

Australia: St. Norbert College, Occupationally-focused work experience and student-led career fairs

Enabling young people to share and reflect on their direct experiences of industry and training, helping them to think early about the connections between education and employment.

St. Norbert College is a Catholic co-educational secondary school, serving an ethnically diverse and predominately lower-socioeconomic community in Queens Park, a suburb of Perth in Western Australia. The school offers a Careers and Enterprise programme for 10-12 Year students (ages 16-18). The programme is designed to help students develop a range of work skills and an understanding of the nature of work.

Central to the programme is its work experience component. All Year 11 students (age 17) in the Careers and Enterprise (CER) programme participate in one or two days of out-of-school workplace learning each week, as they are required to fulfil a minimum of 110 hours of workplace learning per year. Additionally, students may also combine their workplace learning with a specialised VET programme, a type of work-integrated learning pathway based on their career aspirations.

Through industry and training partnerships students can personalise their pathways aligned with their career development goals. Partnerships provide students with a wide range of opportunities for accessing learning experiences in the community. These include participating in training programmes through Government-funded TAFE (Technical and Further Education) programmes and internships within community, offered by public and private sector employers. Students apply with support of the school to access out-of-school learning programmes which serve to personalise their learning pathways. Some key successes have been through pre-apprenticeship programmes which often lead to offers of apprenticeships prior to leaving school. Higher-level VET certificate programmes are also popular. These help to build students' confidence in their career ambitions and what they need to achieve to secure them. They also make it easier for students to progress to higher education institutions to continue their vocationally-focused studies.

Student-led job fair

As their final assessment task in the CER programme, the Year 11 students organise a student-led job fair, where they display all of their direct experiences of industry, training, and out-of-school learning. This job fair is attended by all Year 7 students (age 13), and is intended to engage younger students in the career thinking process, helping them to think early about the connections between education and employment. Students prepare for the job fair by joining together in teams to research key information around the industry areas they have experienced. Information around occupational duties and tasks, education and training pathways and labour market information is organised into displays for their stalls. Year 11 students write their own 'engagement' question that can be answered based on their expo display and all questions are collated into a worksheet for the Year 7 students to complete during the expo to win prizes. In this assessment, the Year 11 students play the role of 'industry experts' as no industry guests are present. This helps to develop student agency and to provide positive feedback on the value of their experiences in VET and work-based learning. The expo is always a buzz of excitement and the school reports Year 7 students really engage with learning from their older peers to think about where their education could lead them.

While the experiential learning component is the programme's core, the school believes that it is the opportunities for post-experience reflection and dialogue that allow students to create a cohesive understanding and awareness of the intrapersonal and socio-environmental influences that shape their identity and how these connect to the world of work and learning.