



Western Cape College – Vocational Education and Training (VET) Program

School Profile

- Queensland
- Very remote
- Government
- Prep to Year 12
- On the traditional lands of the Alngith people (Weipa) and the Tjungundji people (Mapoon)

Program Summary

Western Cape College is a unique state school which comprises three campuses spread over a significant area of the Cape York Peninsula in Far North Queensland. There are approximately 1000 students enrolled at the school, with about 58 per cent of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander heritage. A feature of the school's vocational education and training (VET) program is an individual case management strategy for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. Through this strategy Western Cape College aspires to have all students leaving school with full-time employment, an apprenticeship or further training, or a place at university. Western Cape College's established link with Rio Tinto supports this aspirational goal.

‘We offer a flexible timetable structure with two different timetables according to need. Students can take on vocational learning via school-based traineeships or block delivery of learning. Students are able to follow their own pathway.’

Ashley Spain – Head of VET and Employment, Western Cape College

Western Cape College's Senior School is recognised for its broad range of subject offerings including Queensland Curriculum and Assessment Authority (QCAA) subjects and locally relevant programs such as the QCAA registered subject Aquatic Practices, and an array of VET courses at Certificate I, Certificate II and Certificate III levels. Furthermore, the school has strong and well-established links with industry and tertiary institutions that enhance the learning experiences and future opportunities for students. The school's program puts emphasis on the cultural, physical and environmental context of students and through these explorations develops students' sense of aspiration, self-esteem and belonging, whilst also providing real-world job pathways.



Western Cape College offers a broad range of subjects and VET courses to students.
Credit: © The State of Queensland (Department of Education) 2018

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‘There are no closed doors. There’s
always a way to do what you want
to do.’
.....

Ashley Spain – Head of VET and Employment, Western Cape College
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Students in Years 10, 11 and 12 pursuing a vocational pathway at the school have the opportunity to combine work and study through either an Australian School-based Apprenticeship or Traineeship, allowing them to achieve a nationally recognised qualification. The aim of the VET program at Western Cape College is for students to begin transition into their chosen industry pathways prior to completing secondary schooling.

All students, whether they are on a university or a vocational pathway, are provided with individual case management by preparing a Senior Education and Training plan in Year 10. This plan maps a ‘study and career orientated learning pathway through Year 11 and 12’ (westerncapecollege.eq.edu.au, 2018) and supports students’ attainment of the Queensland Certificate of Education (QCE).

The VET program offered at the school has multiple streams to meet different student needs across the

three campuses. The range of offerings for students available at the school includes Australian School-based Apprenticeships and Traineeships, and vocational education programs provided by the school, as well as from external providers. This requires significant engagement with all parties due to the large distances involved between the three campuses.

Outcomes

Between 2010 and 2014 the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students achieving a QCE grew from five per cent to 82 per cent. In the same period, the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students achieving a Certificate II and higher rose from 25 per cent to 86 per cent.

Rio Tinto provides employment pathways for many of these local graduates. Of the approximately 283 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees at Rio Tinto Weipa, 75 participated in pre-employment initiatives, including Australian School-based Apprenticeships. At Rio Tinto Weipa, 24 per cent of the workforce is Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander, and 13 per cent of the workforce comprises local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. This provides a clear message to Western Cape College students about the viable employment and training pathways that are available to them.



*Western Cape College has a strong relationship with Rio Tinto that aims to improve the employability of local students.
Credit: Historic Collection/Alamy Stock Photo*



‘At Western Cape College, through flexible and evolving strategies, we will continue to commit to developing in students the capacity to successfully engage in a variety of pathways that lead directly or indirectly to appropriate and satisfying careers in the real economy. Further, Western Cape College will purposely measure the success of this commitment through indicators such as Year 12 QCE attainment, and destination surveys of students one and two years post school.’

Source: Western Cape College, Queensland State School Reporting (2015), 2015 School Annual Report

Industry Links

Western Cape College has partnered with Rio Tinto Weipa for over a decade to help improve the employability of local students by providing a range of initiatives that link school-based programs with core industry requirements. The relationship was established in 2005 to address a shortage of skilled local workers.

‘The alignment of culture and values ensures that there is consistency across both organisations. It has also created high expectations and a competitive process whereby students will not progress through the various stages if they do not meet the criteria. Criteria include attendance, behaviour and literacy and numeracy requirements.’

Source: Rio Tinto Weipa (2015), Bringing education and industry closer together – Western Cape College and Rio Tinto

The college also hosts the Western Cape Trades Skills Centre, a collaboration between Western Cape College, Rio Tinto and the Federal Government aimed at improving the quality of schooling offered to secondary students undertaking trade-related pathways. The purpose-built facility encompasses well-resourced industry standard training for the construction and engineering sectors. The centre supports young people to make a successful transition from school to work on the Cape.



Students undertake practical trades training at the purpose-built Western Cape Trades Skills Centre.

Credit: © The State of Queensland (Department of Education) 2018

‘Students studying at the Western Cape College are truly not disadvantaged by living in a remote location. They are actually better off because of the partnership.’

Michelle Radlof – Western Cape College 2007 graduate; HSE, Tailings and Water Specialist, Rio Tinto Weipa

Source: Rio Tinto Spotlight (2016), Careers in the Cape

The school also runs annual careers-focused days to expand students’ horizons and build connections into industry. The ‘Hands on Trades’ program is designed to introduce young people to training in the areas of plumbing, construction, automotive work and engineering. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander apprentices from Rio Tinto form part of the cohort who provide students with opportunities to experience these trades. The Careers Expo includes representatives from universities, TAFEs, employers and training providers.



Why Western Cape College's VET Program Works

Recent research indicates that the following key themes consistently underpin successful delivery of vocational learning and VET, including career education, to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students:

- **Context:** 'Nuanced, contextual factors will influence individual or group learning undertaken by Indigenous young people (Cuervo et al., 2015; Rigney, 2011).'
- **Flexibility:** '... recognition that a rigid or singular mode of education, by definition, cannot meet the needs of diverse learners (Anderson, 2009b; Bottrell, Te Riele & Plows, 2014; Te Riele, 2014).'
- **Two-way learning and community engagement:** '... happens in the context of an evolving relationship and structured partnership between Indigenous and school communities that supports Indigenous young people to grow their learning aspirations and stay connected to school or training.'
- **Aspiration, self-esteem and belonging:** 'To "dream big" was seen as an essential component in a young person's ability to have vocational ambitions and to achieve them (Mission Australia, 2014).'
- **Real-world job pathways:** 'In assessing what motivates Indigenous young people to study, a direct link to real employment, that is, getting a job, figured much more highly than reasons connected to a plan for career or further study (Fordham & Schwab, 2007).'

Applying these themes to an understanding of the design, delivery and operation of vocational learning and VET provides insight into "what works" and "what doesn't work" for this cohort of students.

Source: Cultural and Indigenous Research Centre Australia (CIRCA), National Priorities: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Secondary Student Transitions Project report

Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) Links

The *Australian Professional Standards for Teachers* from AITSL outline what teachers should know and be able to do. As part of the VET program at Western Cape College teachers are delivering vocational learning, VET or career education that aligns with the following standards:

Know students and how they learn

- 1.3 Students with diverse linguistic, cultural, religious and socioeconomic backgrounds
- 1.4 Strategies for teaching Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students
- 1.5 Differentiate teaching to meet the specific learning needs of students across the full range of abilities
- 3.1 Establish challenging learning goals
- 3.7 Engage parents/carers in the educative process

Source: Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) (2011), Australian Professional Standards for Teachers

Contacts

If you want to know more about this program or think that it might benefit your community, please access the following links:

Western Cape College

W: westerncapecollege.eq.edu.au

My School

W: www.myschool.edu.au

