

camp, The Science Experience at UQ, during the January school holidays. Now she is the committee chair of that same program.

"We have anywhere between 200 to 400 students going into Year Nine attending four campuses at UQ, QUT and Griffith (including the Gold Coast) and USQ in Toowoomba. I love seeing young people get excited about science," Katelin says. "My favourite thing about science is the challenges it presents me with every single day. My work is never boring!"

And she certainly has plenty to keep her busy. In addition to her studies, for the last two years Katelin has been working as a research assistant in the lab at UQ's Diamantina Institute (UQDI), based at Princess Alexandra Hospital. The Institute has already earned a worldwide reputation for developments such as the HPV vaccine for cervical cancer under the stewardship of former director Professor Ian Frazer, now CEO of Queensland's Translational Research Institute.

Katelin's work currently focuses on investigating a possible treatment for Ankylosing Spondylitis, an inflammatory arthritis which results in the bones of the spine and pelvis fusing together. At the moment there is no known treatment for the condition.

New director of UQDI Professor Matt Brown openly confesses that if there are more Katelins out there he'd be delighted to have them.

"She's thrown herself into science with great gusto, energy and ability. She's picked up her skills really quickly from an undergraduate level to being a very capable lab research scientist. I think she'll go a long way in the research field she's heading in, which is genetics and the functional analysis of genetic variances in bone and joint disease," he says.

But it's her commitment to the community of science that sets her apart, according to her peers. For the last two years Katelin has chaired the BioFutures program, a seven-day forum for high school science students from Australia and New Zealand in Years 11 and 12 to experience a real taste of what studying science at university and living on campus is really like.

According to Professor Brown BioFutures is the sort of event any institute would be proud to be running and he credits Katelin as one of the major drivers in its continuing success. "It's a well-oiled program with people being immersed in real lab science which she put together alongside her studies...and doing those very well...it's an impressive achievement," he says.

Brown is confident it will encourage others who wouldn't have thought of science as a future career to look at it. "Research science is not something that gets put up in the public domain very much so it doesn't get considered by people in their high school years but, in fact, it's a highly exciting and dynamic field with lots of potential career opportunities for people who are successful and good at it.

"[Katelin's] a tremendous role model first of all and the stimulus she will have given people to think about [science] through the BioFutures program I think is going to have a broad impact..."

It appears Professor Brown is right and that Katelin's enthusiasm for science is indeed infectious. Tom Partridge took part in BioFutures with Katelin as a high school student in 2006 and is now in his fourth year studying biotechnology at UQ. He's been a group leader with BioFutures for three years.

"Katelin inspired me to get involved because she was so committed and motivated. I got swept up in her enthusiasm so I thought I'd give it a go. Katelin's a good delegator! BioFutures is a massive event to put together," he says.

"She has this incredible passion for her work and really wants younger people to get excited about science. I don't think people realise she's so young because she's so mature and has this real presence when she's addressing groups. You can see the students' eyes light up when she's talking."

Partridge says people like Katelin are making a real difference. "She's actually making science cool for a lot of these kids, and that's pretty amazing!"

The sentiment is echoed by another mentor Professor Linda Richards, a group leader at the Queensland Brain Institute who met Katelin at the national Brain Bee Challenge competition in 2006. "Being chair of BioFutures, she has to negotiate with some very senior people at university to get the venues and put the program together, which is very professionally run. She handles all that with such aplomb - it's hard to believe she's only 21 and doing all of this on a voluntary basis," says Richards.

While the world appears to be her oyster, Katelin so far is staying put in Brisbane with "another five years of being a poor student" ahead of her as she completes her PhD at UQDI. Meanwhile her mum Helen has no doubt her daughter's future is extremely bright. "I fully expect that phone call when she tells me she been offered some amazing overseas posting. It's only a matter of time."

But Katelin isn't waiting for the phone to ring. She will take a well-earned break before she starts the next component of her study. "When I'm not in the lab or organising a science camp I like to hang out with my family. Surprisingly, I am also very competent on rollerblades, which is my favourite sport." And another indicator that she's anything but the stereotypical science 'nerd'.

"Yeah, there is this perception that scientists are geeks or nerds with big thick glasses who wear lab coats with a pocket protector," she laughs. "That's what I love about the programs I'm involved with, when young people understand that science is not an esoteric thing, they realise it's actually really exciting!"

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