HARLEY PAROULAKIS
AT THE HEART OF INNOVATION
SETTING SAIL FOR WORK

PHOTO: HELEN ORR.
Darwin’s Casuarina Senior College is one of only 14 Australian schools – and the first in the Northern Territory – chosen to take part in a brave new initiative to prepare students for work in an ever-changing world.

The college is now looking for business partners to help drive P-TECH, which stands for Pathways in Technology.

Principal Paul Mathews says: “We want industry to help students get the high-level trade qualifications and skill sets needed now and into the future for a good, fulfilling career.”

P-TECH is centred on STEM – science, technology, engineering and maths, subjects that are increasingly in demand.

Students will continue to study for their NT Certificate of Education, which will feature technical and vocational education components.

P-TECH students will then extend their studies beyond secondary school for two years to achieve a STEM-related, job-relevant certificate, diploma, advanced diploma or associate degree.

Twenty five national companies have already signed up to be a part of P-TECH.

CSC is also working on the key work-ready attributes needed by students, such as work ethic, enterprise, creativity and resilience. “Jobs nowadays demand adaptability,” says Mr Mathews.

The college, which has about 950 students in years 10-12, is conscious that the workplace is undergoing a new industrial revolution – it is estimated that 40 percent of today’s jobs won’t exist within 20 years.

“But new jobs will be created,” says Mr Mathews. “For instance, there’s now a robotic arm that can lay bricks, so the demand for brickies will diminish. But a new job will be created – programming the robot.”

“We must keep up with industrial developments.”

The principal says CSC wants to “connect” with industry to ensure students can learn skills that will be in demand when they leave school.

The steering committee overseeing P-TECH is particularly keen to forge a partnership with enthusiastic businesses and organisations.

Initially, the health technology and maritime industries, including the Navy, transport companies, and ship builders and repairers will be approached.

The college has a well-equipped maritime training centre, which includes a simulator enabling students to navigate everything from a runabout boat to a freighter.

The steering committee wants industry to send experts to the college to inspire and talk to students about career opportunities and the skills needed into the future.

“IT’S ALL ABOUT CREATING OPPORTUNITIES FOR STUDENTS, BUILDING THE COLLEGE COMMUNITY SO THAT INDUSTRY IS AN INTEGRAL PART OF OUR PLANNING.”

This could be followed by a more formal arrangement for work placement – an excellent way to give potential employers the chance to look at students and for students to see if they like the look of the industry.

P-TECH will require curriculum to “evolve” around industry skill needs; for instance, some maths relevant to the practical maths involved in transport.

“It’s all about creating opportunities for students, building the college community so that industry is an integral part of our planning.

“We want students to be confident that the skills they are acquiring will enable them to be job competitive.”

Mr Mathews says the Federal Government’s $5.1 million P-TECH initiative will enhance, rather than replace, the college’s strong Vocational Education Training program.

A P-TECH steering committee has been set up in Darwin to work with Casuarina Senior College.

The initiative was introduced to Australia after former apprentice chef Nicholas Wyman won a Churchill Fellowship to study what other countries are doing to improve the school-to-work transition.

He found P-TECH operating at a school in Brooklyn, New York, established by multinational technology company IBM.

“I just cold-called the principal, struck up a conversation and invited myself.”

He found that the initiative didn’t demand “new buildings and a massive investment” but a well-managed linking of schools, employers and post-school educators.

Mr Wyman, the chief executive of Skilling Australia Foundation, came home and together with IBM and other interested stakeholders persuaded the Federal Government to pilot P-TECH.

He said Casuarina Senior College and Darwin employers were enthusiastic.

“We want to engage students, to help them gain the skills for new jobs. We want them to aim high.”

Territory steering committee member, Janet Kocis, Program Director of the newly-founded Darwin Innovation Hub, says the hub is involved with the P-Tech program because STEM and advanced technology are “part of the hub’s DNA”.

“Our ecosystem of startups and entrepreneurs are either working in STEM fields directly or are reliant on others developing STEM-based advanced technology,” she says.

“The P-TECH program enables students to explore these study units with input from industry. This is what makes the hub excited about this program.

“Input from industry is critical in developing the next wave of highly-skilled and motivated people to either join our workforce or develop Territory-grown entrepreneurs and developers.”

TQ
TEACHER ANDREW MCGUINNESS WITH NATHE QUILONIO AND SHEA FINN, BOTH AGED 16, IN THE MARITIME SIMULATOR