



Try, Test and Learn Fund

Initiative: *Ability School Engagement Partnership*

Location: South-East Queensland

Using insights from the Priority Investment Approach, the 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.

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 are invited to participate in a facilitated group conference, along with representatives of the Department of Education and the Queensland Police Service.

The group conference 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 receives support to develop an individual plan, which addresses the barriers identified and includes actions for everyone participating in the conference. The student's attendance is 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 been undertaken in Australia. This project tests 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.

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Fast facts

Priority group: Other

Target participant number: 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 supports a group of people identified through the provider's experience in working with vulnerable people, and other research. To date, potential future savings for this group have not been calculated. Such a calculation may be possible once data on participants in this project is available if an appropriate comparison group can be identified.