



Try, Test and Learn Fund

Initiative: *Ability School Engagement Partnership*

Location: South-East Queensland

What are we trying to achieve?

This project is testing the effectiveness of mediated family group conferences in improving the attendance of high school students who have high rates of unexplained absences from school; in the long term, improved school attendance may reduce the risk of welfare dependency among participants.

What is *Ability School Engagement Partnership*?

High school students who have high rates of unexplained absences from school participate in mediated family group conferences that aim to identify and address barriers to attendance. The student and their parents or carers will be invited to participate in a facilitated group conference, along with representatives of the Department of Education and the Queensland Police Service.

The group conference will discuss the legal requirement for students to attend school; the effect that absenteeism has on all parties; and explore what barriers are preventing the student from attending school.

Each student will receive support to develop an individual plan, which will address the barriers identified; it will include actions for everyone participating in the conference. The student's attendance will be monitored for three months after the conference.

What does the evidence tell us?

- Generally, the higher a person's level of education, the more opportunities they have in their working life.
- Approaches that address parent and student attitudes to school attendance can be an effective tool to improving attendance at school.

How is this initiative new and innovative?

A small-scale trial of the intervention has previously trialled in Australia. This project will test on a large scale the efficacy of a mediated group conference intervention against the usual interventions for non-attendance currently undertaken by schools. The cooperative collaboration between the Queensland Department of Education, Queensland Police Service and the University of Queensland is also innovative.

Fast facts

Priority group: Other

Participant numbers: 300

Locations: Metropolitan Brisbane, north coast region, Logan, and the Gold Coast

Trial period: 24 months

Total funding: \$1.85 million

Service provider: University of Queensland

Potential future saving: This project is one that supports participants who for the purposes of the Try, Test and Learn Fund are classified as an 'other' group at risk of long-term welfare dependence. This group of people was identified through the provider's experience in working with vulnerable people, and other research. At this stage, potential future savings for this group have not been calculated using the Priority Investment Approach model. This calculation may be possible once we have data on participants, if a comparison group can be identified on which to base those calculations.

Using insights from the Priority Investment Approach, the \$96.1 million Try, Test and Learn Fund is gathering evidence on new or innovative approaches to addressing barriers to work.

The Try, Test and Learn Fund will help achieve the objectives of welfare reform—that is, to develop a modern welfare system that increases the capacity of individuals, reduces the risk of welfare dependency and maintains a strong welfare safety net.