

Engaging School Students: Mabel Park State High School

Throughout Queensland, a growing number of secondary schools have established themselves as Health Hubs and are working with multiple stakeholders with a common agenda to address the projected workforce shortages in health and the high youth unemployment rate. One of these schools is Mabel Park State High School. Mabel Park State School's Health Hub was the first of its kind to be founded on school grounds in South East Queensland and is now one of six Health Hubs in the Logan region.

Aim

The health sector is the second highest employer in Logan and is expected to grow significantly in coming years, however, only 3% of students aged between 15 to 19 years are currently undertaking health-related education or vocational training. Mabel Park State High School is trying to address this through an innovative school-to-work transition program that offers career talks, Health Inspiration Days, hands-on industry work experiences, school-based vocational training and traineeships for students. Their program involves a broad range of stakeholders including health service providers; registered training organisations (RTOs); secondary schools; Regional Development Australia (Logan and Redlands), Logan City Council, Beacon Foundation, and the Department of Employment, Small Business and Training (DESBT), which has a central coordination role.

Health hub

Mabel Park State High School's students come from approximately 65 different cultural backgrounds, reflecting the incredible diversity of the area. Engaging multi-cultural students in the Health Hub is supporting the creation of a local health workforce that better reflects the diversity of the communities they serve. Mabel Park State High School has partnered with other RTOs to provide students in Years 10, 11 and 12 with the opportunity to learn in a simulation training facility on school campus. The facility consists of a classroom fully equipped with laptops and internet access for all students, as well as a skills laboratory. Equipment was donated by Queensland Health, Trinder Park Aged Care, Lifetech and Debetrek, reducing the school's costs. Some of this equipment is not necessary to achieve competency, however by exposing students to it builds familiarity and confidence for entering the workforce.

The Hub offers a Certificate II in Health Support Services, with students attending training one day per week for nine months, with the option to complete 5 to 10 days of structured, relevant work experience with health employers. Through this training, students gain the foundation skills required for the health sector. The students then have the opportunity to transition into a Certificate III in Individual Support.

Staff delivering the training courses are required to hold a Certificate IV in Training and Assessment and the level of the qualification they are delivering, or higher. To ensure staff maintain industry currency of their skills they are required to undertake yearly industry work placements.

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Training cohorts

Mabel Park State High School has opened the program to other students in the area, and invested in a bus to assist students from other schools to get to training and events such as Health Inspiration Days. Over the three years that the Hub has been operating, students from 14 local schools have accessed the Certificate II in Health Support Services program. In 2016 and 2017, 121 students graduated with the Certificate II. Currently, 116 students are enrolled in this course.

Boosting awareness of career pathways

During the Health Inspiration Days students visit hospital wards, aged care facilities or disability services, where they are provided with an overview of the various services and an insight into what their potential roles may be as a school-based trainee. School-based traineeships in a Certificate III in Individual Support provide students with an understanding of how a health organisation operates, as well as good foundation skills that offer a genuine pathway to employment. To date 25 students have chosen this pathway, with a further 40 expected to commence in 2018.

To further boost awareness of career pathways in health and help students to build employer networks, Health Hub students attend industry-driven career talks ("A day in the life"), involving speakers from a cross section of health sectors highlighting the wide range of employment possibilities within the industry. Regional Development Australia Logan is also working with the school to further expand industry connections by exposing students to STEM skill-related careers in health, with particular emphasis on assistive technologies and IT. The pathways provided by the Health Hub initiative have led to 50% of Year 12 graduates in 2016 pursuing employment or further education and training in Health. In 2017 this number grew to 60%.

Strong collaboration with industry and alignment with needs

The precedence that the school places on building strong relationships with local employers is evidenced by its appointment of an Industry Liaison Officer, whose role is to promote school-based apprenticeships and traineeships to employers and to find work experience placements for students. Employers are also invited to participate in career days and the school's annual review process. To increase the likelihood of students transitioning to employment the school's focus is to ensure that their courses are aligned to workplace needs and are credible in the eyes of industry.

In 2017 Mabel Park State High School's Health Hub was awarded Education Queensland's Showcase Award for Excellence in Industry Partnerships for the South East Region. Each year the Showcase Awards are presented to Queensland state schools that demonstrate excellent practices that significantly improve outcomes for students. As well, in 2017 Mabel Park State High School's Health Hub program was one of three state finalists for the Queensland State Training Awards in the Premier's Industry Collaboration category.

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