

How successful engagement with industry enhances your career education plan and why it is important

Cheltenham Secondary College

Cheltenham Secondary College is a co-educational high school in Cheltenham, a suburb in Melbourne, Victoria located 19 km southeast of Melbourne's central business district. It caters for students in Year 7 to 12 and is a good example of successful engagement with local industry.

The school is divided into two sub-schools, a Junior School catering for students in Year 7 to 9 and a Senior School catering for students in Year 10 to 12, with a total enrolment of around 1100 students.

Careers and Pathways at Cheltenham Secondary College has grown steadily over the past six years to become an integral part of the college curricular and extra-curricular programs.

Lexia Knight, Careers and Pathways Leader said, "It was important to introduce changes over a period of time to ensure that a robust program could be developed from Year 7 to 12. As part of this process it has been imperative for us to have strong and cohesive links with industry."

How was the relationship with industry established?

In establishing relationships with industry, the college has adopted a very personal approach. Lexia and her colleagues have dedicated a considerable amount of time to calling and personally meeting employers and establishing individual relationships. On occasions, local employers also contact the college when they are looking to fill part-time or full-time positions. Lexia works hard to try to match the right student with the expectations of the employers. This process allows the college to form ongoing positive relationships with employers.

Cheltenham Secondary College uses the parent population as a source of employers and as a network that can connect with other local employers. Lexia said, "There is always someone who knows someone and we really encourage networking – and we teach our students this from Year 9".

When vocational education and training was first introduced at Cheltenham Secondary College, there were only 28 students participating. Through liaising with the local TAFE and private training providers, as well as other local schools, Lexia developed a strong network of providers offering a variety of courses. Through strong promotion at parent information evenings and through the college newsletter, 175 students were undertaking courses in the second year of the program.

At Cheltenham Secondary College, with such a wide variety of courses on offer for the students to select from, engagement with the local industry is vital to the success of the Careers and Pathways program.

Lexia said, "Industry informs us of the skills they are requiring students to have. Industry give our students the chance to work with cutting edge technology and specialist people within the workforce."



How is industry involved?

The Work Experience Program is an integral part of the Careers and Pathways program. Students have two rounds of work experience and the college has built up a database of over 1000 employers to assist students to find a placement. The program is embedded in the Commerce curriculum in Year 10 and focusses on immersing students into a workplace and providing them with a meaningful industry experience, assisting them with their career planning and preparing them to become work ready.

The Year 9 Mock Job Interview Program is another way that Cheltenham Secondary College engages with their local industry. Students participate in a 15 minute mock job interview with local business people and are provided with written feedback on their resume, cover letter, attire and responses to questions.

Lexia said, “This program is an important link with our local industry. Our students are the employees of the future and workplaces should be encouraged to be involved with schools in running programs such as this.”

Since 2014, Cheltenham Secondary College has been enrolling students in the Senior VCAL (Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning) pathway at Year 12. Students in their first year have gone on to study diplomas in areas such as Horticulture, degree courses in Photography and commenced Apprenticeships in Automotive. Due to the success of the program it will be expanded to include the Intermediate VCAL in 2017 (Year 11).

Pathways in VCAL are very individualised and may include a School-based Apprenticeship where students work one day a week on-the-job and complete complementary training in the area of interest. Cheltenham Secondary College is fortunate that they have industrial estates close to the college, providing greater engagement opportunities with industry.

Industry participation and involvement is integral to the success of students undertaking VCAL. Students are required to have on-the-job training and the assistance of local industries is vital in providing this.

Lexia, in talking about the importance of building partnerships between schools and industry said, “We have a student who has been working with a local engineering company, Vibropile. They had previously taken on two of our students as full-time apprentices and another as a work experience student. The current student is enrolled in Year 12 Senior VCAL. He is completing his Certificate II in Engineering here at the college and works with Vibropile one day per week. He has also gained casual work over the school holidays. Last week he was offered a full-time apprenticeship – a fantastic outcome! He will begin the apprenticeship later in the year.”

“In the automotive industry, we have an ongoing relationship with Stuart Hunter Motors, who have a School-based Apprentice with them at present. My hope is that more, larger industries close to the college, who have not yet opened their doors to work placement and work experience, will do so in the future.”





Peter Bailes

