



Finding a balance

This case study was of a regional TAFE Victoria campus that delivered a Certificate III and Certificate IV in AHA. They considered Certificate III an introduction into health, and the Certificate IV preparation for an AHA role. Based on industry needs, the program focused on occupational therapy and physiotherapy. Thirty enrolment places were offered annually for the mixed-mode course, which had students attend campus two days a week, plus one day online. After the theory component was completed students chose from one of three placement blocks offered by the TAFE.

Benefits

Students who gained a Certificate IV in AHA had a broad knowledge base in working as an AHA. The high-level communication and observation skills they learned were transferrable to working with any AHP. Enrolling a limited number of students ensured adequate progress supervision and the provision of placements with the possibility of future employment.

Challenges

This TAFE found it challenging to find enough quality placements for the students in their regional area. Students often came into the program with very clear ideas on what they wanted to do as an AHA.

'Most of them talk about the fact that they want to help people. Although we don't always think that they have had a good understanding of what that actually could involve'. (TAFE Coordinator).

Strategies for success

- The TAFE worked to provide quality placements by fostering close positive relationships with local employers – who reciprocated with enough places for every student each year.

Key principles of good practice

- The TAFE provided flexible mixed-mode study and timed its placements to accommodate students' other commitments, offer the best chance of students' success, and ensure the quality and availability of placements.
- Students underwent a selection process before being accepted into the program. After being given an overview of the program – including information that could have triggered an emotional response – followed by a group interview where they worked together on three tasks to see how they interacted with people they had just met. They then completed an individual ten-minute interview where they were asked questions such as why they wanted to become an AHA and how they would balance their study commitments. Finally, the students discussed their suitability for AHA studies with the program coordinator.
- Created ongoing positive relationships with industry to secure ongoing placements for AHA students
- Capped AHA student numbers to ensure quality education
- Ensured student suitability for the AHA career pathway
- Provided flexible course delivery.