballina and we have a close relationship with it. I represent Byron Bay High School on the Management Committee and we make resources available to the Flexi School. If they want to do, say, science experiments, we supply microscopes. Sometimes they want support from a school counsellor. When they did their School Certificate this year they come to our school to use the facilities here. We try to support them in these practical ways.

What’s best practice in the professional approach you’re taking with the school?
The Flexi School is very supportive in putting in mentor programs, in putting welfare initiatives in place, for these at risk students. We acknowledge that there are students who in other schools who might just fall through the cracks, so to me the best practice is in engaging these students.

Last term one of our Year 10 students at Byron Bay High School had gone through a number of suspensions and normally we would have been looking at expulsion for his behaviour. We were able to meet with the family and said “Rather than go down this path, let’s sign your child out of this school and apply through Distance Education to get him into the Flexi School”. That same student will get his School Certificate this year. It’s something we could not have guaranteed if he’d stayed at Byron Bay.

This is our second year and it’s been a huge success.

How can this best practice by you or your colleagues assist in the achievement of any aspect of the three goals of the new school leaving age project?
Both the staff and the students have high expectations. We have students who now realise that in a different structured environment they are able to achieve success. They are able to meet the outcomes required for the School Certificate. And this year, we have 17 students who have gone to the Flexi School who will come to Byron Bay High School to sit for their School Certificate exams.

When you look through the list of names there are students who we would have thought would not have achieved that success. So it’s about working towards success for those students.

Supporting young people in identifying options and making decisions is a goal of the management committee, which has representatives from Youth Pathways, TAFE and the Department of Education and Training. We meet once a term and look at what support we can put in place for the young people. That has included the provision of mentoring programs through the local community.
Strengthening connections has resulted in the school having a really positive effect in the local community. People see it as a real positive thing. We have the full support of the local council, and the Mayor, Jen Barham, is on our side and promotes the school. Trevor Fletcher has been to see what we’re doing. So we’ve managed to show that this is a real success story and that the students are meeting outcomes and they’re gaining self-confidence. They’re gaining the willingness to participate in a social environment.

**What management of the innovation is required?**

The biggest problem is always going to be money. Because the students are enrolled through Distance Education, they get the support of the Department of Education and Training. We’re managing it quite successfully in that way.

The School also works because of the support of the Byron Shire Council, because they manage the Youth Activity Centre. They’ve given us the venue to be able to provide the School. So there is a lot of classic ‘outside the square’ thinking about how we can support people.

The deputy of distance education is David Cox and Richard Hazelwood-Ross is the deputy at Mullumbimby High School. They were successful in getting a $50,000 grant through the National Bank to financially support the Flexi School. With that funding we will look at setting up another branch at Mullumbimby so that the students from there won’t have to travel down into Byron Bay.

Our success is based on having representatives from a number of different agencies and sometimes thinking outside the square about how we can support the kids and what we can access. We initially had $40,000 through TAFE and now we’ve got $50,000 through the Schools First program.

**What is a favourite highlight from the story about the Flexi School?**

There’s probably two. One is the fact that 17 students will get their School Certificate this year. That is a fantastic thing to be bragging about.

The other one is the student we’ll call Ben. He was a student enrolled at Byron Bay High School who had a lot of anger issues. We convinced Ben and his father that Ben could be one of the first students involved in the Flexi School. Ben went on not only to get his School Certificate, or the equivalent through TAFE, but also he matured into a role model.

He now says that because he was given the opportunity to operate in a completely different environment, he was able again to realise that he could succeed at his own rate, he could achieve the outcomes, and he developed self-confidence. He then matured, he started looking at his anger management and he was a real success. And he’s now gone to either Sydney or Melbourne to have a career down there. If had he stayed in a mainstream school, he would have been expelled because there was very little support we could give him. He’s a number one story.

**How has the Flexi School delivered benefits for the student and/or the school community?**

Students are able to succeed in a less structured environment and the school community now has options for these at-risk students. We have a number of students in Year 9 who are not really coping with the school environment, so we have an opportunity to talk to their families and say "Well look, why don’t we go down the Flexi School path where, by being in an environment where there might only be six or eight students working together at any one time, all of the stress of being in a rigorous school environment disappears and allows success?” So the Flexi School is giving us an opportunity to look at alternatives that could still lead to a success.

**How are you ensuring the benefits are sustainable?**

It’s sustainable because it comes under the umbrella of the Department of Education. Distance Education can supply specialist teachers to go into do one-off lessons. We can ensure they’re enrolled through the Board of Studies which guarantees them the accreditation of the School Certificate, and we’re hoping some of next year’s students will go through to do the Higher School Certificate.

Also, if a student goes to the Flexi School and turns around and is able to achieve success, in some cases there may be a transition program for that student back into the mainstream school. We have had several students who came back and did several subjects at the high school and other subjects down at the Flexi School. So there’s that opportunity to re-integrate back into the mainstream environment.
What do you think are the main factors that have brought about the success of the Flexi School?

I think people want it to succeed; people who are willing to give a go to students who are a little bit different. People are willing to put in the extra yards, outside of normal hours. They’re willing to try to bring different programs in to develop with the School.

The success is also because of the involvement of the Byron Youth Services, and the support of the Byron Shire Council and in particular the Mayor. It is because of the support from Byron Bay High School, Mullumbimby High School, Southern Cross Distance Education, the support of TAFE, the support of Youth Pathways and always the support of our SED in wanting to give us the resources as best he can, through the Department of Education, to see that it succeeds.

Are there other reasons for the success of the Byron Flexi School?

It is very low key and was implemented with small steps so that we could ensure that it would succeed. And we’re showing people in the Department that this is a real success story. But we’re not doing it with any fanfare. We get key people to come in and meet the kids who are sitting there with their tattoos and piercings. Then the visitors realise that they students are human beings who really should be given the opportunity to succeed.
VET ACADEMY

INNOVATION SNAPSHOT

• SUMMARY
  - The college has established a number of academies which provide specialised learning and career path opportunities for students. One of those is a VET (Vocational Education and Training) Academy.

• DRIVERS
  - The school leaders felt that the school needed to improve its outcomes, and so the whole focus in recent times has been on meeting the needs of a whole range of students.
  - Another major driver of innovation is digital based pedagogy.

• FEATURES
  - To create time for alternatives, the college has introduced a longer school day, three days per week.
  - The college is establishing an e-learning platform using Moodle, and it is envisaged that the VET Academy programs will be on that platform.

• SUCCESS FACTORS
  - A shared vision. The teachers share ideas and they work hard, and they’re very committed to the students. They’re very committed to improving results.
  - Creating the head teacher VET position gave VET studies a co-ordinated managed focus.

• BENEFITS
  - Students are encouraged to challenge themselves and to aspire to more demanding jobs and contexts than they might face without a full twelve years of schooling.

• RELEVANCE TO NEW SCHOOL LEAVING AGE
  - The principal says to the students there is an HSC for every one of you, and you can do it at this school, you can aspire to be anything you would like to be, and that’s what our curriculum reflects.

Context for the innovation
This case study focuses on this Year 10-12 college in a relatively low socio-economic area of NSW.
In seeking to provide an adult learning environment, the college has established a number of academies which provide specialised learning and career path opportunities for students. These are in Rugby League, Football and Netball, Technical Entertainment and Production (TEPA), and VET.
The Central Coast has 40% youth unemployment and it is vital to provide real pathways for students. The college staff believe that a VET Academy offers a real means of achieving this as it aligns all the programs in order to achieve a shared goal.
Overall, the college has worked to establish close links with appropriate outside organisations. These organisations come in to work with the students in the college as well as providing a range of opportunities for students in specific fields in the community.

Features of the innovation
Some features of the innovations at the college are as follows:
• 'Maximising' Curriculum. The VET Academy offers a broad range of curriculum choices and flexible pathways.
• Student Support. Student support is integral to the success of this academy. The college has funded the position of transition adviser to work with students who are in danger of dropping out and this work is being expanded in 2010. The college also have a learning support coordinator and careers adviser. All students in Year 10 develop a personal learning plan (PLP) with their teacher as part of a Creating My Future Program.
• Professional learning. Much of the professional learning at the college focuses on building leadership capacity in staff as they work together to create and implement innovative programs to meet the needs of the students.
• School Structures. To create time for alternatives, the college has introduced a longer school day, three days per week, to operate in 2010.
Best practice
Teaching staff show great creativity, flexibility and adaptability in providing a wide range of VET programs in fields ranging from Nursing and Allied Health, to Trade Training in Construction, to school based apprenticeships and traineeships and TVET programs. In 2008/09 the college offered the opportunity for students to elect to study one Stage 6 - that is, Year 11 or 12 - Industry Curriculum Framework Course in Year 10.

Achieving goals of the new school leaving age
• Aiming higher. The college constantly refers to three key words - Opportunities, Expectations and Aspirations. The academy concept is about providing opportunities for all students, having high expectations and encouraging aspirations.
• Supporting strongly. Individual mentoring of students is a core activity.
• Strengthening connections. The college is establishing an e-learning platform using Moodle, and it is envisaged that the VET Academy programs will be on Moodle.

Sustainable benefits
The benefits of the college’s approach innovation are sustained through a number of deliberate strategies. These include the implementation of systems for ongoing monitoring and review of student progress. And the systems are underpinned by the establishment of the following: the head teacher VET position to monitor and coordinate activities; the career and transition team to oversee the Academy; and the transition coordinator and learning support coordinator positions.

The college has also implemented ongoing internal support systems including the coaching of individual students and has involved parents closely in all programs to ensure support for students. Additionally, and as part of the mentoring of students, the college has designed follow-up strategies if the student is not progressing.

Success story
Working with the college, a local employer Peninsula Village has provided a large number of school-based apprenticeships and traineeships in a range of areas - aged care, construction and hospitality.

This organisation was awarded the Central Coast VET Employer of the Year in 2009. The college believes this will be a long term relationship that will provide many opportunities for the students. The partnership is highly valued and has become a model for building relationships with other employer organisations.
What drives innovation in the college?

We were a school that really needed to improve our outcomes, and so our whole focus has been on meeting the needs of a whole range of students. We developed a VET agenda, but at the same time, we also put a big emphasis on an academic pathway. We very much have taken a pathways approach in trying to meet the needs of all students. One thing I say to the students is there is an HSC for every one of you, and you can do it at this school, you can be anything, and that’s what our curriculum reflects.

We are well positioned when the leaving age rises to seventeen, because with many of the things that other schools have a bit more work to do we’ve been working on them for a number of years. That was a major driver.

The other major driver of innovation is digital based pedagogy. We’re in the process of establishing an e learning platform, Moodle. Students will be able to access their course of study online, both in class and at home. It is a means of developing adult, independent learning skills in our students. They can get assessments, all that sort of information. So that’s an area that we’re developing, and a major driver of innovation.

Another driver of innovation is the set of academies we have established. We have a sports academy. Our first one was about rugby league, and we extended that to football, and next year we’re going to have a netball academy. We have a performing arts academy, an entertainment and production academy. And now we’ve established the VET academy which encompasses a whole lot of things.

How have the academies fared?

The idea of academies has developed, evolved: it’s the business end of your schooling. This is where you need to have your connections/partnerships with business, with organisations in the community, who can provide career pathways for students. This morning I’ve just signed out a student who is going to the Melbourne Storm in Melbourne. He will complete his HSC at the same time. We’ve had a link with Melbourne Storm through our sports academy. We’ve got three students currently studying at NIDA from our entertainment and production academy. These students have discovered their future career paths in an area they did not know existed before they joined the academy. Those innovations, those drivers, have made us move forward. They fit with our need to continuously improve our results and raise the aspirations of our students.

What is the most significant innovation?

You can’t be really successful without maximising your curriculum offerings. You have to be continually asking yourself, how can we provide a curriculum that meets the needs of our kids? We want to keep a really strong academic pathway, last year we doubled our number of students going to university. That has been really positive. We offer the full range of extension and other academic courses.

At the same time, the VET curriculum is being expanded. We offer nearly all of the VET frameworks, SBATs, (18 students have been completing SBATs this year) and a range of other programs in this area.

So our curriculum is huge, about 50 courses: there’s something in it for everyone. Okay.

What are you doing at Year 10 level?

We have developed a new program for Year 10, where volunteers come in from the community, and work one on one with students on developing their literacy skills. The reading age of some of these students increased two years in term one. It didn’t work for all of them, but it certainly is something we’re going to do again next year and develop further. So we are trying to provide a multifaceted approach that not only gives students career pathways, but also addresses other important learning needs.

How has professional learning contributed to the innovation?

When we became a college, I was the deputy here then, we felt that we were always focussed on welfare and we needed to make the shift to making learning the centre of our focus. As part of this change, we collapsed our school development days in terms two and term three and conducted a two day college learning conference, for all the teachers and parents if they wanted to attend. This has continued and become a central driver of professional learning in the college. We believe effective professional learning is the key to improving learning outcomes for all students.
Are there any other best practice professional approaches underpinning your innovation?
One of the things we’re introducing next year as a direct result of the “17” is what we call our T2 Pathways. We’ve identified students and interviewed them with their parents. We’ve had meetings with local employers to encourage their involvement in the program. We’re trialling it next year, and if it works, we’ll see where we go with it. It’s certainly not best practice at the moment, but we’re trying to make that happen.

Would you like to comment on how your best practice can assist in the achievement of any of the goals of the new school leaving age project?
I say to the students, you can go around the corner to your local school, and you can be whoever you want to be. You can be an astronomer, or you can be a carpenter, and I think that this focus on individual students and whatever their needs, and making sure that you’re aiming programs to do that, is really important.

I’m really thrilled: we’ve got more kids going to university. We’re still not quite at the state average, but we’re close to it, 24.8% last year. And if I look at the school-based apprenticeship and traineeship program we have running, that’s really growing, and it’s about saying to kids, it’s just not only about getting a 99 ATAR, it’s about you, and creating your future that’s going to meet your needs. One of our big things is raising aspirations. We talk opportunities. We talk expectations. We talk aspirations.

What management of these innovations is required to ensure success?
You have to have the personnel. Creating the head teacher VET position gave it a co-ordinated managed focus, otherwise it’s not co-ordinated.

Do you have a favourite highlight from what you’ve been doing?
We had a student who was really struggling in Year 11, but the thing that she absolutely loved was her school-based apprenticeship in aged care. So I thought, this is a student who probably will be in danger of leaving school and who may end up in and out of the work. So I said to her, there is a thing called a Pathways HSC, how about you continue with one or two subjects at school and your school-based apprenticeship and see where you go this year? Well, it just changed her life. She just loves it. At the end of next year, she’ll have a Cert III in her Aged Care, a skills shortage area, and they’re saying they’ll offer her a full-time job. She’s absolutely thrilled.

Is there anything else you’d like to say about your innovations result in benefits?
The innovation has to meet the needs of kids, and at the same time, we can have high expectations of them and try to raise their aspirations. So if kids say “My father’s a carpenter, I want an apprenticeship because that’s what I’m getting” we say “you could be an engineer”. It is not just accepting the status quo. I think you’ve always got to have your foot on the accelerator. You’ve always got to be pushing, you know, and it’s quite exhausting at times!

You seem to do many things to sustain these benefits.
I think that the benefits are sustainable. We review them, but I think you’ve got to have that management structure, and you’ve got to be thinking that sometimes you get innovations and they fall over because you’ve got one key person and they leave. The actual establishment of these decisions such as by a head teacher, or transition co-ordinator, or a career and transition team, makes it a much more sustainable.

What do you think are the main factors that have brought about your success?
I think a shared vision. I think that the teachers share the vision and they work hard to achieve it. They’re very committed to the kids here. They’re very committed to improving results. They do very detailed analysis of their HSC results: every teacher and every faculty develops a very detailed analysis every year, and then that informs where we go the following year. We do a mid-course analysis of our HSC students to work out where we are, where we need to go for the second semester. We have established a STAR program where every five weeks, teachers are asked to identify any students who is “starring”, or one who is at risk for some reason. These students are then followed up. We’re very data driven: anecdotal and hard data informs where we go. I think that’s really important.

We have that shared concept of what we want: we want a really top school for all kids here.
Is there any other innovation you would like to mention?

A program we introduced when I first came here in terms of raising academic results was our Making A Difference Program. We identified our top 25 or 30 students. Other students were welcome to join, but we worked with those particular kids to help them identify and address areas of weakness in their academic study, to broaden their expectations and their aspirations. It’s evolved over the years, but I think that’s an important program in terms of lifting our academic results. It’s multi-faceted.

You seem to be rejecting simply taking what you called a welfare mindset.

We’re trying to drive improvements in outcomes for our students, with a strong value base.

You have to have a learning focus. If you don’t focus on learning, all you do is chase your tail. Like any school, we have students with serious welfare needs and we work hard and are very committed to addressing these. In fact, we have found senior welfare issues to be very different to middle school welfare needs. There are all challenges, but we are determined to keep the focus on learning, because that’s our core business and it is education that will open up the future for our students.

One of our big things is raising aspirations. We talk opportunities. We talk expectations. We talk aspirations.
This section summarises the themes that emerge from the case studies in this publication about innovation and capacity in the public school system. These themes are then used as a basis for a practical model for innovation and continuous improvement within the context of the new school leaving age.

Themes about innovation and capacity in the public school system

Some of the major themes about innovation and capacity in the public school system were set out in the Key Findings section and are not repeated here in full. In summary, those major themes include the following:

- **A shared view** across the public secondary school sector that the new legislation about the school leaving age is an opportunity to provide students with more options.
- **Common benefits** of innovation in schools are a marked increase in student engagement, a frequent improvement in the attitudes of students towards their own potential to learn and a positive response from students when challenged to stretch themselves.
- **Drivers of innovation** include internal factors such as staff motivation and external factors such as new legislation and technology.
- **Critical success factors** include schools’ ability to collaborate internally and partner externally.

Other major and related themes about innovation that emerge from this study and inform the model are as follows:

1. **Clear purpose.** Innovation in NSW secondary public schools is designed to deliver benefits for students. In this set of case studies there was consistent agreement among the participants that the reason for any innovation was to aid students. There was no sense in any of the cases studies, for example, of experimentation for its own sake, such as staff playing with technology such as blogs or wikis without seeking to deliver a concrete benefit to students.

2. **Specific benefits.** Innovation in NSW secondary public schools is targeted at delivering specific benefits for students who might be affected by the new school leaving age, including improving students’ engagement with school and learning, increasing the students’ confidence, fostering students’ resilience, expanding students’ opportunities and pointing students towards meaningful choices in life and work.

3. **Collaborative stakeholders.** Innovation in NSW secondary public schools is aided by the collaborative interaction of a range of stakeholder groups, including staff, parents, TAFE, employers and most importantly students. In relation to the new school leaving age, school staff working with senior level students are aware that the boundaries between school, community and employers need to be less rigid and more fluid.

4. **Team-oriented staff.** Innovation in NSW secondary public schools is underpinned by teamwork between school staff. The team often involves teachers, senior staff, careers and transition advisers and a full range of support staff.

5. **Shared practice.** Innovation in NSW secondary public schools is assisted by staff developing a shared practice. To develop this practice often involves staff looking beyond their traditional focus as, say a teacher of Year 11 curriculum, and seeing how literacy and numeracy approaches in, say, Years 6-7 link to curriculum at Years 10-11. To construct a new, shared practice is a high order achievement and NSW staff profiled in this publication deserve public commendation for this professional achievement.

6. **Advanced practice.** Innovation in NSW secondary public schools is supported by staff developing advanced practice. In the context of the new school leaving age, this commonly requires them to blend elements of pedagogy (the theory of teaching) with elements of andragogy (the theory of teaching adults), and aspects of education (e.g. learning needs analysis) with aspects of social welfare (e.g. case management methodology). And increasingly this advanced practice also involves an understanding of how to use new educational technology such as learning management systems and how to understand quantitative data about student performance.
7. Reflective practice. Innovation in NSW secondary public schools is supported by staff learning on the job, reflecting on their practice, and implicitly moving through the action learning cycle of experiencing, reviewing, concluding and planning.

8. Common goals. Innovation in NSW secondary public schools is focused around three demanding but achievable goals linked to legislation - aiming higher, supporting strongly, strengthening connections. Every case study in this publication demonstrates the capacity of schools to respond to and meet these goals. The Department is to be congratulated for capturing and articulating this small but powerful set of challenging goals as they have galvanised innovative staff to reach higher. While the legislation around the new school leaving age is a broad stimulus for innovation, these three goals have ignited motivated staff.

Continuous improvement

Continuous improvement is defined as “an ongoing effort to improve products, services or processes. These efforts can seek incremental improvement over time or breakthrough improvement all at once. As part of the continuous improvement approach, customer valued processes are constantly evaluated and improved in the light of their efficiency, effectiveness and flexibility.” (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Continuous_Improvement_Process)

In relation to continuous improvement, this set of case studies demonstrates the capacity of NSW secondary public schools to continually improve their responses to students affected by the new school leaving age, by staff:

• scanning the environment, including finding out what others schools are doing, and identifying ideas and practices that might be transferable to their own school
• modifying their school structures, curriculum and support systems
• constantly interacting and networking with and learning from a range of different parties and sources
• developing new skills for diagnosing student needs and designing solutions
• managing, monitoring, evaluating, improving and sustaining those innovative solutions
• learning more, adapting their approaches and reinvigorating their practice to better align with the goals of the innovation
• modelling leading edge practice.

Open innovation

Business innovation is rarely viewed nowadays as a totally internal organisational activity and this is demonstrated in this set of case studies. Chesbrough (2006) and others have coined the term “open innovation” to describe the way “valuable ideas can come from inside or outside the company” (p.43). “Open innovation” involves searching for and adapting whole new sources of innovation. It also requires a workforce with the confidence to make suggestions about directions for change.

Most of the case studies in this publication show how the school innovations were influenced by a combination of ideas from within NSW public secondary schools and from external parties, such as other schools, other educational providers, parents and community organisations, employers and industry groups, other government agencies and technology providers.

The model of innovation and continuous improvement set out in this section emphasises these loose boundaries between schools and other stakeholders, in generating innovation for the benefit of students.

The Learning Coach Program

Georges River College, Oatley Senior Campus

Prepared by Angela Pelc, Head Teacher Teaching and Learning

The following short piece includes many of the themes about innovation that emerge from this study and inform the model described in this section.

Context for innovation

As the senior campus of Georges River College we don’t have the benefit of knowing our students as they progress through the junior years of schooling. It is imperative that we get to know our students quickly, make explicit the expectations of senior school and most importantly support their smooth transition to this demanding stage of their education.

In response to local research in the Sydney Region conducted about engagement and retention, we initiated the Learning Coach program to identify, support, engage and ultimately retain students at risk in Year 11, 2009. With a large cohort of almost 500 students in Year 11 it would be easy for our students to become invisible and feel that no one in the school knows or cares about them. It was shown through the research that vital to engagement and the school knows or cares about them. It was shown through the research that vital to engagement and retention was that students should feel a part of the school and know that someone knew and cared about them as an individual. Addressing this was a fundamental part of the learning coach program.

Strong staff support was vital for success. So the principal, deputy principals, all head teacher, student advisers and volunteering class teachers were involved; 42 staff in all. Almost 150 students from the middle campuses of the college were initially identified as being at academic risk according to their School Certificate and literacy (Torch) test results. At this point, poor subject selections were identified for students to reconsider, with guidance from their learning coach.

Student Support

The learning coach program has been both a proactive and reactive program. In one sense we set out to pre-empt problems we thought faced students entering our school and built the first stage around that initial transition. After that, close consultation with staff drove the successive stages in the program. As academic events approached - for example, exams, subject changes for HSC - we developed ‘conversation guidelines’ to suit. As learning coaches and students became more acquainted, coaches selected questions from the guidelines that fit the individual students.

As well as clarifying school policy, assessment procedures and support structures, the guidelines focused on reflection on assessment task performance, study skills, organisational skills and future planning/goal setting. The main focus was on guiding students toward more academic success when they hadn’t experienced much of that earlier in their school career.

Both subject specific and generic skills were developed in students, so the conversations were very much individualised. They were also informal. Details of conversations were kept to a minimum although copies were made, reviewed and entered onto the school welfare system and kept in student files. These records also informed the next phase of the program to see overall patterns within the cohort.

Best practice

The individualised nature of this program has been one of its strengths. It is flexible for implementation with future cohorts. After evaluation, the proformas or guidelines for conversations are easily adjustable to suit the needs of the next group of individuals who enter Year 11 in 2010.

Evaluation of staff and students involved will inform the program for 2010. All evaluations and anecdotal evidence shows strong support for the learning coach program.

Achieving goals

- Aiming higher. Conversations between learning coaches and students have aimed to show students more opportunities available within the senior school that they could take up as well as career counselling and developing their skills in looking ahead in the short term and long term.
- Supporting strongly. A strong focus on appropriate subject choice was a starting point for this program and started the conversation with students about their possible futures.

Success story

All staff involved reported enjoying their conversations with students. The relaxed nature of their meetings set a good tone with students who may not have had any teacher talk to them outside the classroom except perhaps if ‘in trouble’. While some students may not have seemed to need the assistance we anticipated they would (i.e. they adapted better to senior school than their School Certificate results indicated) it has been worthwhile for all individual students involved to have that contact with a staff member and they have appreciated the interest shown in them. While logistically difficult, many staff have commented that it would be good for all students to have learning coaches, which is a testament to this approach.

The learning support team has driven and endorsed the guidelines and the review of the program in close consultation with the principal who has been a strong advocate for this initiative. The large number of staff involved and supportive of the program has been the key to its success.

Student benefits

Anecdotal evidence suggests that students have enjoyed their conversations and benefitted from the program in being clearer on school procedures, especially around assessment rules and requirements. Suspension and expulsion rates are lower than last year, and less referrals to our regular STARSEARCH program could be considered indicators of how this program has fitted into and enhanced the already strong welfare and student support structures in the school.

Sustainable benefits

Evaluations of this year’s program are being incorporated into next year’s planning. This includes calendar planning to minimise clashes with other programs/school events and maximise time availability for staff involved. Also identification procedures are being adapted to more clearly identify students in the most need. Flexibility in adding students to the coaching program who do not come to our school from the college has been incorporated when students have come to the attention of staff.
Broken Hill High School
Prepared by Darryl Ward, Principal

Following is a short description of an innovation at Broken Hill High School. The brief story illustrates some of the key themes about innovation highlighted in this report.

Context for Innovation
Broken Hill is an isolated area and students have traditionally stayed in town for work or further training with only 25% on average receiving a university offer. Many look for work or a place with TAFE. Those who are unable to find work often leave town.

The Stepping Back Looking Forward program was born out of the desire to provide support and positive role models in career education to indigenous students.

The Stepping Back, Looking Forward Program (SBLFP) program is supported by an agreement between Broken Hill (BHHS) and Willyama High (WHS) Schools and the Broken Hill University Department of Rural Health (‘BHUDRH’).

The program quickly evolved to be inclusive but with a particular emphasis on indigenous students. It started out as a Year 10 - 12 program but insights gained from literature searches about similar programs quickly led to it being expanded out to a 7 -12 program with 3 streams.

The nursing stream was chosen due to the expertise of our partners and the potential capacity for work due to a shortage in the local area of rural health workers and the potential for students to return home after training.

Benefits for students and the community
Benefits of the program for students include increased career choice and an improved connection to school and community. Several students have now moved into health fields post Year 12 and several in Year 11 are working towards nursing as a career.

The program has been expanded to other allied health areas as potential career fields. The program has many partners and has had a beneficial impact on the community.

Sustainable benefits
To aid the program’s sustainability, student and parents are surveyed, research papers have been produced by our partners, and we are seeking to keep the program going having won a Careers Lighthouse award recently.

Description of the model in words and diagrammatically

A practical model for innovation and continuous improvement within the context of the new school leaving age model is expressed in words below and diagrammatically on the following page.

The diagram expresses a range of ideas, including:

• The multiple lines represent the multiple parties involved in innovation in NSW public secondary schools.
• The lines connect the four major components in the model, each represented by an oval shape. Those four components - supportive stakeholders, innovative schools, shared practice and common goals - all interact to produce student benefits. The ovals are floating upwards, flowing with the lines, moving towards student benefits.
• At the tip of the lines, the arrow heads point towards student benefits in relation to the new school leaving age.
• The lines are moving both upward and forward designating confidence, success and continual improvement.
• The interplay of focus and the larger muted lines in the background create a sense of depth. Effective innovation is not superficial: there is depth of expertise required in designing, implementing, managing and sustaining innovation.

The diagram is a stimulus not a summary: it is meant to generate reflection and promote discussion. There is no end to the potential for innovation and continuous improvement with regard to producing student benefits.
Student Benefits
Enhanced engagement
Increased confidence
Greater resilience
More opportunities
Meaningful choices

Innovative schools
Maximising curriculum
School structures
Professional learning
Student support

Supportive stakeholders
Community
Parents
TAFE
Universities
Other providers
Industry
NSW DET
Other agencies

Shared practice
Rethinking
Experimenting
Reinvigorating
Modelling
Collaborating
Networking
Transferring

Common Goals
Aiming higher
Supporting strongly
Strengthening connections

Innovation and Continuous Improvement Model