



From the West, In the West, and For the West HWA-funded project comes to fruition

'From the West, In the West and For the West', the \$4.16 million Health Workforce Australia (HWA) funded program as an Australian Government initiative—a collaboration between Victoria University, Mercy Health and Western Health — has been realised. Comprised of five projects, including capital works and a review of placement processes, the program, managed by the University under Dan Boariu, will accommodate nursing and midwifery student growth and expand the clinical training capacity of Werribee Mercy Health and Western Health.



The project will boost clinical training networks in western rural, regional and outer metropolitan areas of Victoria by producing graduates with increased attributes and capabilities and combating recruitment and retention shortages of health care professionals. Students will be immersed in interprofessional clinical training that will assist in the development of work-ready graduates able to meet the needs of the expanding communities of Melbourne's western region.

Professor Greg Blatch, Dean of the College of Health and Biomedicine



'It was very important that there was a good relationship and a trust between the different organisations, so that even though there were personnel changes, we continued to develop the partnership and produce the deliverables.'

The completed capital works projects and improved placement processes will provide enhanced clinical training and support the needs of Victoria University's diverse student body.

Professor Greg Blatch, Dean of the College of Health and Biomedicine, chaired the committee that oversaw the program. While acknowledging the challenges of a project involving large organisations, multiple partners and a combination of capital projects and process reviews, Professor Blatch is pleased with how the component projects were rolled out— which have all come in within budget and projected timelines.

'With the support of the different people involved, such as project managers like Dan Boariu, we were able to keep the momentum going; people stayed connected, and we made sure that we delivered on the various projects.'

Another aspect that was vital to the good governance of the project, he says, is the institutional memory and trust that exists between the partners. 'It was very important that there was a good relationship and a trust between the different organisations, so that even though there were personnel changes, we continued to develop the partnership and produce the deliverables.'

'Communication lines were always open and flowing, meetings were held and people were prepared to put things on the table in an open, transparent and honest fashion.'

Accountability, he says, was at the core of the processes that ensured the projects' success.

'There was always openness in that regard. One could openly query what was happening with the money with particular projects and adapt a project for the optimal utilisation of the funds.'

This was particularly true of the capital projects', he says.

'The tracking of the budgets was quite critical, especially when you're looking at a large budget for a building such as the Werribee Mercy capital project. You have to be really careful with the way you follow the expenditure and the way that you account for that expenditure.'

CLINICAL LEARNING OFFICE

The first of the capital projects to be undertaken as part of the greater HWA-funded project was the internal renovation of VU's Clinical Learning Office (CLO) at the St Albans campus. The CLO, which coordinates the placement of Health and Biomedicine students, was reconfigured as a central kiosk for students requiring placements, refitted with new fixtures, and refurbished with new furniture and ICT equipment.



includes three rooms, one of which is multi-purpose and can accommodate up to 50 people and will be equipped with AV facilities to allow for video streaming and conference calls. The second room is a clinical space that will also be fitted out with AV equipment. The third room is another flexible space that can accommodate up to 20 people. These new teaching spaces reflect that learning for nurses and midwives extends beyond that gained through clinical placements, she says.

The student accommodation will alleviate the pressure on those students who may have long distances to travel in order to complete their clinical placements at Werribee Mercy Health, but it is the new clinical spaces and facilities that will have the biggest impact on students' experience, says Ms Berry, and, ultimately, on patients.

'We're hoping it will bring more of a multi-disciplinary approach to the students' learning.'



'I'm certainly looking forward to the opening and to moving the staff on my team into the new building,' Ms Berry says. 'But also I'm absolutely looking towards the future in terms of the opportunities that this can provide, not only for Mercy Health, but also for the community.'

MERCY HEALTH BUILDING WERRIBEE

Project 2, undertaken at Werribee Mercy Health, saw the construction of a purpose-designed building comprising student accommodation and a learning precinct that includes a clinical laboratory. Both the accommodation and the new clinical spaces and other facilities will be ready for use when first semester begins in 2014.

Kamaree Berry, Mercy Health's General Manager, Learning, is anticipating that the new building will facilitate a more multi-disciplinary approach to health care. In addition to student accommodation and staff office space, the new building

'Essentially, it will result in better patient care. The better we look after our staff, and our students who are coming through and who are our future workforce, the more benefits will be reaped by our patients within the community. That is really the aim in utilising this building.'

'I'm certainly looking forward to the opening and to moving the staff on my team into the new building,' Ms Berry says. 'But also I'm absolutely looking towards the future in terms of the opportunities that this can provide, not only for Mercy Health, but also for the community.'

WESTERN HEALTH

At Western Health, the focus of Project 3 has been linking the Melton South, Footscray and Williamstown campuses with each other and with VU through an upgrade of ICT capability. Louise McKinlay, Director of Education and Learning, says that Western Health's aim in participating in the project was to enhance its environment to support an increase in nursing and midwifery student placements.

'The reason [for WH increasing its clinical training capacity] was twofold: one was in accordance with our longer-term workforce planning and the other was in support of our partnership with Victoria University.'



Louise McKinlay Director of Education and Learning, Western Health

'We're an organisation undergoing quite significant growth. We knew we had potential for increased capacity; however, we needed infrastructure investment to make that happen.'

'It's not just a case of bringing students in and then immersing them in an environment. You've got to have systems and processes as well as capital to support that. So the emphasis of the project that we put in for with VU was on connectivity.'

Because Western Health is a multi-site hospital, Ms McKinlay says, it wanted to find the best way to support students on clinical placements access learning opportunities across Western Health as effectively as at the University. Williamstown Hospital, for example, she says, was 'an untapped resource' for students because of a lack of adequate ICT before the completion of Project 3.

'What the HWA project enabled us to do was to completely remodel three distinct areas to make them more accessible to students. We remodelled the library space and made it a clinical skills teaching space and a space where we can deliver low fidelity simulation exercises. The second room at the back of the emergency department was refurbished so that we can deliver tutorials with students as well as clinical skills training onsite — so both a classroom-based approach as well as another area for simulation activities. Finally we remodelled another office space to make it more multifunctional and accessible to students wishing to access online resources and to provide an enhanced space for clinical teachers to work in whilst undertaking administrative tasks relating to teaching and training.'

At Footscray, with the HWA funding, Western Health was able to upgrade a videoconferencing facility, which has improved the connectivity of all the Western Health campuses.

While the connectivity infrastructure was at the heart of the project, Ms McKinlay says, a parallel project was concerned with the quality of the placements offered to students. As a result, Western Health has implemented a model where nine clinical units have been secured for Victoria University's nursing and midwifery students — three at Williamstown, four at Footscray and two at Sunshine, representing a significant proportion of its clinical units dedicated to VU.

This model allows for a more flexible learning approach to placements, Ms McKinlay says. 'Students are here for a 16-week block and they can roster their hours in that 16 weeks. We set up an electronic roster for them so that they can manage their own rosters as if they were working and we have dedicated clinical trainers to support groups of students coming through.'

'Students basically have 24-hour access. They can work weekends and evenings, and, once they are at an appropriate level, they can do nightshifts. It really promotes balance in the clinical training years.'

This flexibility assists students to manage the demands of work, study, and their placement requirements. It also familiarises them with the reality of shiftwork and enables them to experience being part of a team on a ward.

Ms McKinlay envisages that the project's impact will be far-reaching.

'Part of [WH's broader] plan is looking at our workforce and the type of health professionals we need to support our community. How do we train those health professionals, employ and retain them, up-skill, develop and advance their practice? It's all connected and the ultimate aim is to improve the patient experience and patient outcome.'

While Projects 1 to 3 of From the West, In the West and For the West are concerned with students' clinical learning experience and the clinical learning environment, Projects 4 and 5 have focussed on improving processes and meeting KPIs in relation to increasing the number of nursing and midwifery student placements. Meeting these KPIs is required to ensure the current level of HWA funding is maintained.

To date, the University has fulfilled its obligations in this regard, with student placements increasing by approximately 10 per cent each year from a 2010 baseline. It is expected that this rate of increase will continue until at least 2015.

'The University,' Associate Professor Peter Hartley, Director of Learning and Teaching in the College of Health and Biomedicine, says, 'is committed to working closely with industry partnerships in ensuring KPIs are continued to be fulfilled, thereby enhancing student clinical learning and graduate outcomes for nursing students.'

Associate Professor Peter Hartley also supervised Project 5, which sought to review and improve the internal VU placements process through what he terms a 'multi-faceted approach'.

'We're an organisation undergoing quite significant growth. We knew we had potential for increased capacity; however, we needed infrastructure investment to make that happen.'

'By improving our current processes,' Associate Professor Hartley says, 'we're able to give our students a better learning experience and, on the flipside of that coin, increase the number and quality of the opportunities available to them.'

'We're anticipating a range of benefits [for the students]. If you look at it from a two-tiered approach: there's the increased capacity that we'll now have to place students, whilst on clinical placement they'll also get access to a wider range of facilities.'

Assoc Prof Peter Hartley, Director of Learning and Teaching, College of Biomedicine



The more streamlined processes will result in an increased capability to respond to individual student needs. The University has a diverse student body, with many students juggling work along with full-time study. New arrangements, such as flexible clinical training, will allow students to more easily manage their various obligations and constraints, Associate Professor Hartley says.

'There is no doubt that the underpinning key factor in all of this change is increased graduate attributes and capability,' he says, 'so at the end of their [the students'] program, we will have a higher-level qualified graduates.'

From beginning to end, Associate Professor Hartley says, the process review, and other projects have been a collaboration between VU and its partners.

'The process of going through the HWA projects has deepened the relationship [with Mercy Health and Western Health] in that it's been a collaborative effort from the very commencement of putting in the applications for funding.'

That joint partnership, he says, 'has certainly strengthened and deepened those relationships and given a greater understanding of each other's organisations.'

These partnerships will continue to underpin VU's training of nursing and midwifery students. 'If I look towards the future,' Professor Blatch says, 'it doesn't end here. From my perspective we would hope to continue to work with HWA and our partners to grow those partnerships.'

The completed HWA project, he says, that will provide a base upon which the quality of graduates and the quality of health services in Melbourne's west will keep developing.

'There's obviously going to be a benefit from what's happening now, but this benefit has to translate over the next few years and continue in a sustainable manner. This means strengthened partnerships with the additional output of strong students with a good experience who can work in the community in a way that is appropriate and effective.'

'There is no doubt that the underpinning key factor in all of this change is increased graduate attributes and capability,' he says, 'so at the end of their [the students'] program, we will have a higher-level qualified graduates.'

