Fostering hope and showing students that you believe in them develops their self-belief and self-efficacy. The CQU University School of Business and Law (SBL) Mackay Team empowers regional university students, constrained by obstacles, to transform their internal narrative and to become confident business professionals. Our students are from low SES and non-English speaking backgrounds, first in family to university, mature aged, or a combination of these. We challenge students to transcend demographic limitations, explore opportunities within and beyond their postcode, and awaken their minds to believe in transformed futures. To reflect our practice, we have developed the Student Transformation Model (SBL Mackay Team) to capture how we influence, motive and inspire students.

A Bachelor of Accounting (Honours) graduate demonstrated the enduring benefits of our advocacy that regionality is not a constraint. He was an international student with English as second language and first in family to attend university. As a result of our coaching from his initial study enquiry through to graduation in 2013, and our collective teaching practices inside and outside of the classroom, he developed a suite of professional skills, attaining the highest possible grade point average. His standing as a student role model was recognised and he delivered the student address at his graduation ceremony. He obtained his professional qualification, worked for KPMG, and held a prestigious position at the Australian Accounting Standards Board. This CQU University Mackay Alumnus is now an Associate Director, Finance Group, National Australia Bank. “I will be forever grateful to my Mackay lecturers and support staff for helping me overcome many obstacles and to gain confidence. Because of their ongoing help and support, I was work-ready for prestigious positions, with the self-belief that I can excel beyond my dreams.”

A key premise of this model is the active and reflective learning of both students and the team. Many Mackay students perceive living in regional, rural and remote communities as socially isolating and a disadvantage. These perceptions pose both a challenge and an opportunity. We influence students’ learning journeys with the specific intent to break through their mental barriers and unlock their inner strengths, taking an active interest in their holistic learning from our first interactions. We inspire diffident students to move beyond any constrained thinking, see other perspectives and develop a ‘can-do’ mindset. Our approach is integral to students’ learning experiences and allows strong individual relationships between students and the team. The outcome of our work is empowered students with a ‘can-do’ and growth mindset, who are successful learners, work ready, confident business professionals, embrace opportunity and succeed beyond their expectations.

The team’s authentic teaching transfers to real world employability. A Bachelor of Business student recently secured a permanent position. She said: “My shyness and lack of confidence was limiting me. With your persistent conversations to believe in myself, I made the deliberate decision to confront my fears”. With our ‘just do it’ culture, we immerse students in authentic activities and networking experiences with an engaged industry network. We model professional conduct, employability skills, and personal characteristics. We use a suite of techniques to teach, coach and equip our students to become empowered. Consequently, students become work-ready and achieve career mobility, securing employment with high profile regional employers and national and multinational organisations.

Our coaching of students and continued positive narrative transforms their thinking and self-belief. A recent CQU University Business graduate who is Indigenous and first in family to attend university attested to the benefit of our influence, “[There was] a real focus on ‘can-do’ approaches to help transform our futures...learning was about so much more than just the classroom”.

Our collective industry-facing learning practices inspire and support students to realise often-unrecognised potential and to apply for many different opportunities. Our aim is to transform students’ ability to forge new perceptions of a hopeful personal future. We suggest this student transformation model has application to empower people to transform futures in other regional contexts.

Team members are Natasja Steenkamp, Maree Framenovich, Robyn Collins and Maria Tyler. Contact Natasja for information: n.steenkamp@cqu.edu.au.

Photo: SBL Mackay graduates Megan Brunner, Bianca Webster, Tenille da Rin Perenito.