So who goes to University?

A PACKAGE FOR SCHOOLS
So who goes to university?

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Executive Summary

There is significant under-representation of students from low socio-economic status (SES) backgrounds in Australian higher education, despite an overall expansion of access to higher education during the last 15 years. The proportion of enrolments of people from low SES backgrounds has remained largely unchanged at around 16 per cent of undergraduate places, well below the 25 per cent of the Australian population defined as low SES.

A university education offers economic and social benefits including higher labour force participation rates, higher than average salaries, improved health and a general expansion of cultural capital. So, who goes to university, and why do we not have more young people from low SES backgrounds continuing on to higher education?

Educators working with low SES school communities are amongst those best placed to understand the interwoven factors that shape the aspirations and expectations of their students, and to identify strategies that can work to improve their students’ chances for a university education.

Developed in consultation with schools, this package aims to share the strategies and approaches teachers and other school staff are using to improve student attainment, and develop students’ awareness of and interest in undertaking higher education.

Common approaches and programs that schools are undertaking that are proving to be effective are:

- engaging in multiple programs aimed at building aspiration and attainment – accumulation of ‘lots of little things’ to shift students’ expectations and capabilities
- demystifying university through frequent and ongoing exposure – including students visiting universities, and involving university staff and students in school-based activities
- providing information to help students and parents through what may be seen as daunting aspects of going on to further study, including information about financial support, courses and what academic preparation is required
- involving parents in development activities
- prominently displaying university relationships to show how much they are valued by the school – for instance university logos on school websites, stories in newsletters
- proactively engaging with numerous universities and other support organisations, and taking full advantage of resources on offer
- inviting former students who have gone on to succeed at university to act as role models/speakers
- providing support for students through tutoring and mentoring relations with university students and others
- providing specific academic achievement programs – particularly maths and English.

More information about these strategies and approaches is provided in section four.

The package also contains:

- an overview of the issues relating to the participation of students from low SES backgrounds in university education (section one)
- information for schools about their students’ current levels of educational attainment and transition to TAFE and university (section two)
- a consideration of students’ subject selection in relation to higher education (section three)
- overall approaches schools have undertaken to engage and build relations with universities in order to increase attainment and aspiration (section five)
- information about evaluation approaches that may assist in identifying the impact of programs aimed at improving aspiration and attainment (section six)
- further information about university support programs (appendix).

The package initially developed as an initiative arising from the Low Socio-economic Status School Communities National Partnership. It soon became clear that it would be beneficial for all schools to share their ideas for raising student attainment and aspiration.
The package includes examples and case studies of a diverse range of New South Wales schools across the government, independent and Catholic sectors that are all working towards maximising opportunities for their students for higher education.

The package supports the State’s commitment outlined in the recently released NSW Tertiary Education Plan to: promote better links between schools and universities to lift participation and attainment and university enrolments, especially in schools serving low socio-economic communities and regional NSW.

As well as the additional funding provided to schools through the Low SES School Communities National Partnership, universities are receiving extra Commonwealth funding to increase their enrolments of students from low SES backgrounds through the Higher Education Participation and Partnerships Program (HEPPP). Universities are accordingly expanding the range of school support programs and resources aimed at increasing enrolments of these students.

These combined elements are providing us with a rare opportunity to provide significant additional support to young people from low SES backgrounds to aspire to, and succeed in, higher education.

University is of course not the only pathway for all young people to take after school. There are other valuable pathways for students – into traineeships and other forms of education, and through these into the workforce or possibly university further down the track. However, the school–university pathway should be one that is equally accessible to all, and this package aims to assist schools in providing opportunities for all students to access higher education.

Aboriginal students, rural and remote based students, students from other disadvantaged regions and equity groups experience similar educational participation problems as those from low SES backgrounds but also experience distinctive issues and challenges. Some of the university-school programs profiled in the package address these distinctive needs.

While the package is targeting students from low SES backgrounds because of their under-representation at university, the strategies outlined are relevant to all students regardless of their SES background. They are based on sound, high quality learning and teaching practices and support processes that can be adapted according to the individual student’s circumstances and needs.

The package complements other resources designed to support teachers and schools in implementing the reforms of the Low SES School Communities National Partnership, available on the Supporting Low SES School Communities website: www.lowsesschools.nsw.edu.au
SECTION ONE

Introduction

Why a focus on university education for students from low socio-economic backgrounds?

“Education is a transforming influence, assisting us to change the circumstances of our birth, reach our full potential and contribute to our society.”

Professor Denise Bradley

Speaking from the experience of being the first in her family to attend university, Professor Denise Bradley’s description above of the power of education is a fitting introduction to the contents of this package. It highlights the power of schools and educators to shift expectations, open up possibilities, and by so doing transform individual lives as well as contribute to a more equitable and productive society. This includes opening up the possibilities of higher education to students from low socio-economic status (SES) backgrounds, and providing them with the capacity to attain at university if they choose this pathway.

Students from low SES backgrounds are on average three times less likely to attend university than their higher SES peers. Despite an overall expansion of access to higher education during the last 15 years, the share of university places for people from low SES backgrounds has remained largely unchanged at around 16 per cent of undergraduate places.

Student and parent expectations and aspirations, the learner’s self esteem, levels of school attainment, understanding what is involved in preparing for university, lower exposure to the potential benefits of higher education – these are some of the inter-related factors that we know from the research affect young peoples’ chances of a university education.
These issues will be familiar to those working in low SES school communities, who are engaged daily in improving the opportunities of their students and opening up possibilities for further education and training. This package aims to contribute to this process by addressing the issues affecting aspiration and attainment, and providing information about how some schools are going about tackling these issues.

The package contributes to the implementation of the reforms within the Low Socio-economic Status School Communities National Partnership targeting attainment and aspiration rates of students from low SES backgrounds. Under the system-wide reforms, schools are implementing a range of initiatives targeting their particular students’ circumstances. The package also supports the State’s commitment outlined in the recently released NSW Tertiary Education Plan to promote better links between schools and universities to lift participation and attainment and university enrolments, especially in schools serving low socio-economic communities and regional NSW.

The package has been developed in consultation with schools, building on what they are already doing to improve aspiration and attainment. Some but not all of the schools profiled in the package are participating in the Low SES School Communities National Partnership; all are tackling how best to increase the opportunities available to their students from low SES backgrounds.

Expanding pathways to higher education

While the package primarily focuses on the school–university pathway, it is based within a State strategy of working with business, vocational education and training and higher education providers to develop more effective pathway programs into higher education, that will enable greater mobility of movement between education sectors.

As well as targets for university participation, New South Wales also has targets to increase participation in Vocational Education and Training (VET), particularly at the Diploma and Advanced Diploma level. Progress has already been made to expand pathways between university and TAFE, including credit transfer and articulation arrangements between TAFE NSW and higher education providers and joint VET/Higher Education delivery. TAFE NSW now offers degree level programs.

A priority of the NSW Tertiary Education Plan is to continue to strengthen and expand pathways, particularly the development of more integrated VET and higher education programs. This includes students undertaking formal study programs that would result in the acquisition of both a VET and higher education qualification – generally a bachelor degree – or tertiary qualifications that draw on both sectors and integrate them within the one qualification. These models will widen access across the State, enabling students to move readily between VET and higher education.

These initiatives will provide greater flexibility for students, and further increase the opportunities of students from low SES backgrounds to access a wider range of higher education options.

Further information about existing credit transfer and articulation arrangements from TAFE NSW to universities is available on the TAFE NSW – University Credit Transfer website, https://www.tafensw.edu.au/tafeunicredit/
Aspiration and attainment: interlinked elements of successful transition to university

Aspiration

Perceptions regarding the value of higher education and for whom it is best suited play a large part in students’ decisions about further study. For many students from lower SES school communities, university is an alien and inaccessible concept; they are less likely to have parents who went to university, and few people in the local community are likely to have attended. In most cases teachers are among the only people students from low SES backgrounds meet who have engaged in higher education. For students from high SES backgrounds university is generally a normal progression, with over two thirds planning to enrol, whereas for low SES students a very high level of inner motivation is required in the face of general expectations that they will progress to non-higher education pathways.

Students’ aspirations in regard to school completion and further education are developed early and shape their decision making as they progress through high school. This includes decisions about completing school, with students deciding by 15 years, if not before, whether they will complete Year 12 and continue on to university. The research indicates students from low SES backgrounds who expected a higher level of educational degree when they were in Year 8 were more likely to attain a higher degree in later years, and that those students who had high early expectations also had relatively high educational attainment in later years.

Other research consolidates this, with findings that nine out of ten young people’s future actions are in line with the plans they have made by 15 years of age, and that of those who expressed an intention at age 15 to complete Year 12, over 90 per cent did so, whereas of those who indicated they would not complete Year 12, almost 90 per cent did not complete it.

While students from higher SES backgrounds are more likely to believe a university course is relevant and will offer them ‘the chance of an interesting and rewarding career’, students from low SES backgrounds have a stronger belief that a TAFE course is more useful to them. Implicated in this are students’ perceptions of their teachers’ expectations, with students from low SES backgrounds less likely to believe they were encouraged by teachers to aim for university than higher SES background students (44 per cent compared to 58 per cent).

This highlights the significant role of teachers in supporting these students in aspiring for and working towards successful school completion that will open up tertiary education possibilities.

Attainment

As educators know, aspiration goes hand in hand with attainment. Lower levels of educational achievement, lower educational aspirations and lower school completion rates are significantly interrelated, with lower levels of educational achievement believed to be a precursor for other effects.

Research findings consistently demonstrate that ‘the individual SES of students matters greatly in terms of their academic achievement’. This is also reflected at the school level, with social patterns separating schools in terms of average achievement evident in the first year of secondary school. For instance, the lower the SES intake to a public high school, the lower the reading scores, and schools with poorer results in Year 7 are also more likely to have lower rates of retention to Year 12.
Students from low SES backgrounds are:

- less likely than high SES students to achieve a high score in English or Mathematics. For instance, the proportion of 15 year old secondary students in the highest SES quartile achieving at or above level 3 in overall reading literacy in 2006 was approximately 81 per cent compared with approximately 48 per cent of students in the lowest quartile, and for mathematics achievement at level 3 or above approximately 83 per cent of high SES compared with approximately 50 per cent in the lowest SES quartile.

- less likely to complete Year 12: 59 per cent across Australia compared with 78 per cent for high SES students.

- far less likely to achieve a high Australian Tertiary Assessment Rank (16 per cent compared to 46 per cent).

- more likely to progress to the VET sector or to work than higher education.

There are substantial differences in the conversion of early school achievement of individuals into university eligibility scores based on their social background, with students from low SES backgrounds unable to capitalise on their ability (as reflected in early school achievement) in the same way as their more advantaged, high SES counterparts, in terms of university eligibility scores. For students of similar ability, those from higher SES backgrounds are more likely to obtain university entrance scores and achieve higher scores if they do.

The accessibility of higher education is also a contributing factor to participation of students from low SES backgrounds, with distance and cost – living away from home expenses, earnings foregone, tuition fees and other study related costs – playing a contributing role to limiting access for some students.

This is an important finding as it confirms that the socio-economic gap in higher education participation is attributable to differences in the education achievement of children much earlier in the education system, rather than at the point of entry into higher education. The challenge is to provide the support to increase the proportion of students from low SES backgrounds who are succeeding at school and therefore eligible for university entry.

Figure 1.1 demonstrates the widening gap in educational attainment between students from different socio-economic backgrounds over time. The graph traces a cohort of students commencing school at Kindergarten in 1994 and undertaking the School Certificate in 2004, irrespective of the school attended, and their progression to further education.

Clearly we need to raise both education aspirations and early attainment if we are to increase the possibility of students from low SES backgrounds completing school and progressing to further education.
The good news is that if students from lower SES backgrounds do get to university, they have almost comparable success and retention rates as students from higher socio-economic backgrounds. They are, however, underrepresented in the highly-competitive professional courses, such as medicine, law and architecture, which have a higher earning potential, and overrepresented in courses with low entry requirements.

For example, in 2009 low SES students accounted for 11.1 per cent of applications for an undergraduate medical degree, compared with 49.8 per cent of applicants from high SES backgrounds. This finding raises a range of questions for educators, including the impact of students’ prior attainment (Higher School Certificate, Australian Tertiary Admission Rank score received) as well as school subject choices and career advice received on their university course selection.

The benefits of higher education

A university education offers improved economic and social benefits. For the individual, this includes increased employment prospects, higher labour force participation rates and lower unemployment rates. Post secondary education leads to significant financial benefits, with completion of a bachelor degree qualification having the largest impact, increasing earnings by about 30 per cent. The benefits are more striking when considered in relation to those who do not complete Year 12 – in this case completion of a bachelor’s degree leads to a relative increase in earnings of about 73 per cent. The benefits of post secondary education are even stronger for young women than young men.

Figure 1.2 indicates the financial benefits of higher education.

Unemployment rates and labour force participation rates for less educated workers also fluctuate more dramatically than for their higher educated counterparts when the economy goes through business cycles. Other benefits include improved health prospects, improved social standing, and a general expansion of cultural capital.

Recognising that higher education at an individual level bestows significant benefits, as well as contributing to society through boosting productivity and economic growth, the Commonwealth has set the following higher education national targets:

- by 2020, 20 per cent of higher education enrolments at undergraduate level will be of people from low socio-economic backgrounds
- by 2025, 40 per cent of all 25 to 34 years olds will hold a qualification at bachelor level or above.
Collaboration across governments and education sectors to raise aspiration and attainment

Joint government and sector processes are underway to facilitate increasing university enrolments of students from low SES backgrounds.

Universities are receiving additional Commonwealth funding through the Higher Education Participation and Partnerships Program (HEPPP). Under this program, about $14 million in 2010 was used to help universities develop and implement outreach activities to promote higher education among students from low SES backgrounds. Universities are accordingly expanding their range of school student support programs and resources aimed at increasing enrolments of these students, a number of which are outlined in this package.

From 2011, the Universities Admissions Centre (UAC) will automatically assess as eligible for an educational disadvantage rating all students who attend a Low SES School Community National Partnership school. Students who attend a NSW Department of Education and Training school participating in the Priority Schools Funding Program or Country Areas Program already qualify for this rating. Students who attend a school in these programs will automatically receive Educational Access Scheme points without having to submit an EAS application. However, the universities themselves have different policies in assessing students’ eligibility and allocation of bonus points and need to be consulted directly.

Other university support processes include setting aside a percentage or number of places in university courses for students assessed as experiencing educational disadvantage. Most institutions also have specific schemes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander applicants. Further information is provided on the Universities Admissions Centre’s website at http://www.uac.edu.au/undergraduate/eas/ee

These combined elements provide a rare opportunity to achieve radical change in opening up access to higher education to students from low SES backgrounds. Educators know from first-hand experience that individual teachers and schools can and do make a difference to children’s learning and well being, but the capacity to do so will be enhanced by this expanded systemic support.

Your ideas for improving student aspiration and attainment?

As you read over the strategies other schools are implementing to raise attainment and aspiration, you may find a high cross-over with what your school is already doing.

Do you have other processes in place that are working to improve student aspiration and attainment that other schools would find helpful to know about? If so please let us know so that we can incorporate them into the web based version of the package.

Contact details

National Partnerships Unit
NSW Department of Education and Training
Phone: 02 9561 8750
Email: national.partnerships@det.nsw.edu.au
SECTION TWO

Identifying attainment

Identifying students’ current aspiration and attainment

To assist in planning and decision making in relation to raising student attainment and aspiration for university education, schools will be provided with their student attainment and transition data. This data will be provided to schools participating in the Low SES School Communities National Partnership in early 2011, and will be available to other schools later in the year.

Most of this data is already available to schools through a variety of sources. The intention is to assist schools by providing it in a consolidated format.

The data will consist of:

i. Your school’s student data for the six year period 2004–2009 indicating:
   • the number of students receiving a School Certificate award
   • the percentage of students continuing on from School Certificate to Higher School Certificate
   • the number of students receiving a Higher School Certificate (HSC) award
   • the number of students eligible for an Australian Tertiary Admission Rank (ATAR)
   • the percentage of those who received an HSC award who were eligible for an ATAR.

ii. Your school’s student data for the five year period 2005–2010 indicating the number and percentage of HSC award students who received a university offer, did not receive a university offer, or did not apply for university.

iii. Your school’s student data over the five year period 2005–2010 indicating the number and percentage of students who received a HSC Award who went on to enrol at TAFE (Australian Qualification Framework Certificate 111 and above).

Feedback from schools focusing on improving student outcomes indicates that they are asking the following sorts of questions when analysing their data:

■ are students’ results indicating they are making progress from the School Certificate to the Higher School Certificate, and improving as they move through school?
■ if students’ results are declining as they move into the upper years, why might this be?
■ what does the data tell us about students’ strengths?
■ what does the data tell us about areas for improvement and additional support?

Schools are using this information in the development of individual, class and subject-targeted strategies that will improve student outcomes.
Supporting students in subject selection for the HSC

Students receive a wealth of support and guidance as they move from Year 10 into HSC studies. While some have a clear idea of future study and career paths, others are still unsure of their options and the multitude of possible study and work pathways available to them.

The advice schools provide is benefitting all students in identifying their range of talents and interests, and from this basis selecting a range of appropriate HSC subjects. This advice may be particularly influential though for students from low SES backgrounds, who may be the first in their families to continue to HSC completion and therefore may be relying heavily on guidance from teachers and careers advisers.

When choosing subjects for the HSC, students are advised to select subjects that they are interested in and are good at, and to take into consideration what they would like to do after completing school. However, there are distinctive, long standing social patterns in subject selection, with students from low SES backgrounds less likely to choose the more ‘academic’ subjects, including mathematics and the sciences, traditionally associated with continuing on to higher education. These subjects are regarded as developing high level critical thinking and analysis capabilities, and the sophisticated literacy and/or numeracy skills that will equip students with the capacity to succeed in higher education.

Social and cultural based expectations – of parents, teachers and students themselves – as well as previous attainment rates are largely implicated in students’ subject selection. The combination of low attainment and subject selection serves to compound the exclusion of young people from low SES backgrounds from professional courses at university that are associated with higher earning capacities.

Schools have identified the following issues when supporting students in making appropriate choices:

- are students from low SES backgrounds limiting themselves in their thinking about their possible future pathways? One principal for instance noted that many of the girls in his school planned on child care studies – staff encouraged them to think about other related options such as early childhood education at university, which would offer a broader range of career paths.

- what are teachers’ expectations for their students as they progress into Stage 6?

- are students’ subject choices for the HSC reflecting their educational capabilities? For instance, are their choices aligning with their performance in the School Certificate? Are students challenging themselves with their subject choices? One principal commented that in the past, students were more likely to lean towards safe options that undersold their capabilities – a big focus in the school had been to change this mind set to thinking more ambitiously about options.

- have students fully taken into account entry requirements into university courses they are interested in pursuing, and identified prerequisite subjects and ATAR eligibility?
Schools are supporting students through the following strategies:

1. **Regular and tailored advice and support for students**, as they continue to develop their ideas for future study pathways. Careers and transitions advisers are playing a major role in guiding students through the various study and work options available to them, and how to go about accessing these. This extends to supporting students by accompanying them to university open days and other information gathering activities. Research into the usefulness of further education and careers advice indicates that students really benefit from one-to-one sessions: of the various forms of career advice they received, including written materials and group talks, students in Years 10, 11 and 12 reported benefiting most from an individual conversation about their future options.  

2. **Readily accessible information and support to students** and their parents. Parents play a major role in guiding students’ subject choices and need to be involved early on in the process of decision making. Strategies schools are using include:
   - profiling university-related information in school newsletters to parents, for instance promoting university information sessions and open days
   - whole-year information sessions for parents, explaining the HSC process and subject selection, then providing time for parents to follow up with individual teachers
   - joint parent, student and career adviser interviews focusing on the individual student’s interests and future study possibilities. These provide parents with the opportunity to ask questions that they may not feel comfortable raising in a public forum. Some schools undertake this for targeted students – others for all students in Year 10
   - directing students and parents to other sources of information. These include access to the UAC guide and encouraging students to undertake further research themselves by visiting websites
   - supporting students in developing Individualised Learning Plans.

3. **Increasing the subject range available to students.** Student subject selection is of course dependent upon what the school is able to offer to students and to support them in undertaking successfully. Schools serving low SES communities have sometimes experienced a range of resourcing limitations that have restricted curriculum range. Through the Low SES School Communities National Partnership, schools are increasingly working in networks or clusters to share resources and pool expertise to increase the range of subjects and quality of teaching available to students. One way in which this occurs is through the use of technology such as Connected Classrooms to assist in developing effective clusters that enable schools to expand their curriculum offerings.
Guidance in selecting a mathematics course

While mathematics is no longer a compulsory subject for the HSC, some university courses require mathematics as a prerequisite, and others assume knowledge of it or recommend its study. This includes disciplines as diverse as primary teacher education, midwifery, speech pathology, public health, international business and agriculture.

Schools are currently supporting students in selecting a mathematics course that matches their capabilities and interests by providing them with the following:

- detailed information about the various mathematics courses well in advance of decision making time
- assistance in selecting a course that aligns with students’ demonstrated ability in the early years of high school, and reflects teachers’ high expectations
- clear indications of the workload required to succeed in the course
- information about movement between courses, for instance encouraging capable students who are unsure whether they are best suited to Mathematics or Mathematics Extension 1 to initially undertake Mathematics Extension 1 and change to Mathematics if the pace and work level does not suit them
- information about mathematics pre-requisites for university courses. Some schools collate this information and provide students with a written summary of the NSW university courses that require a mathematics course, including which specific course is required. Students are able to refer to this information as they progress through Year 10, and to share the information with parents.

Further guidance in supporting students’ subject selections is available at:

- NSW Board of Studies  
- Universities Admission Centre (UAC)  
  http://www.uac.edu.au/
- MyFuture  
  http://www.myfuture.edu.au/
Strategies for raising student aspiration and attainment

“It’s about awakening students to the possibilities.”

This is how one principal described the underlying basis for the various activities his school is undertaking in relation to building student aspiration and attainment. This section outlines how schools are going about this, including examples of schools partnering with universities to raise aspiration and attainment levels, and best place students to succeed in their HSC studies. These are based within the high quality teaching and overall literacy and numeracy development that is occurring through the Low SES School Communities National Partnership, which is aimed at overall increases in education attainment, extending to students’ performances in the senior years.

Strategy: Parent engagement (in relation to university aspiration and attainment)

A critical element of students’ aspiration and attainment is parental support for students’ learning activities at home and engagement in schooling, and for these reasons parental engagement is a key reform element of the Low SES School Communities National Partnership (Reform 6). Improved school behaviour and attendance and increased likelihood of school completion are some of the crucial elements research indicates are influenced by parental support and engagement. Parental support and engagement are therefore central to increasing students’ aspirations and attainment in relation to university education.

Schools in low SES school communities are undertaking a range of strategies to engage parents and develop their understanding of how they can support their children through the HSC years. These include strategies aimed at developing an understanding of what is required to succeed at HSC level, the options available at university and the benefits a university education can provide. A sample of these programs is provided below.

Kurri Kurri High School, North Lakes School, Gorokan High School: Making Educational Goals Sustainable (MEGS) program to raise attainment and aspiration

“It was good to have mum, because we were talking about how mum wants to go and do a special course.”

“Dad explained stuff I didn’t understand.”

The student quotes above about their parents’ involvement in a university visit demonstrate the effectiveness of the Making Educational Goals Sustainable (MEGS) program in successfully engaging parents in their children’s learning in the context of higher education; and the pleasure and satisfaction this is bringing to children.

The MEGS program is a community based research program between low SES school communities, the Hunter/Central Coast region, the TAFE NSW – Hunter Institute and the University of Newcastle. In 2010 students from 10 primary schools and Kurri Kurri High School, North Lakes School and Gorokan High School are involved in the program.

MEGS began as an intervention to improve student and parent awareness of tertiary education and career choices by raising awareness of and aspiration for higher education, and improving attainment to allow participation. Through the program, students from Year 6 participate in a range of activities including university and TAFE visits and workshops, follow up in-class activities and integrated use of technology as a learning tool following the visits.

A core element of the program is parental involvement, with the schools involved describing family participation as critical to “addressing perceptions and attitudes about tertiary education and supporting new and different conversations at home about tertiary education as a result of the shared experience”.

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MEGS is also providing a vehicle for strengthening transition partnerships between primary and high school, within the context of building student expectations and aspiration. Primary school students and their families talk and interact with high school teachers in a friendly manner, enabling teachers to get to know future students and parents and begin to build positive relations.

Students and families complete before and after surveys and feedback indicates the program is successful in meeting its aims of building aspirations for university education. The program is also succeeding in providing teachers with new understandings of how to better engage families, enabling them to see a “totally different side of working with families”:

“Teachers saw a different side of parents and heard them talking about educational opportunities. They talked to people they had either never seen or spoken to before.”

The increased engagement of parents and higher expectations for their children’s learning is translating into stronger collaboration between parents and teachers around encouraging positive student behaviour and engagement:

“One family who had often displayed anger when the child had been disciplined or suspended is now saying to the child ‘you can’t do that, you can’t afford to miss school if you want to go to university.”

The feedback indicates the impact of the program is significant and long lasting:

“This is not just a one off. Families really experience something that made a difference.”

Teachers involved in MEGS are enthusiastic about its impact and keen for continued involvement, with one school commenting that ‘we would be doing this even without the money or support’.

“Never mind the kids – I want to go there!”

This comment by one parent is further demonstration of the multi-layered impact of the program in fostering higher expectations not just for students but for their parents, and schools have reported parents requesting information about university and TAFE entry for themselves.

**Strategy: Tutoring to increase engagement, aspiration and attainment**

While higher SES background students may be able to access external tutoring for support in particular learning areas or to generally raise attainment, low SES background students may be reliant upon their school for this type of support. Many schools are tapping into opportunities provided by universities to provide their students with one on one tutoring.


The Refugee Action Support (RAS) program is a tutoring initiative that assists adolescent refugees with English language, literacy and learning skills. The program is a collaboration between the NSW Department of Education and Training, the Australian Literacy and Numeracy Foundation (ALNF) and the University of Western Sydney (UWS). Through the initiative, refugee students receive
after school tuition and in-school assistance in order to develop their literacy skills, improve achievement of syllabus outcomes, and improve participation and engagement in schooling.

Under the program, young refugees are matched with Masters of Teaching (secondary) students from the University of Western Sydney. Each university student works with a group of no more than three young students, providing three hours of tutoring per week for 12 weeks. A further half hour is allocated for debriefing sessions, after each tutoring session, with the RAS coordinating teachers. The Australian Literacy and Numeracy Foundation provides 15 hours of literacy training for tutors. The literacy training utilises scaffolded literacy and situated practice strategies as well as ESL scales to guide students through skills in discourse elements (genres, registers and codes) that will benefit the young refugee students. The ALNF also provides cultural awareness training and ongoing support to the tutors through online resources.

Two tutor groups are recruited each year, allowing for 24 weeks of support to be made available. The tutors conduct support lessons during and after school, both in the classroom and in the school’s homework centre. They are more than just teachers; they act as mentors by modelling the skills and habits of effective learning and the effective use of language. The tutors are supervised and supported at the school by a teacher coordinator.

As well as providing students with valuable mentoring or tutoring support, the pre-service teachers gain new insights into the lives and pedagogical challenges facing students whose needs are not well met through mainstream provision. Insights gained through these interactions often have transformative effects on beginning teachers’ understandings of young people from diverse backgrounds. This experience can have a long term effect on the kinds of teachers they become.

Evaluations of the program conducted by University of Western Sydney have found that both teachers and student tutors rate the program as very worthwhile. The tutoring provides language and learning support to the young people as well as assisting them to navigate school and post-school options.

**Marsden High School**

Marsden High School has developed a special relationship with Macquarie University through its School Tutoring Program that has been running successfully over the past four years. Volunteer students from Macquarie University provide individual and small group tutorial support to senior students at Marsden High School, West Ryde, for their HSC subjects. Through the School Tutoring Program Marsden High School students are able to gain an insight into university life by getting to know the Macquarie students.

The Marsden students identify the subjects for which they would like additional help and they are then matched with university students by the Head Teacher of Teaching and Learning at Marsden High School and the coordinator of the Macquarie University Transitions Program. Each Tuesday afternoon during Terms 2 and 3, students from the university meet with about 30 Marsden HSC students to provide free tutoring.

Involvement in the program allows the students from Macquarie to earn points towards their Global Leadership Program. The Macquarie students take on a mentoring role as well as a tutoring role with the Marsden students. The program has proved to be very beneficial as it allows the Marsden students to ask their tutors questions about university courses, in addition to improving their HSC results.

In 2008 Marsden High School had a record number of students qualifying for university and according to the Head Teacher of Teaching and Learning the School Tutoring Program is one of the reasons that the students
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were so successful that year. The tutoring program has been instrumental in helping the students realise their potential and aspire to more demanding courses.

Macquarie University’s Pro Vice Chancellor and Manager of Student Recruitment are in discussions with Marsden High School to begin a new program aimed at supporting refugee students. It is hoped that the program will be operational by 2011 and that it will focus on supporting refugee students to secure a pathway to a university education.

Strategy: Targeted support in key subjects

Students may benefit from targeted tutoring in specific subjects, particularly if undertaking challenging courses.

Barrenjoey High School, Pittwater High School, Narrabeen Sports High School: lifting aspiration and attainment around science, technology, engineering and mathematics

Barrenjoey High School, Pittwater High School and Narrabeen Sports High School are part of the Peninsula Community of Schools (PCS), through which they are working together and with Macquarie University to develop and implement innovative teaching and learning practices within the science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) curriculum areas. The following public
schools are also part of the PCS: Avalon Public School, Bilgola Plateau Public School, Newport Public School, Mona Vale Public School, Elanora Heights Public School, Narrabeen North Public School, Narrabeen Lakes Public School, Collaroy Plateau Public School, Wheeler Heights Public School, Cromer Public School.

Years 9 and 10 were the original target group for tutoring support but the STEM Project has evolved to include all students from Kindergarten to Year 12, thereby forming links early on between school and university, and enabling greater involvement of parents in activities.

Tutoring of Years 9 and 10 students continues to be a key component of the STEM Project, with Macquarie University students a key resource in the partnership, providing good role models for high school students while themselves benefiting through learning innovative teaching practices. Following on from the tutor support, selected Year 10 Science students have had the opportunity to undertake work experience, including participating in a research project with university students and professors to study rainforest dynamics at the Werrikimbee National Park in northern NSW, a 40 year project looking at the growth of old and new forests.

The PCS has taken the tutor model into their own schools, with Year 9 students working as mentors on the PCS Sustainability Project. Through the project they are allocated a group to mentor/tutor, meeting every two weeks to learn about and experience the concept of an authentic sustainable environment. The university’s innovative Information and Communications Technology (ICT) Centre has been an invaluable resource for implementing this joint learning venture.

Research projects have been created to maximise the effectiveness of the available resources, facilities and staff, involving a team of support people including university staff and students, ICT Centre staff and PCS Coordinators. Through a “hands-on” approach using high-end technology and access to experts, tutors and students engaged in a range of high quality, relevant science experiments, with skills developed in science, graphics, design, communication and problem-solving.

All students from Kindergarten to Year 10 also have the opportunity to participate in Robotics programs as an innovative approach for the delivery of STEM curriculum. This program is supported by trained mentors from the high schools as well as experts and student mentors from the University.

Further information is provided in section five about the processes whereby the Peninsula Community of Schools set up the initiative with Macquarie University, and the process of ongoing development and strengthening of programs.

Lachlan Macquarie College: specialist programs in Mathematics and Science

Lachlan Macquarie College commenced operation in 2008 as a partnership between NSW Department of Education and Training and the University of Western Sydney. The College develops and provides innovative specialist programs in Mathematics and Science for public school students and teachers in a local education partnership based in Western Sydney.

Foundation partner schools are Arthur Phillip High School, Cumberland High School, James Ruse Agricultural High School, Macarthur Girls High School, Marsden High School, Northmead Creative and Performing Arts High School and Parramatta High School.

Programs are offered for students in Stage 3 and Years 7 to 12. Professional development workshops and courses are also offered for primary and secondary teachers.

Delivery of the programs is supported by the availability and application of new, cutting edge technologies in a unique school and tertiary education partnership, with students attending other schools and University of Western Sydney lecture theatres or laboratories.
Participation in the College’s activities extends beyond the partner schools to many others, including National Partnership schools. Students are also able to participate on an individual basis in study preparation activities for the HSC.

Samples of current programs involving schools such as Arthur Phillip include:

- the Year 12 Chemistry Day including the Atomic Absorption Spectrophotometer Challenge, where students measure the sodium content of a well known sport drink in a fun, competitive environment
- the Threshold Concept Research project. University academics are working closely with secondary teachers in researching best practice delivery within Stage 4 Science, to enhance student understanding and classroom delivery
- Discover Science@UWS which provides a rare opportunity for Year 10 students to work with state of the art technology, leading scientists from university and industry and postgraduate students in discovering science through a ‘real world’, problem-based approach to learning
- the project used the confocal microscope at University of Western Sydney Hawkesbury to engage students in a challenging, authentic and interdisciplinary project that enhances students’ understanding of potential science career pathways
- Mathematics Gifted and Talented days, providing extended learning opportunities in a fun, team based environment.

**Hunter/Central Coast region pilot program to raise attainment in mathematics and increase aspirations**

Five schools from the Hunter Central Coast region are participating in a pilot program with the University of Newcastle to increase students’ attainment in Mathematics, and raise aspirations for university education.

Approximately 50 students currently in Year 11 at the following schools will participate in this one year program: Irrawang High School, Kurri Kurri High School, Mount View High School, Northlakes High School, Wyong High School.

The students will participate in academic skills building workshops, will have a university student mentor, shadowing experiences, and tutoring by undergraduate students in the mathematics teacher education program as part of those university students’ coursework.

The students’ mathematics teachers will work with an experienced academic from the university’s School of Education with a view to enabling the teachers to better support the students participating in the pilot.

The students’ parents will also be part of the pilot, participating in a number of sessions at the University and at the school which focus on ways in which they can contribute to the achievement of the best educational outcomes for their children.

**Wagga Wagga High School**

The Podcasting Project investigated podcasting of academic content in Science, Mathematics and History to improve the learning outcomes of Years 7–10 students. The research focused on generating models of how podcasting could be integrated into the teaching of a range of subjects to foster improved oral and metacognitive skills. In addition, the project enhanced the digital literacy skills of teachers and students involved in the project.
The research was carried out as part of a project directly supervised by Charles Sturt University (CSU) and with the additional assistance of the Australian Catholic University (ACU). The universities worked in conjunction with Science, Mathematics, Computing and History teachers. The aim of the research was to identify how effective some of the latest technologies, such as podcasting, can be as a tool for more powerful and effective learning.

The information from the study was used to report to the wider educational community about the value and effectiveness of podcasting in attaining improved teaching and learning outcomes. The report was delivered to all interested parents and students at the school but was also a part of an academic paper delivered in Sydney and Singapore.

**Strategy: Mentoring and coaching**

“It’s been a real eye opener for the mentors as well as the students.”

A transitions adviser involved in coordinating mentoring activities for students in his school made this observation about the impact of the mentoring experience on both students and their mentors, illustrating how the relationship can be an enlightening experience for all involved.

Ongoing mentoring of low SES background students as they progress through the senior years is being used effectively in a number of Low SES School Community National Partnership schools, in line with research demonstrating that mentoring can enhance positive behaviour changes of students and increase positive attitudes toward school.

Schools are tapping into the already extensive and growing network of student support programs offered by universities and other external organisations. Through these programs, students are linking up with older university students and other support people who can provide insights into university life, its benefits and challenges, and how to successfully approach university study.

**Marrickville High School**

Marrickville High School students from Years 9–12 are participating in the ASPIRE program through the University of New South Wales (UNSW), which aims to lift students’ aspirations for a university education. The students participate in a number of on-campus and in-school awareness raising activities. Equity staff and trained UNSW student volunteers work with the school’s students to build greater awareness about university and encourage students to consider a university education as a possible option for the future.

UNSW’s Step-Up program provides opportunities for students in Year 11 to participate in a two day on-campus mentoring program on developing key study and academic learning skills and preparing students for university study. Students are encouraged to think about the link between effective study skills and academic success in both the short and long term. Year 12 students are involved in on-campus student shadowing at UNSW. Students are matched with a current university student, who mentors and assists students in decision making and increases their awareness about university opportunities. Both of these programs encourage team work and communication skills and assist in students making informed decisions in their transition into further education.

Another mentoring program provided to students is the Constructive Argument and Respectful Debate in Schools (CARDS) program, run by Sparke Helmore Solicitors. Through this program 12 students in Year 10 are mentored by the firm’s solicitors over a period of six weeks to enhance their public speaking and debating skills, with students participating in 2.5 hour workshops on problem solving, rhetoric and the art of persuasion, active listening and constructive and respectful debate. The personalised attention each student receives from their mentor builds...
self-esteem and encourages their participation in the practical side of the program. The students perform in front of their peers, teachers and mentors in a formal debate in their final week of the program.

These mentoring opportunities provide insight into professions, which increases students’ confidence and enhances their capacity to pursue higher education. They also strengthen students’ understanding of the requirements of university study and increase awareness of the wider community. At Marrickville High School there has been a steady increase in students who apply for university.

Granville Boys High School

Students at Granville Boys High School are involved in various mentoring programs aimed at increasing aspirations for further education, and understanding what is required to continue on to university.

Year 9 students are participating in the Classrooms Without Borders Mentoring program offered through the University of Western Sydney, through which students receive small group mentoring at school from university students. As well as providing practical information about studying at university, the university students share the bigger picture of university life, extending beyond the academic to social and other activities.

Year 11 students participate in the Australian Business and Community Network’s (ABCN) Aspirations coaching program for students, facilitated through one of the Network’s member firms Pricewaterhouse Coopers. The ABCN is a partnership of national business leaders and companies working on mentoring and coaching programs that focus on improving training and literacy levels, supporting innovation, mentoring and broadening opportunities for students. ABCN’s NSW programs currently work with 31 primary schools and 26 high schools, most within the Southwest Sydney region.

The Year 11 Aspirations program involves small group coaching of students, with the volunteer coach meeting with students in a workshop setting for discussions and activities. The small group-coach structure aims to encourage team work and communication; vital skills in today’s work and study environments. The program aims to provide students with the knowledge and tools to make informed decisions about their choices and pathways after school, including how their own unique strengths, skills and aptitudes can be applied at school and in their future studies/career pathways. Some of the workshops occur in the firm’s city offices, providing students with a valuable opportunity to experience a professional work setting.

The program is proving to be an enjoyable process and school staff describe it as successful in opening up possible future study/career options for the students involved, with the program coach encouraging students to think ambitiously about possible future options. As with other coaching and mentoring programs, the benefits are mutual, with coaches gaining increased awareness of the wider community and the satisfaction of working with young people.

Alexandria Park Community School

Alexandria Park has been providing mentoring for its Aboriginal high school students in partnership with the Australian Indigenous Mentoring Experience (AIME) since AIME began operating in 2005. Through structured educational mentoring, university students are linked in a one-on-one relationship with indigenous high school students.

AIME offers a range of programs for Years 7-12 students that aim to build academic capacity, aspiration and determination to succeed. In 2010, Alexandria Park’s Year 9 students are participating in the Year 9 Interactive program. Through a variety of art, dance, drama and writing activities mentors and mentees build respectful relationships and explore processes of learning and self reflection.

Teaching staff involved in the program describe it as “opening up students’ minds to the possibilities” of
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further education. Through partnering with an Aboriginal university student, the high school students develop new insights into what is possible for them. They also develop their understanding of the sort of hard work that is required for success – staff report that a clear message that reverberates through the program is that students need to put the effort in to succeed in continuing to university, and to do well once there.

By spending time on campus students experience what university life is like, and the various support networks that are in place for Aboriginal students, including careers counselling and scholarships. This is all communicated in a friendly and fun environment, where the students spend time with Aboriginal students from other schools, thereby further strengthening and extending supportive networks beyond the school.

Strategy: Homework/Learning Centres

Schools are operating Homework/Learning Centres to provide students with additional out of class learning support. These sometimes draw upon universities for additional resourcing, with university students offering tutoring assistance, which may also take on a mentoring aspect as relationships build over time.

Eden Marine High School Homework Centre.
Marrickville High School operates a Homework Centre one afternoon a week, in which university students work one to one with students across a range of subjects including Maths, Science and History. University students from both UNSW’s ASPIRE and University of Sydney’s Compass programs are involved in the tutoring sessions. The sessions are proving to be effective in engaging students in completing homework tasks, and Marrickville High is considering using National Partnership funding to extend the Homework Centre to other afternoons.

Eden Marine High School also runs a weekly Homework Centre that is open for all students to attend and on a second afternoon the Centre operates primarily for Aboriginal students. The programs have proven to be popular, particularly with Aboriginal students who are supported by teachers and members of the Aboriginal community to meet their educational goals.

Strategy: Study Camps/Summer Schools

Schools are taking up the opportunity for their students to participate in university-run study camps or summer schools. Examples include the summer and winter school programs conducted by the University of Technology Sydney (UTS) through its U@Uni Schools Outreach program including, ‘Make it Reel’ Cineliteracy Summer School, a three week literacy and numeracy program for Year 9 and 10 students, and the ‘Make a Real Robot’ Summer School. More information on summer schools provided by UTS is available the Appendix.

The Kempsey Adventist School

The Kempsey Adventist School, an independent school, runs a study camp for its Year 11 students with tertiary education provider, Avondale College in Cooranbong New South Wales. The program was developed in 2008 in response to school data indicating low expectations amongst students at Kempsey Adventist School regarding post-secondary study and employment options. The program aims to increase the number of students completing the HSC through the creation of a realistic vision of successful completion of a post-secondary study pathway at Avondale.

The study camp involves formalised co-curricular activities including students living on the tertiary campus and attending tertiary classes, career assistance and planning at a tertiary level, on-site school visits and support from Avondale staff. The Year 11 Study Camp runs for one week, full time at Avondale in early Term 1 each year. Dedicating the time, resources and budget to develop the “wow” factor of the program was critical to ensure the initial success of the camps. Students then returned to school and effectively sold the program to their younger peers by relaying their experiences and how they benefitted from the activities.

The Year 11 Study Camp currently has a high level of student engagement. Of the 2010 HSC class, 40 per cent of students hope to attend university or post-secondary school. About 20 per cent of those students plan on attending Avondale, including one Aboriginal student. These students are achieving at a level high enough to obtain an ATAR that should enable them to attend university.

Support mechanisms are crucial in program delivery and program continuity. Avondale provides ongoing support to the students at school, which is facilitated through the Year 12 Coordinator. Avondale staff visit the school throughout the year to promote tertiary education and the school’s administration office also commits time to support Year 12 students to apply for appropriate scholarships.
Strategy: Shifting school culture towards positive expectations

A common element of schools’ approaches to increasing aspiration and attainment is shifting the expectations of what students are capable of achieving – expectations that are deeply embedded in the school’s culture. While schools varied in the degree to which this aim was articulated, shifting culture is a key strategy running through programs and activities.

“It isn’t anything special, just a lot of little things that add up.”

This is one principal’s modest description of the many support programs that have been initiated in his school to support students’ aspirations for university, and awareness of the possibilities university education has to offer. The combined effect of these ‘little things’ is to provide frequent exposure to higher education, building up students’ understanding of the higher education system, and developing expectations that university is a realistic and achievable and known quantity – not an exotic destination for a limited few. Schools are also increasing exposure through open promotion of their links with universities to parents and the broader community. For instance some schools display the logos of universities or their support programs on their website home pages, making it clear that the school values the school-university relationships that are developing.

This is important because, although a great deal of effort and resources go into informing students about their education and training options after school, and supporting them in the decision making process, feedback indicates significant gaps in students’ knowledge about the details of how the higher education system works. For instance, students from low SES backgrounds appear to be generally less well-informed about the various university options, entry requirements, pathways, delivery modes and study requirements than those whose environment and knowledge is influenced by the university experiences of peers and families.

Below is one example of a school working to develop positive expectations for all students, and the next section continues to consider how schools are shifting expectations for university education through engaging with universities.

Loyola Senior High School

Loyola Senior High School, Mount Druitt, offers a broad ranging pastoral care program that promotes positive expectations of all individuals. The Ignatian ideal of the education of the whole person is promoted through the integrated Pastoral Care program that touches all aspects of school life, with a particular focus on motivation and goal setting. Consisting of three parts: the House and Tutor System, the Careers and School Counsellors (CARE team), and retreat and reflection days, the purpose of each part is specific, but all are seen as integral in the development of the whole student.

The Loyola House and Tutor System provides personalised support for the students by allocating a tutor to each student for the duration of their time at the school. Loyola also employs both a Careers Counsellor and a School Counsellor, who is a fully qualified education psychologist. The School Counsellor chairs the “CARE Team”, which develops programs on study habits and skills and motivation for students as well as identifying those students in need of additional support. The CARE program includes successful former students speaking at lunches or at functions and the contracting of motivational speakers. The Retreat and Reflection Day programs address future goals and ambitions and the dignity, talents and value of all students.
Schools engaging with universities

General feedback indicates that the time required on the part of school staff to organise involvement in the university programs is a challenge. Schools often need to provide release to teachers to participate in the visits to the universities, coordinate student involvement in the activities, liaise with university staff and evaluate outcomes. However, schools are reporting that the pay off in terms of increased engagement from students and frequently parents, and increased awareness of university education throughout the school, is making the effort worthwhile.

Schools are also benefiting from forming networks and partnerships with each other in accessing university support structures and resources – this is evident in some of the activities outlined in the previous section, and further information regarding interschool collaboration around student aspiration and attainment is provided in this section.

Feedback from schools also indicates that the processes universities have in place and are continuing to develop to engage with schools are facilitating collaboration between organisations. Frequently, the universities are making the first approach to schools, and are keen for their involvement.

This section explores some of the overall approaches that schools are using to develop effective partnerships with universities (and in some cases other organisations) to support low SES background students, and generally raise the profile of university education in the school community, and promote its benefits.

Wiley Park Girls High School

“Our impetus for all these programs is to reach as many students as possible in an attempt to expose them to the many opportunities available to them.”

Wiley Park has well established links with a number of universities, through which students are participating in a range of programs:

- targeted students from Years 8 to 12 are participating in UNSW’s ASPIRE program. University students conduct workshops with students at the school, and throughout the year various year groups (20–30 students) go to UNSW to participate in whole day events
- ABCN Aspirations program: in 2010 a targeted group of Year 11 students were mentored by staff from Pricewaterhouse Coopers through this program (described above in the mentoring and coaching section)
- University of Western Sydney’s Fast Forward mentoring program for Years 9-11 students (see Appendix 1 for further information about this program)
- UTS Women in Engineering program. Students attended 2010 Winter School ‘Robotics’, which was seen as a very rewarding experience, opening up students’ awareness of the many opportunities for women in this area of study.

The school sees the greatest challenge as being able to provide release for teachers participating in the visits to the universities and business partners, but staff members are keen to continue the programs which are “highly valued”. Staff involvement and support has been good, with Year Advisers and classroom teachers actively supporting the programs by giving their time to cover classes for the teachers escorting students out of the school.

Wiley Park has seen “immense” results through students’ involvement in the programs, with a notable shift in student engagement. Parents are supportive, indicated by their willingness to collect their children from city locations following university visits and involvement in other activities including a parent excursion to UTS in September.

The school undertakes ongoing evaluation of the programs.

Marrickville High School

Marrickville High School is involved in range of programs promoting aspiration and attainment, through both UNSW’s ASPIRE program and the University of Sydney’s Compass program. Through the programs, students from
Year 7 onwards are engaged in activities that will increase their familiarity with universities and what they have to offer. “It’s about putting uni on the map for students – who pass it on the bus but otherwise would not step foot on campus”. Recent activities undertaken through the Compass program include attending open days and various programs such as ‘Science in the City’ for Year 9s, and a visit to Fischer Library for Year 7.

Given the school community’s demographic, with 82 per cent of students coming from Language Backgrounds Other Than English, a priority is ensuring students and parents understand the educational attainment that is required for entry to and successful undertaking of university studies. The schools’ parents have high aspirations for their children, and through the programs and information provided through the school’s activities, they are informed about the steps their children need to take if they are to reach university.

The school’s university-focused activities take place within the context of a range of strategies to raise student aspiration and attainment:

- focus on raising aspiration. There has been a shift amongst the school’s students towards higher expectations, away from taking ‘low risk’ options which avoided failure but did not capitalise fully on students’ strengths. The school pushes students to challenge themselves, by suggesting study and work options they may not otherwise consider.
- ongoing goal setting relevant to students’ developmental stage. From Year 7 onwards students are involved in identifying their learning goals and supported in reviewing their performance towards goals. These include regular student performance evaluation and target setting, whereby students identify their half yearly and yearly exam goals online, and review these with the support of the year coordinator.
- raising literacy and numeracy attainment from Year 7. There is a strong focus on literacy development in Years 7 and 8, and one of the targets of the Low SES School Communities National Partnership will be the development of Year 9 students’ writing skills.
- ongoing, high quality careers advice. This is a key factor in Marrickville’s student support strategy. The careers adviser works with Stages 5 and 6 students, including both in group presentations and one-on-one sessions with students, to review areas of interest and strengths, and develop future study options which make the most of these.

The school’s approach is to take a long term perspective, informing parents and educating current students about the possibilities of further education, for the benefit of both the children and the parents.

Kogarah High School

Kogarah High School is taking full advantage of the varied activities offered through the University of Sydney’s Compass program, with activities undertaken including:

- ‘Science in the City’ experiences
- university taster days
- extension days for senior students
- HSIE literacy initiative – aimed at improving the quality of extended responses for the School Certificate
- professional development courses – literacy in drama; educational conferences
- visits to university museums
- Engineering Project – four engineering students ran a one day workshop with Year 10 students.

Kogarah High School is concentrating largely on parent aspirations and is working hard to inform parents about the initiatives undertaken through the program and their benefit to students. Compass personnel are invited to many parent evenings as this is seen as an ideal opportunity for them to have direct contact with parents.

The school works with the Compass program coordinator to plan activities that align with school targets and management plans. University personnel attend some school staff meetings, which assists in coordination and in
continuing to highlight the profile of the program. All staff members are asked to include aspects of the program in their faculty management plans.

While accommodating school and university logistical constraints has been a challenge, the school has found the university personnel employed in the program very accommodating and flexible, which has added to the success of the program.

Initial anecdotal evidence indicates that the students are gaining an enormous amount from the opportunities provided through Compass. There is “much more discussion and conversation about University being an option to consider”, and students express enjoyment at being able to go to the University campus, which previously “had been a foreign place to them”. An external company has been employed to undertake a longitudinal evaluation of the program.

Peninsula Community of Schools

The Peninsula Community of Schools (PCS) is also described above in the ‘Targeted support in key subjects’ section. The information here provides a broader overview of ways in which schools in the Community have partnered with Macquarie University to develop, support and implement innovative teaching and learning practices within the Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) disciplines.

All levels of the schools’ communities were involved in the establishment of the Community, from the initial vision of the principals, to teachers and parents who helped create and fund the partnership, to the university through its commitment to community outreach and support, to the students who have embraced the opportunities with enthusiasm.

In addition to the STEM project described in Section Four above, other components of the partnership are:

1. Teacher Professional Learning, in which teachers have been able to participate in specialised workshops each term, supported by university staff, teachers and community partners, in which they are immersed in innovative teaching and learning practices designed to improve student outcomes across the board.

2. Closing the Gap: working with Indigenous communities to provide additional support for Indigenous students’ learning and increased opportunities for participation in university programs.

3. A Senior Shared Curriculum for the three PCS secondary schools Barrenjoey High School, Pittwater High School and Narrabeen Sports High School. The integrated senior curriculum provides students with a broad and flexible timetable of HSC course choices, enabling the schools to create classes in Marine Studies, Engineering Studies, Information Software and Design and the provision of extra classes in Physics and Chemistry to cope with the overflow of students from their home school.

There have been an increased proportion of students completing Year 12 or recognised vocational learning since the PCS was formed. Retention rates are well above state average and PCS schools are performing above retention targets set in the State Plan.

The partnership is maintained through extensive communication and consultation including regular newsletters, active promotion of courses of professional learning at Macquarie University, and wikis which have been created for informal communication links to Macquarie University. The partnership has a strong support structure, with the creation of the PCS P&C and the Advisory Council, both of which meet once a term to review and support the partnership’s targets and goals, and the appointment of a STEM Project Coordinator and PCS Coordinators who create, model and deliver specialised activities.

The Peninsular Community of Schools STEM project is a model of university and school partnership and collaboration, which could be extended to include other curriculum areas of the university, and could be adapted
to other communities of schools. It has been showcased to educators from Western Australia, Victoria and other school education areas of NSW, and those involved in the project are keen to share with others.

**Granville Boys High School**

Granville Boys High School has worked to establish partnerships and programs with a number of NSW universities, through which students are involved in a wide range of attainment and aspiration building initiatives that are collectively raising the profile of and interest in university education throughout the school. Establishing the programs has involved school staff working with university program initiators to plan and develop time lines for activities.

In addition to the mentoring programs the school is involved in outlined in Section Four of this package, initiatives include:

**Architectural Design Project with the University of Sydney:**

Through this project, 150 second year Architecture students were paired with 150 high school students, who acted as their ‘clients’ to discuss improvements to the school and redesign the school’s landscape. As well as working with the university students at school, the students attended a critiquing session at the University where they joined with academics and professional architects to review the university students’ designs. They then attended an exhibition of the finished designs and models where they once again interacted with a range of architecture professionals and students.
The program enabled the school students to gain a better understanding of the content and processes of architecture studies and the architecture profession, and more generally the attractions of university life. Project evaluation by university students, high school students and staff was very positive, with school staff reporting they were impressed by the high level of student engagement in the activities.

**Fast Forward Year 9 program with University of Western Sydney:** this involved a selected group of students visiting the university to participate in faculty-based activities. The group of students will continue involvement through to completion of school in Year 12.

**UNSW’s ASPIRE program for Years 8–12 students:** through the program students visited the university to meet current students and participate in a range of activities including mock trials, lecture theatre visits and campus tours. Feedback from students has been very positive, with students expressing eagerness to continue involvement in Year 11.

**Eden Marine High School**

Eden Marine High School has established a network of university initiatives and relations that is benefiting the learning of all members of the school community – both teachers and students. The programs and processes underway are addressing the greatest barriers to the students' access to university education—regional isolation and the perceived lack of tertiary pathways and role models.

As well as participating in the Low SES School Communities National Partnership, the school is also a Centre for Excellence site within the Improving Teacher Quality National Partnership. The Centre is focusing on improving the quality of professional experience for student teachers and implementing a range of supporting strategies for new teachers including by highly accomplished and experienced teachers.

From these firm foundations, the school has taken a multi-faceted approach to raising student attainment and aspirations for university education, which begins with high expectations for student performance, acknowledgement of student achievement and the identification of role models for students.

Eden Marine High School has partnership relationships with a number of universities including:

**Australian National University**, through an ambassadors program where university students visit the school to promote and ‘demystify’ university. This includes meeting with students, visiting classes to support learning and supporting the delivery of special events. Students also visit the university to participate in special programs, and the university uses the school facilities to deliver marine studies programs to its undergraduate and postgraduate students.

**University of Wollongong**, through the Centre for Excellence National Partnership program.

University pre-service teachers undertake practicums at the school, participate in professional learning at a learning community school development day and participate in workshops delivered by the school’s teaching staff. Eden Marine High School students participate in curriculum enrichment programs at the University’s Wollongong campus and through its outreach campus in Bega, and also participate in special programs, such as the Honeywell Engineering Program.

The programs are implemented within a framework that supports their impact, including the flexible delivery of special programs, rigorous and consistent application of achievement standards, and processes to support student performance. For instance, the Board of Review in week 5 of each term identifies students who may need more support to maximise their learning, and a Homework Centre runs each Tuesday for all students, while on Wednesday the program is aimed towards Aboriginal students. The school also runs a tutorial program for Stage 6 students who are allocated a home room with access to technology and tutor support.
The establishment of effective partnerships between the school and universities is contributing to the school’s development of a ‘culture of success’. Staff members have seen improvements in student engagement and achievement, and the school’s community profile has also been enhanced by the university links. The partnerships are enabling the school to identify tertiary education opportunities for students and begin to address barriers to participation arising from residing in a regionally isolated community. Programs will be evaluated through a student satisfaction survey, and data analysis related to student performance and post school destinations.

**MacKillop Catholic College (Warnervale)**

Developing strong links with university partners is seen by MacKillop Catholic College Warnervale as a significant means of supporting diverse student post-school pathways and strengthening aspirations and expectations. Since 2005 the College has accessed a variety of opportunities offered by several universities including:

**Australian Catholic University**

- Step Up Into Teaching (SUIT), an example of quality collaboration between the Australian Catholic University (ACU) and a number of Catholic schools in the Broken Bay Diocese. SUIT enables students to experience tertiary study in the field of education and receive dual accreditation from the NSW Board of Studies (towards the HSC) and ACU (for advanced standing in a Bachelor of Education degree). Since 2007, nineteen students from the College have enrolled in the SUIT program.
University of Newcastle

- Students have participated in the Gifted and Talented Program developed by the University of Newcastle and offered on the Central Coast. The program provides a pathway for exceptional students in Years 9–11 to undertake first year university courses while attending school. Visual Programming is one option that students from the college have pursued.

- The College has also partnered with the University’s Faculty of Education in the LINKS Program for tertiary students enrolled in Education courses. LINKS allows undergraduate students the opportunity to observe, participate and assist in school based co-curricular activities. The College has been able to assist five undergraduate students as part of the professional mentoring scheme since 2005. One of the undergraduate students who completed their LINKS Program at the College is now employed at the school as a New Scheme teacher.

- In 2005, boys from Years 7 and 9 participated in The Boys’ Education Lighthouse Schools Project developed in partnership with the university. As a result of the project, teachers’ knowledge and skills in implementing effective strategies to improve boys’ literacy and to meet boys’ learning needs continue to be strengthened. The results of the project were presented at the 4th Biennial Conference Working with Boys Building Fine Men in April 2005, Melbourne.

- The College, as well as a number of Catholic schools in the Diocese, has worked with the university’s Faculty of Education in professional learning focusing on the Quality Teaching Framework. This partnership has enabled teachers to consider their own approach to pedagogy, teaching and learning in the light of contemporary research and the school’s goals and mission. The College continues to connect with tertiary partners in a number of ways including enrolment of teachers in various post graduate programs, involvement of the universities in college awards celebrations and parent and student participation in university open days. The College values these partnerships greatly.

McAuley Catholic College (Grafton), St Joseph’s College (Banora Point) and St Mary’s High School (Casino) – Catholic Education Diocese of Lismore: ‘Going On to Uni’ – Connecting with Regional and Rural Young People’s Own Perceptions of Participation in University Education

The ‘Going Onto Uni’ initiative was funded by the Southern Cross University’s (SCU) Higher Education Equity Support Program, the Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth, and a SCU Teaching and Learning Centre seed grant. The research project involved the three secondary colleges and one primary school – St Joseph’s Primary School (Kempsey). Focus group discussions were held with children and young people in Years 5–11 and questionnaires were also used to establish a basis of demographic data, socio-economic status, local ‘connectedness’, and the educational aspirations of children and young people and their parents/guardians.

Information was collected in the students’ own words about their views on their local community, activities, future plans in terms of both work and education and the educational and occupational opportunities available to them in their locality and further afield. The research provided information about children and young people’s own understandings and experiences of social exclusion and inclusion in their communities and the factors – both barriers and enablers – influencing their post-school educational aspirations. Of particular interest was the identification of the crucial times, or ‘moments’, in the formation of these aspirations.

The project explored how children and young people perceive the culture of university and why many young people (especially teenage boys) from regional/rural/remote locations and low SES backgrounds rate their preference to attend university so low, irrespective of their ability. Parents and teachers were also surveyed.

The research investigated strategies that might assist children and young people to access and participate in university. Information from the research will hopefully
inform the development of both outreach and curriculum-based programs and strategies capable of connecting with the communities, cultures, needs, and practices of young people living in rural and regional locations of Australia, and in particular, those from backgrounds of disadvantage.

Further information can be obtained from Dr Judith Wilks, School of Education, Southern Cross University (judith.wilks@scu.edu.au).

**Loyola Senior High School, Mount Druitt**

Loyola Senior High School fosters substantive links with universities through a broad range of initiatives aimed at raising awareness of the range of options open to students, and providing pathways into university.

- The Step Up Into Teaching program was developed at Loyola in conjunction with the Australian Catholic University (ACU) in 1999. Year 11 students who express an interest in teaching as a career are competitively selected to undertake two units from the first year teacher education program at ACU as an endorsed course in their HSC. Successful completion of these units can lead to early entry to the degree program.

- A Gifted and Talented program offers support and enrichment tailored to individual student need and aspiration. Enrichment programs with guest speakers are run during the holidays and students attend public lectures and functions conducted by universities including the University of Sydney and the University of Western Sydney (UWS) for a range of courses from music, to film, to aeronautical engineering. Loyola regularly provides transport for students to attend public and non-public lectures in the University of Sydney’s Faculty of Science. Students also participate in shadowing, mentoring and modelling programs at ACU.

- Early Acceptance and Access Schemes are heavily supported by Loyola. An enormous amount of time and energy is dedicated to making sure these applications are completed and lodged on time. A significant number of students use this method of entry into university and subsequently are successful in their programs of study.

- Students participate in the awards and scholarship programs offered by universities including the University of Notre Dame, the University of New South Wales, ACU, Campion College and UWS. The school regularly fields a team in the Campion Knowledge Challenge.

- Other institutions with which the school fosters linkages include the Victor Chang Institute. Loyola was the first school in New South Wales to be awarded the Victor Chang Institute award for Science. The student involved now works with the Institute as a research scientist and is in the process of undertaking her PhD.

An Assistant Principal of Vocational Programs was recently appointed, and is responsible for the development of ‘non-traditional’ curriculum pathways such as school-based university courses through ACU and UWS, the Loyola Trade Training Centre and the expansion of school based traineeships and apprenticeships. The school has a strong focus on the implementation of as varied a curriculum as possible with extension, university and vocational course offerings.

Loyola has a range of initiatives to raise the profile of university study as part of the every-day life and culture of the school, and to encourage appropriate role models including:

- Lunchtime Speaker programs involving universities and TAFE colleagues.

- School alumni who have gone on to study at university act as role models to current students, and play an active part in helping them to achieve. Where possible and suitable, alumni are employed on the teaching staff and as relief teachers, with three ex-students currently on staff. Alumni are also involved in the Saturday morning tutorial program, which has been in operation for the past eight years and is currently attended by up to fifty students per week. Undergraduate students who attended Loyola offer their help to current students, and in turn benefit from academic discussion with school staff who also donate their time. Successful professionals working in the community, such as women in engineering, are chosen as mentors for students; and a distinguished member of the alumni is invited each year to address the Year 12 prize giving.
Each year a “Principal’s Assembly” is conducted, to showcase the previous year’s HSC results and subsequent university and other tertiary courses undertaken by previous year HSC students.

Loyola conducts leadership training courses in conjunction with other Jesuit partner schools at which school leaders are exposed to the realities, dreams and aspirations of other students from more affluent areas, and share their own aspirations and experiences.

Strong links are maintained with immediate alumni in order to provide them with support in their post-Loyola study programs. Initiatives include an Alumni Facebook page, and a yearly reunion of previous HSC classes.

The school has seen great results from its promotion of tertiary study. Over 100 students from the class of 2009 are currently undertaking study at university.

More information about these and other university programs to support students from low SES backgrounds is provided in the Appendix.
Tracking progress and evaluating strategies

The overall purpose of this package is to support schools in lifting the number of their students from low SES backgrounds continuing on to university, and it has done this by first identifying the elements that feed into increased enrolment – aspiration and attainment – and then identifying strategies schools are using to lift aspiration and attainment.

To evaluate whether the strategies have been effective, schools need to look at assessing changes in aspiration and attainment, and also at parent and student engagement elements. Schools are employing a widening range of evaluation processes to determine the impact of programs, including pre and post testing of students participating in targeted support programs, longitudinal evaluation of programs, and feedback from students, teachers, parents, program coordinators and other relevant staff.

Some measures schools can use to identify changes in transition, attainment and aspiration are suggested in the box at right.

Other outcomes schools might assess:

- alignment of student subject selection with their academic performance in Year 10, ensuring students are realising their abilities
- alignment of student subject selection with their higher education study intentions, including selection of necessary pre-requisite subjects
- spread of subject selection, including students undertaking subjects associated with development of critical thinking skills necessary for progression to higher education.

Finally, schools will need to keep records of program implementation, including levels of attendance and engagement of students, as this information will be essential in understanding program impact.

Measures

Changes in transition to further education
- Number of students receiving university offer of enrolment
- Number of students enrolled in a university course after completing school (where available)
- Number of students enrolling in TAFE AQF III

Changes in student attainment
- Improved educational performance in targeted subjects (eg Maths, Science, English 9/10)
- HSC performance
- Number of ATAR eligible students
- Student ATARs (where available)

Changes in student engagement
- Student participation in aspiration and attainment programs such as tutoring and mentoring
- Overall attendance rates
- Class participation

Changes in student aspiration
- Student surveys (eg School Life Student Questionnaire)
- Students’ intentions for future study
- Self reported goals

Changes in parent engagement (in relation to university aspiration and attainment)
- Parental attendance and participation in information sessions and other university-related activities
- Parent satisfaction surveys
SECTION SEVEN

Information & contact details

Further information and contact details

Listed below are key sources of information and contact details for schools, students and parents about university programs, the HSC process, scaling, the ATAR, university courses, requirements and support services.

- Supporting Low SES School Communities
  NSW Department of Education and Training
  http://www.lowsesschools.nsw.edu.au

- NSW Board of Studies

- Universities Admission Centre (UAC)
  http://www.uac.edu.au/

- UACs 2010 Educational Access Schemes
  http://www.uac.edu.au/undergraduate/eas/

- University entry requirements

- DEEWR Higher Education student support services
  Department of Education, Employment and Work Relations

- Higher Education Partnerships and Participation Bureau (HEPPP)

- TAFE NSW – University Credit Transfer website

For information about existing credit transfer and articulation arrangements from TAFE NSW to universities:
https://www.tafensw.edu.au/tafeunicredit/

Improving outcomes for Indigenous students

- Australian Indigenous Mentoring Experience (AIME)
  http://www.aimementoring.com

- Dare to Lead
  http://www.daretolead.edu.au

Non-government organisations

Numerous non-government organisations offer individual student support services including one-to-one mentoring and tutoring. These include the following organisations.

- Australian Business and Community Network
  http://www.abcn.com.au

- Australian Literacy and Numeracy Foundation (ALNF)
  http://www.alnf.org

- Barnardos – Service Philosophy

- Benevolent Society

- The Smith Family – Student2Student
NSW University contact information

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**Charles Sturt University**
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Enquiries about this package
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University support programs for students from low SES backgrounds

This section provides an overview of programs New South Wales’ universities are offering to support students from low SES backgrounds. A number of these have already been referred to in the previous section describing schools’ current activities with universities.

**Australian Catholic University**

Australian Catholic University (ACU) Pathways Strategy offers a range of pathways to tertiary study for students. There are options for students who have not met the minimum ATAR requirements for direct entry to ACU and for those whose socio-economic or Aboriginal background or geographic remoteness have limited their capacity to access higher education.

Through the ACU Pathways Strategy, the University aims to increase its intake of equity groups, expand its links with the Vocational Education and Training sector, schools and workforce groups, and retain the targeted students successfully through to their graduation.

The Pathways Strategy provides a framework within which ACU’s initiatives are developed and implemented to ensure that they are a strategic fit with targeted students and partners, are sustainable, and meet consistent guidelines developed collaboratively across the University.

One example is ACU Link, a program targeted at school Years 8 to 12 and designed to attract more students from socially and economically disadvantaged regions to university. The program recognises that the causes of this inequity are complex and linked to entrenched dispositions, and that such attitudes are unlikely to be altered by quick fix approaches.

For Year 8 students the program guides students in planning their learning pathways, and thereby in selecting subjects for Years 9 and 10, which opens possibilities for undertaking higher education. This part of the program is delivered by ACU staff and students within the schools and online, and through support of teachers of Year 8.

Year 10 students are able to come to the university, look around and begin to experience the format of a university life. These days will also provide information about career decisions and will complement the students’ own planning in their subjects for the HSC.

Year 11 students undertake a Role Model / Shadowing experience to allow students who are particularly interested in university education to spend a day with a current student in a range of courses, undertaking real classes and being immersed in university life.

ACU Link offers a model for outreach schemes based on community engagement and early intervention. Through engaging with school communities in developing and implementing strategies, it seeks to make a difference where it is most needed – at the level of changing young people’s attitudes and beliefs towards university.

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**Charles Sturt University**

Charles Sturt University (CSU) is one of the leading distance tertiary education providers in Australia. The University will host new outreach programs designed to inspire students
to consider a tertiary education beginning in 2011. Two programs are offered to students from Kindergarten to Year 12 from all school systems. Rural ASPIRE will be run in collaboration with the University of New South Wales to deliver a multifaceted program to raise awareness and aspirations in students who may not think that university is for them. The program activities are run by ASPIRE staff and student ambassadors. Primary aged students are given a fun day on campus to ‘Xplore’ the campus, and its activities and meet undergraduates.

Other activities include Uni for a Day for Year 9, Taster days for Year 10 and two day workshops focusing on academic skills and managing study and university life for senior students. Parents are welcome to participate so that they can reinforce the importance of tertiary study and support their children in the journey.

The Primary Industry Centre for Science Education (PICSE), University of Tasmania has partnered with CSU to deliver the PICSE program to schools in the Riverina Region and focuses on careers in agricultural and primary industries. The program is delivered by a Science Education Officer (based in Wagga Wagga) who will present the program in the schools, with industry partners and CSU supporting activities such as Science Investigation Awards, science teacher Professional Development workshops, science camps and field days as well as industry placement scholarships for Years 11 and 12 students. Both programs are well developed and serve to influence the decisions of students to consider a future that involves tertiary education.

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Macquarie University

Macquarie University established a position of Pro Vice Chancellor Social Inclusion in 2009. Some of the objectives underpinning this development were to ensure that it is an accessible institution to all prospective students – especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds – and to develop a range of outreach activities aimed at aspiration development.

Macquarie University has a range of equity scholarships including those for indigenous students, mature age students, students from refugee backgrounds and for students from rural/regional Australia. In terms of pathway programs, there are a range of options depending on the background of the prospective student, for example the Lighthouse Scheme for people who have experienced hardship or disadvantage or the Jubilee Scheme for potential students over the age of 21 who are not likely to gain an offer through the usual channels but wish to pursue a higher education. UniTEST – a tertiary aptitude test – is also available as an entry pathway. In 2010 a Rural Bonus Scheme was also piloted. Based on the ARIA Index, the scheme awards points based on remoteness in an acknowledgement of the disadvantage this can create.

During 2010 LEAP was also instituted. LEAP – Learning, Education, Aspiration and Participation is an umbrella initiative aimed at Widening Participation in Higher Education. LEAP includes a number of outreach programs such as the very successful science demonstrators program in MacLean, NSW. This program was designed to engage indigenous students in science and upskill them as demonstrators of basic scientific principles to other students and members of the general public. In conjunction with the elders of the region, this program has had a significant impact on Year 10 completions and progress on to Year 12 by indigenous students.

Another LEAP initiative has been the development of the Refugee Mentoring Program. Based on a strong background of mentoring activities over time at Macquarie,
this program has been developed in conjunction with the NSW Department of Education and Training and five partner schools, most located in Western Sydney with high numbers of refugee students. During 2011 the program will be trialled and evaluated in terms of its effectiveness in increasing the abilities of students from refugee backgrounds in making informed decisions about future options.

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University of New England

The University of New England was the first university established outside a capital city and is regarded as the pioneer of distance education. Several Future Student Advisers conduct a Schools Liaison Program, which involves regular visits to secondary schools regardless of size in an approximately 400 kilometre radius of Armidale, with videoconferencing available to isolated schools. There are several programs available to the large number of smaller communities mainly in Northern and Western New South Wales to encourage further education. The annual on-campus Science in the Bush Program attracts around 150 primary students and the 2010 HSC Booster Days brought more than 1000 Year 12 students on campus over four days.

The university also supports the Making Educational Goals Sustainable (MEGS Project) by subsidising group visits to the university campus from disadvantaged schools. The Early Entry (Principal’s Recommendation) program and the provision of a large number of scholarships, including Equity Scholarships, have been particularly effective in providing tertiary opportunities to general and low SES students.

The university’s social inclusion policy includes a number of indigenous initiatives. Its dedicated Oorala Aboriginal Centre conducts a comprehensive Indigenous study program, fostering interest within primary and secondary schools and mature aged groups, and including visits by groups of students from isolated schools. The university offers specialised enabling courses including the TRACKS Tertiary Preparation Program, Internal Selection Program (ISP) and the Indigenous Tutorial Support Scheme that encourages enrolments from Aboriginal communities. National Aboriginal and Islander Day Observance Committee (NAIDOC) Week celebrations include information sessions and traditional celebrations conducted by Community Elders to support the increased numbers of Aboriginal students.

The university has a Pathways course for students who do not have the educational background for undergraduate admission. The course consists of two Foundation units that provide the basic skills and knowledge required for successful first year university study, Foundation 101 and Foundation 102, plus two faculty-based units called Pathways units. The latter may later be credited towards the student’s undergraduate degree.

The university also has a provision for exceptional students to commence university studies while still at school and a number of articulation arrangements with TAFE and other Registered Training Organisations that encourage students to progress to university.

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University of New South Wales

The University of NSW (UNSW) supports social inclusion in a number of ways. Students from educationally
disadvantaged backgrounds are supported through admission policies, the provision of scholarships and transitional support programs. Through the University’s partnerships with schools in metropolitan and rural areas the university works to raise the awareness, aspirations and attainment of children in order that higher education is a viable option for them.

A major social inclusion project is the ASPIRE project run by the Student Equity and Disabilities Unit, which began in late 2008. ASPIRE program is a multifaceted program working with Years K to 12 to raise awareness and aspirations and support attainment of students who due to disadvantage may not think university is for them. As one part of the program, students (and in some cases their parents) from Years 5, 6, 9, 10 and 11 within the ASPIRE partner schools are brought onto the UNSW campus where they get to work closely with current UNSW students in a range of age appropriate activities.

In the primary years they are given a UNSW passport and ‘Xplore’ UNSW for a day. The day ends in a graduation ceremony where, decked out in gowns and mortar boards, they receive their certificates from the DVC Academic. In Year 9 they experience ‘Uni for a day’ when they work on activities around the campus with UNSW students to learn about university culture. In Year 10 they join in ‘Taster Day’ where they go to mini lectures and interact with academics. In Year 11 they have the opportunity to take part in the two day ‘Step Up to University” program which focuses on academic skills and managing study and life. They can also experience ‘Student shadowing’ where they spend the day experiencing university with a current UNSW student going to their lectures and tutorials.

In Year 12 students are encouraged to take part in the mainstream events such as Courses and Careers Day where they are guided around by ASPIRE staff and students. The aim of the ASPIRE program is that within the partner schools students have the opportunities to be on the UNSW campus multiple times so that university becomes a familiar and comfortable place and somewhere they can see themselves attending post school.

ASPIRE works with students who do not have the necessary social capital regarding education in order that they can make informed choices about their futures. ASPIRE recognises the importance of working with students from primary age and is aimed at students from Year 5 through to Year 12. Core components are in-school workshops, interactions between school students and UNSW students, on-campus activities and university experiences.

ASPIRE has been running in partnership with primary and high schools in the Sydney region since 2007. The results have been very encouraging. In 2010 Regional ASPIRE was introduced in partnership with primary, high and central schools in regional NSW. In 2011 it will be run in collaboration with Charles Sturt University enabling it to be offered to more regional schools.

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University of Newcastle

The University of Newcastle’s approach to increasing participation and access emphasises early and direct intervention with young people and their families by involving family members in the programs starting in the primary school years. Community based development and capacity building is an important element in the university’s approach towards program development, which includes the experiences of community members whose education has been fragmented.

The university also has a Research Institute for Social Inclusion and Wellbeing (RISIW), which provides a focus for
local, national and international enquiry that will promote interdisciplinary research in the field of social inclusion and wellbeing'. This includes research on issues such as equity in education, values in social work and strategies for social inclusion. The university also offers standard credit transfer and articulation pathways from TAFE to university, with some scholarships available to students.

In addition, the University’s Aim High Team, which is part of the Equity and Diversity Unit, is currently developing and implementing the following programs:

**Careers Through Reading**: university students read to small groups of primary school students once a week for six weeks from books that relate to the specific career area the university student is studying. The university student shares their university education experience and their profession with the primary school students.

**Launch Pad**: Year 6 students and a family member visit the University where they participate in a series of interactive displays including a ‘discipline expo’, along with touring the university facilities and speaking with university staff and students. The visit is supported by in-class activities.

**LIVE IT! Boys Summer School**: a four day residential summer school for 80 Year 9 boys from equity target groups from across the Hunter, Central Coast and Mid-North Coast that aims to build the boys’ higher education aspirations by showcasing different areas of study; increasing their confidence in their ability to succeed in higher studies and linking the subjects to real life.

**Girls+Maths+Science=Choices Summer School**: a five day residential program for 180 girls from equity target groups from across New South Wales promoting Mathematics, Science and Technology subjects through motivational and inspirational activities.

**BOOST (Better Opportunities, Outcomes and Skills for Tertiary Study)**: delivered over a three year period this program is aimed at 10 – 12 students at 20 targeted high schools in the Hunter and Central Coast region.

Students are required to apply for a place in the program by the end of Year 9, which includes leadership, academic and study skills building workshops; mentoring and shadowing; workshops for family members and working with school year and career advisers to ensure ongoing support for students.

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**Southern Cross University**

Southern Cross University (SCU) is actively involved with its regional communities. The Equity High School Outreach Program works with students at ten high schools in the University’s regions – five schools from the NSW Northern Rivers region, three from the Coffs Harbour region and two from the Tweed Gold Coast region. The program seeks to demystify university and encourage the interest and aspirations of students who are under-represented in higher education, particularly students from low socio-economic backgrounds and students who are the first in their family to attend university. Students are offered a small-group, experiential program designed to assist them to overcome real or perceived barriers to attending tertiary education. University students and staff work together to facilitate the program, visiting the schools and hosting visits to the university. The program focuses on providing a ‘personal’ experience, featuring small group activities and opportunities for school and university students to meet and interact.

Students in Years 7, 8 and 9 have the opportunity to visit and experience the university campuses, engage in interactive activities in various discipline areas and
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www.nationalpartnerships.nsw.edu.au

meet with university students and staff. Campus visits are integrated with other university events, such as the multicultural Fusion Festival and NAIDOC Week celebrations. Students have the opportunity to explore tertiary study options, and consider their future study aspirations. Activities include providing opportunities for learning activities that work in with school curricula, for example, university library workshops on researching for assignments on-line.

A two-day residential school for Year 9 students from low socio economic backgrounds is aimed towards aspiration building and increasing knowledge, understanding and experience of university. Students participate in workshops, classes and other hands-on activities.

SCU also re-engages with students in Years 11 and 12 through a campus visit, integrated with the university’s Seniors Day event. Students find out more about university life including how university differs from school, support services for students, how to apply and what courses are available. This visit gives school and university students another opportunity to interact.

Southern Cross University offers a flexible range of entry pathways to tertiary study, with numerous options for students who have not qualified for admission through ATAR. These include the STAR (Principal’s Recommendation) Early Entry Scheme, the Preparing For Success Tertiary Preparation Program, Special Admissions Scheme (for consideration of educational disadvantage) and recognition of prior learning and/or work experience.

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University of Sydney

The University of Sydney is committed to creating and sustaining a university that will, for the benefit of both Australia and the wider world, maximise the potential of the brightest researchers and most promising students whatever their social or cultural background. To support this purpose Sydney has a variety of flexible and special admissions programs, most notably the Broadway and Cadigal programs, to improve accessibility to university courses for certain groups for equity reasons. Further equity based admission and pathway programs are under development.

There is a comprehensive range of bursaries and scholarships for students in financial need, including the University of Sydney Access Scholarships to assist academically gifted students with demonstrated financial disadvantage, and the University of Sydney First Year Bursary to assist students with transition to University.

The University’s Compass – Find your way to Higher Education program is a multifaceted program that aims to encourage primary and secondary school children to participate in higher education. It is a partnership between the University of Sydney and the NSW Department of Education and Training currently running in 12 primary and four secondary schools. Compass begins with students in Year 3, providing opportunities to engage with university staff and students every year until they reach Year 12, both on campus and in schools based projects. Compass is focused on supporting the school community as a whole and involves a comprehensive range of learning and cultural activities and programs for students and parents and professional development for teachers. Supporting schools’ literacy and numeracy goals is a major focus of Compass with all of the activities aligned with key learning areas in the primary and high school curriculums.

Teachers in Compass partner schools have the opportunity to participate in a range of professional development programs from activity-specific skills training and one
day/short-term courses through to postgraduate study programs. Wherever possible professional development sessions for teachers are built into the school based programs, for example, film production and editing, speech therapy and reading support. Teachers also have access to short courses facilitated by Faculty of Education and Social Work’s Professional Learning Division, which are endorsed by the New South Wales Institute of Teachers. Fees for these courses are waived.

Compass also offers teachers the opportunity to enrol in postgraduate courses relating to their teaching role and will refund any fees on successful completion.

Since the launch of Compass, thousands of students, teachers, parents from identified schools and University of Sydney students and staff have participated in a range of school and campus based activities and professional development opportunities with the major focus on literacy and science. Compass will expand into a further seven schools in 2011.

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University of Technology Sydney

The University of Technology Sydney (UTS) implements a Widening Participation Strategy that includes an extensive U@Uni Schools Outreach Program focused on Priority Funded Schools in South Western Sydney and Sydney regions. The U@Uni Program encourages high school students to aim for higher education and assists them to achieve academic outcomes that lead to entry and success in tertiary study.

U@Uni Summer and Winter Schools: intensive 3 week summer schools and 1 week winter schools are held for Years 9–10 students in the January and July holidays. Subject areas cover media production, engineering and IT, and science. Through short film making, building robots and running science investigations, the programs aim to boost enthusiasm for HSC study and beyond, demystify university, and build interpersonal skills and personal aspirations.

By studying on campus with university staff and students, school students experience the university environment first hand and build their confidence in learning and solving problems in a team environment. Students completing these programs are reported by teachers to have increased engagement with school study, and much clearer personal goals for their future. The students continue to be supported by UTS through school visits and UTS campus activities such as careers and study skills workshops tailored to individual class and school needs. For more information see http://www.equity.uts.edu.au/outreach/summer/index.html.

Uni@School Program: this program, commencing in 2011, provides discipline-specific classroom activities linked to school curriculum learning outcomes for Years 7–10 students. The goal is to enrich the learning experience, create enthusiasm for further education, and provide tangible academic outcomes for participating students.

U@UTS Day: a one day taster program for Year 10 students at Priority Schools and Country Area high schools, including faculty workshops and university life sessions. UTS students participate as role models and mentors.

HSC Assistant Tutoring Scheme: UTS students act as assistant tutors in HSC subject tutoring at Priority Schools, through the HSC Tutorial Support Program. UTS students act as role models and assist HSC students with improving their study skills and subject knowledge.

Parents’ Information Session: parents from South Western Sydney region Priority Schools attend a half day program.
that includes information about university entry, support at university and costs and fees. Parents also attend faculty and campus tours that give them an experience of the university environment.

**UTS Access and Support Schemes**

The UTS Educational Access Scheme and the Special Admissions Schemes are for current and non-current school leavers whose education has been disadvantaged over a long period of time. Applications are made through UAC. Students attending Priority Schools, Country Area Program schools and National Partnership funded schools are automatically eligible for the UTS inpUTS Scheme which provides a 10 ATAR concession for eligible students.

UTS offers a comprehensive range of personal and academic support programs. Scholarships for undergraduate and postgraduate students include Indigenous Tuition Fee Scholarships, UTS Diversity Access Scholarships for students studying on a low income, and Merit Scholarships for high academic achievers who demonstrate financial disadvantage.

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**University of Western Sydney**

The University of Western Sydney (UWS) was established to increase higher education opportunities and access in the region of Greater Western Sydney (GWS). For 20 years it has been encouraging and enabling local students to pursue and achieve educational and career goals. Two thirds of UWS students live in the GWS region, and over half of them are the first in their families to attend university.

Widening participation and supporting student success at university is achieved through a mix of school sector partnerships and evidence based programs, an innovative range of pathways, special entry arrangements for Aboriginal students, scholarships, and transitional and retention programs.

UWS has an institution wide commitment to working with the school sector to improve educational outcomes. This is articulated in its Schools Strategic Plan, which provides the framework for direct relationships with more than 400 schools and a range of academic enrichment and aspiration building programs for high and primary school students. Over 12,000 students participated in these in 2009, with thousands more involved in research, marketing and sponsored projects. Nine hundred teachers undertook on-campus or in-school professional development.
UWS has over 400 active VET pathways into degrees across a wide range of disciplines, and the UWS College provides university foundation and diploma studies with direct entry into UWS undergraduate programs. Examples of current research include an Australian Research Council (ARC) funded project exploring the classroom pedagogies of exemplary teachers of students in poverty, and an Australian Learning and Teaching Council funded project on improving transition from VET to higher education.

Notable UWS/school programs that are helping to widen participation include Fast Forward, the Indigenous School Student Mentoring program, Refugee Action Support and a range of academic service learning programs that support literacy and numeracy as well as building aspirations. Through the Fast Forward program students are encouraged to strive for their personal best and to see tertiary study as a realistic and viable post-school option. They participate in experiential learning opportunities that develop their skills and foster familiarity with the University environment.

Since its inception in 2004, Fast Forward has grown to include 25 high schools in 2010 with over 850 students involved, mainly around the west and south-west of Sydney. From 2011 primary schools and more high schools will be included.

Two examples of Fast Forward activities:

■ Skills Days for Years 9, 10 and 11 students at a UWS campus, during which students experience the university environment and learn more about what tertiary education has to offer. There are also opportunities to meet current UWS students who will share their knowledge and experiences; learn leadership skills, study techniques and time/stress management skills; as well as learn more about themselves and the career paths that interest them.

■ Year 11/12 UniM8s, during which students are matched with a UWS student whose course of study relates to their interests and ‘shadow’ that student to university classes for a day. This provides students with an effective way to experience university life, become more familiar with the local UWS campus and get the chance to ask an expert what it’s like being a university student.

For one school, an illustration of the outcomes of the Fast Forward program is:

■ 2004 – 1 student went on to university
■ 2006 – 18 students went on to university
■ 2007 – 26 students went on to university

Some comments from school principals speaking about their students participating in the Fast Forward program:

■ “100 per cent retention of targeted students into Year 11 … increased confidence, improved focus and group support toward each other.”

■ “Increased rates of school attendance, assessment task completion, homework centre attendance … this cohort positively impacted upon their peers.”

■ “Improved drive and commitment … in all areas for students themselves and their peers.”

■ “Three students … had doubts about continuing to Year 11. These 3 have now enrolled for HSC courses and now believe they have an interest in tertiary study.”

■ “They will be first in their families to graduate (high school).”

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University of Wollongong

The University of Wollongong (UOW) has demonstrated a long term commitment to building educational aspirations and engaging with schools in its communities. UOW has articulated its commitment at the very highest level through the UOW Strategic Plan 2008–10 Goal 3, Objective 4: Enhanced educational aspirations and higher
education participation in our regions. The key strategies under this objective include:

- strengthening partnerships with targeted school in low participation areas within UOW’s primary catchment region
- extending school mentoring and outreach initiatives
- continuing to support the development of new pathways to higher education
- increasing the number of equity and community-supported scholarships.

It is anticipated that this high level and whole of University commitment will continue to be reflected in the 2011–2013 strategic planning process.

UOW has a number of different programs and initiatives that aim to build educational aspirations and capacity in students from low socio economic status (SES), rural and remote and Aboriginal backgrounds. Its current activities include the UOW Outreach Program that has been running for eight years, working with Priority Funded schools in the Illawarra and Shoalhaven regions and targeting students across Years 6 to 12. The program provides students with engaging learning experiences that aim to retain students in education and provide a link to the University and a smoother transition to university life. Some elements of the program include Year 6 Experience Days, a Tutor Assistant Program, work experience opportunities, school based workshops, library research days and Year 10 ‘Connect and Explore Workshops’.

The Australian Indigenous Mentoring Experience (AIME) program has been running for two years at UOW, pairing young indigenous people with UOW students for tutoring and mentoring. Seven schools currently attend the university for 17 sessions each year. (Faculty of Education)

Year 12 HSC Days are supported by a number of faculties, and include Enrichment Days for Business Studies and Economics (Faculty of Commerce), Society and Culture Study Day, and English and History Days (Faculty of Arts).

The Regional Science Fair (Faculty of Science) provides primary and high school students with the opportunity to undertake a scientific research project. Students are mentored by UOW Science students and present their projects to scientists, educators and industry leaders. More than 40 primary and high schools from the Illawarra, South Coast, far Western NSW, Southern Sydney, Southern Highlands and South Western Sydney participate in this program.

The University of Wollongong has centralised policy development and program operation within the Office of Community and Partnerships. The Community Engagement Projects Manager’s primary focus is on strategic planning and policies around schools outreach and mentoring. The Program Coordinator – Schools Outreach and Mentoring is responsible for the overall management and development of sustainable and effective outreach and mentoring programs for low SES students and schools in the University of Wollongong’s communities, and will also be involved in identifying potential new partnerships with schools, community organisations and the private and public sectors.

The University of Wollongong is committed to working in partnership with stakeholders in the region, and in particular is working in collaboration and partnership with the Department of Education and Training Illawarra and South East Region to develop programs for Low SES School Communities National Partnership schools and other traditionally under-represented students, which are evidenced-based, sustainable, able to be evaluated and which meet the strategic priorities of both parties.

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References


Footnotes
1. The definition of low socio-economic status is based on the Australian Bureau of Statistics’ Socio-economic Indexes for Areas (SEIFA) suite. According to the SEIFA suite of summary measures, 25 per cent of the Australian population is defined as low socio-economic status.
3. DEEWR, 2009, Appendix 2, Table 2.1.
13. SCRGSP (2009), tables NEA 30 and NEA 32. Data is based on assessments conducted for the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA). PISA 2006 involved sample assessment of approximately 6.0 per cent of 15 year old Australian secondary school students. See also Rothman, 2003 and McConney and Perry, 2007.
15. Source: DET data, based on 2009 HSC results by SES group achieving an ATAR over 80. Low SES corresponds to the three lowest deciles, medium SES to the four middle deciles, and high SES to the top three deciles.
21. DEEWR, 2009a, Table A9.
Thank you to the following schools and universities for generously sharing their activities and strategies in this package:

**Schools**
- Alexandria Park Community School
- Blacktown Girls High School
- Eden Marine High School
- Fairvale High School
- Gorokan High School
- Granville Boys High School
- Irrawong High School
- Kogarah High School
- Kurri Kurri High School
- Lachlan Macquarie College:
  - Arthur Phillip High School
  - Cumberland High School
  - James Ruse Agricultural High School
  - Macarthur Girls High School
  - Marsden High School
  - Northmead Creative and Performing Arts High School
  - Parramatta High School
- Loyola Senior High School, Mount Druitt
- McAuley Catholic College, Grafton
- MacKillop Catholic College, Warnervale
- Marrickville High School
- Mount View High School
- Northlakes High School
- Peninsula Community of Schools: (Secondary Schools)
  - Barrenjoey High School
  - Narrabeen Sports High School
  - Pittwater High School
  - St Joseph’s College, Banora Point
  - St Mary’s High School, Casino
  - The Kempsey Adventist School
  - Wagga Wagga High School
  - Wiley Park Girls High School
  - Wyong High School

**Universities**
- Australian Catholic University
- Charles Sturt University
- Macquarie University
- University of New England
- University of New South Wales
- University of Newcastle
- Southern Cross University
- University of Sydney
- University of Technology Sydney
- University of Western Sydney
- University of Wollongong

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