

Case study No. 12

VET ACADEMY

Brisbane Water Secondary College,
Woy Woy Senior Campus

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.

success story

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.

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.



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 do 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 how 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.

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.