



St Columban's College

School profile

- Queensland
- Metropolitan
- Non-government
- Year 7 to 12
- RTO for 13 VET courses; partners with four external third party RTOs
- 24 VET courses delivered across 11 industry areas in 2015
- 1031 students enrolled in 2015

St Columban's College is a co-educational Year 7 to 12 school located in the satellite city of Caboolture approximately 44 kilometres north of Brisbane, Queensland. The college has an extensive vocational education and training (VET) program underpinned by a consciously built culture of 'vocational competence' with a strong emphasis on literacy, numeracy and digital literacy, as well as the development of the capabilities and entrepreneurial skills needed for future jobs. Construction of a Trades Centre was completed mid-2012, allowing the college to offer additional VET pathways for students. St Columban's is a Registered Training Organisation (RTO) and also partners with external RTOs to deliver some courses.

Program background

When the college first offered a small number of VET courses students saw these as an inferior pathway compared to pathways offered through completing the Queensland Certificate of Education (QCE). The VET courses initially offered were mainly classroom-based and not valued by students or industry. After investigating areas of employment growth and skill needs in the region, and through talking to parents, community representatives and employers, and others, the college undertook a rapid expansion of VET program offerings. Although demanding, the college found significant help available from places such as the Queensland Department of Education and Training, other schools, RTOs, as well as from the experience brought in with new school leadership.

Along with the expansion in the VET programs on offer, St Columban's College set about changing the

culture surrounding VET. Their aim was to make VET a valued part of every student's education and to have every student leaving college with partial or full VET qualification. The college emphasises the rationale for students undertaking a VET pathway; whether their schooling is taking a predominantly academic pathway or whether it is VET pathway, the aim for the students is the same—employment.

Employability skills like communication, literacy and punctuality are highlighted as the ones needed for all careers and for the part-time jobs that most students take in their senior years and beyond. The college also stresses the value to all the career pathways of the 'learning by doing' that students experience through undertaking a VET program. In 2015, 95 per cent of graduating students enrolled in one VET qualification, 82 per cent of these were at Certificate III level. While the college worked on building the value of a VET pathway it did not want to be viewed as 'the VET school'. 'We wanted to be a school where VET courses and any other subject that students do are viewed equally.' (Acting Principal)

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Program features

Course selection and structure

Courses and qualifications chosen by schools and the structure of VET courses should be informed by an understanding of:

- the needs of students
- how VET supports career and employment pathways
- industry workforce needs
- school sector or jurisdictional policies
- funding priorities targeting VET towards particular industries or occupations.

Every core subject area of the curriculum is represented through a VET course. There are 11 industry areas covering 24 qualifications.

The college runs a seven-day timetable, which means that students undertaking a School-based Apprenticeship or Traineeship who are out of the school with an employer for a day or two a week do not miss the same classes every week. For staff teaching academic subjects, it means there may be three or four students absent from every class. The college culture is supportive of this happening and staff have different systems to help students catch up with missed work.

All Year 11 students study seven subjects of equal value and time, and all are encouraged to study at least one VET course. The timetable is constructed after subject selection takes place and neither academic subjects nor vocational courses are given preferential treatment.

In 2016, the college itself employed 15 School-based Trainees in the areas of Information Digital Media and Technology, Sport and Recreation, and Library and Information Services. It supports over 90 School-based Apprentices and/or Trainees annually.

If the college does not have a certain certificate on its scope of registration as an RTO, students can study at the local TAFE (Technical and Further Education) institution. A flexible timetable and flexible attitude from staff allows this to happen. The college wants to do everything possible to support each student to follow their desired pathway. For example, the college has supported a number of students interested in gaining entry to the police force to undertake justice studies with an external RTO.

Facilities and equipment

Access to the right facilities and equipment is critical to the success of VET programs and is necessary to comply

with VET delivery and assessment standards. The training package or accredited course materials provide information on what is needed. Identifying required equipment informs decisions about partnerships and accessing external expertise and equipment.

The college has a Trade Centre that delivers training in Hairdressing, Hospitality and Kitchen Operations. A fully functioning hair dressing salon operates as a training salon two days a week and as a micro-business for the college's hairdressing students three days a week. From the industry-standard commercial kitchen, the school has serviced major functions for the public.

Integrating VET

VET needs to be integrated into the fabric of schools and the broader curriculum. This may be through:

- *flexible timetabling*
- *language literacy and numeracy support*
- *assessment support*
- *support with other additional matters that students undertaking VET courses might require.*

Each of these options will suit schools in different situations. Whatever the arrangement adopted, schools and employers need to be confident that the RTO has suitably qualified trainers and assessors and access to the industry-standard equipment required.

Students at the college are positive about the opportunities to enroll in VET courses and the number of students who graduate with certificates testifies to that – providing students with the opportunity to transition to university, further training and employment. The college emphasises the importance of pathways and taking a balanced approach to students' subject choices.



'Students really value [VET] ...they say, "Oh, I'm going to do certificate this and certificate that." I have to keep saying, "Look, it's not just the number of pieces of paper you've got ... be careful. You need to have a passion for that particular industry. You have to be able to stand behind what those certificates represent." We ask them, "What are you really interested in? What are you good at?" That's part of the career development process too, that underpins our program here.' (Vocational Education and Careers Pathway Leader)

The college also emphasises that completing a certificate is only valuable if a student turns up on time and dresses appropriately, and if their communication skills are fit for the context. It makes clear to students that those fundamental employability skills are embedded in every VET course and that the literacy and numeracy skills integrated across the curriculum in all their other subjects actually add value to support them with VET courses.

Working with employers

Collaboration is a key component of the Preparing Secondary Students for Work framework. Involvement from employers and industry is critical when planning for the implementation, delivery and assessment of VET for secondary students. Working with employers or work placement providers to provide access to quality and relevant workplace learning opportunities enables students to develop skills that are better aligned with workplace needs.

The college is a 'Food, Wine and Tourism Gateway to Industry School'. This industry-led Queensland government program aims to help young people make a successful transition from school into further education and/or employment in the food, wine, hospitality and tourism industries and other industries.

Taking strong advantage of the school's location situated in a major health and education precinct, the college is a charter member of the Caboolture Health Care Alliance and a stakeholder in Caboolture Hospital Health Care Academy. This pilot project commenced in 2016 with the formation of a partnership between St Columban's College and Caboolture State High School, Caboolture Hospital and TAFE Queensland. The program involves students in Year 11 and 12 completing Certificate II in Health Support and Certificate III in Health Services. This provides students with a strong pathway into the healthcare industry and ensures the development of the future workforce for Metro North Health Service, one of the largest employers in Queensland. TAFE trainers work with students in simulated and real hospital environments to provide their training.

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Student support

Vocational learning activities and pre-vocational programs support students to select the right VET course and pursue their chosen pathway to a career, employment or further education and training. Career education and opportunities to gain work readiness skills help students make informed choices and prepare them for learning in a workplace environment.

The college guides its students and closely tracks their performance across all subjects. The curriculum leaders and teachers work in teams and rely on data to monitor and support students to achieve the outcomes for which they are aiming. Student performance and outcomes are seen as everybody's responsibility.

A well-resourced learning centre enables students to access learning enhanced resources or tutorial time. A curriculum assistance program runs in lunchtimes and after school to provide support across all subjects.

Review

The school's VET offerings are regularly reviewed and updated to ensure they meet the needs of industry and employers. Similarly, jurisdictions and school sectors update their policies and procedures in line with funding priorities and skills needs. Schools should have in place review processes for the VET programs they offer to ensure these maintain their currency and effectiveness within both VET and school policy environments.

The college uses data to make projections about future areas of employment growth and to establish programs and partnerships that fit the predicted environment.

For example, a predicted growth in health-related employment has led the college to form a partnership with Caboolture Hospital.

Regular reviews and student surveys are undertaken in order to ensure that programs are relevant and students are job ready.

The college was required to undertake a rigorous benchmarking process associated with the Trades Centre which gave rise, in turn, to a series of stakeholder forums as a means to establish the community's needs and the current and future employment markets.

Three stakeholder forums have been held. Participants included representatives from local universities, other schools, parent and industry bodies, and employers. Local RTOs were also surveyed at the time.

Since the early days the college has become focused on data. Collecting data started as a requirement of being an RTOs but the college now sees it as vital in order to track the quality of its programs and their outcomes.

The college has documented its VET program in a 'Blueprint', similar to a business plan, identifying such things as the fundamental underpinning principals of the program. This makes review processes clearer since intentions have been documented. Many VET courses now have their own blueprints.

