

# Supported Pathways to Education & Employment: Building the Capacity of the Illawarra and South East Region

1 December 2014 to 31 December 2015

Anne Snowball, University of Wollongong

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Modifications: Changed to meet WCAG 2.0 accessibility requirements.  
Alternate text inserted for all images. Minor typographical errors corrected.

# Higher Education Participation and Partnerships Programme (HEPPP)

## 2014 National Priorities Pool FINAL REPORT

Supported Pathways to Education & Employment: Building the Capacity of the Illawarra and South East Region

1 December 2014 to 31 December 2015

<b>Name of university</b>	University of Wollongong
<b>Name of contact officer</b>	Anne Snowball
<b>Position title</b>	Director of Regional Campuses and Student Diversity
<b>Email address</b>	annem@uow.edu.au
<b>Telephone number</b>	(02) 4221 5668

In accordance with the Conditions of Grant, you must submit to the Department a **Final Report** (Clause 6.1 of Part A) and an **Acquittal Report** (clause 6.4 of Part A).

To meet this obligation, please submit:

- the completed **Final Report** template, in Word and PDF
- the completed and signed **Declaration** form, in PDF
- the completed **Acquittal Report** template, in Excel and PDF.

All documents must be submitted to [equity@education.gov.au](mailto:equity@education.gov.au) by 31 March 2016. If you require additional guidance or clarification please contact [equity@education.gov.au](mailto:equity@education.gov.au).

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# 1. PROJECT SUMMARY (Conditions of Grant, clause 2.2(a)-(e) of Part A)

## Objectives

**Table 1: Project objectives**

IDENTIFIED OBJECTIVE	EXTENT TO WHICH THE OBJECTIVE WAS MET
Improve the participation of Low SES, rural and remote and Indigenous people in higher education and employment.	Ongoing- UOW's Regional campuses and Student diversity unit is committed to improving the participation of Low SES, rural and remote and Indigenous people in higher education and employment in line with unit and institutional objectives.
Provide 250-350 individuals from underrepresented backgrounds with opportunities to enhance their academic capacity and options post –schooling to access higher education and employment through a supported pathways program.	Met- over 350 students across five campuses and regions participated in the Pathways program in 2015 which included the Bridging and Transition program and careers planning.
Clearly articulate and streamline pathways and progression between vocational education providers, higher education providers and employers.	Met-Streamlining pathways, together with providing exit points with employment outcomes proved to be particularly important in building the capacity of this cohort of students. Students who participate in a supported pathways program will have had the opportunity to complete Certificate III, Certificate IV and Diploma level courses which have specific employment outcomes.
Strengthen partnerships and creating linkages with the University of Wollongong, government agencies and vocational education providers.	Met -The Pathways Program has continued to strengthen the working partnerships and linkages between the University of Wollongong and our vocational and government partners. The program was so successful in 2015 that new partners have been added for 2016 with several new types of vocational qualification being added. Opportunities for collaboration have also arisen at relevant industry forums.

## Project Activities, Milestones and Key Performance Indicators

**Table 2: Project activities, milestones and KPIs**

TIME FRAME	PLANNED ACTIVITIES AND MILESTONES	PROJECT ACTIVITIES AND MILESTONES COMPLETED	IDENTIFIED KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS	KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS OUTCOME
Feb 2015	Students recruited to participate in the Supported pathways program.	YES	150 students recruited to participate in the supported pathways program.	Students recruited to participate in the Supported pathways program.
Jul-Aug 2015	Additional Students recruited to	YES	An additional 150 students recruited to	Additional Students recruited to

TIME FRAME	PLANNED ACTIVITIES AND MILESTONES	PROJECT ACTIVITIES AND MILESTONES COMPLETED	IDENTIFIED KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS	KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS OUTCOME
	participate in the supported pathways program.		participate in the supported pathways program.	participate in the supported pathways program.
Oct 2015	Transition Programs Delivered.	YES	300 students participating in the supported pathways program in 2015.	Over 350 students participated in the Bridging and Transition Program across our five campuses.
Nov 2015	Vocational Qualifications conclude. Graduation ceremonies and applications to higher education or employment completed.	YES	100% growth of partners involved in delivering supported pathways programs from 2014.	Vocational Qualifications were completed and graduations held across our five locations.
Nov 2015	Quantitative/ Qualitative partnership survey conducted with partners.	YES	Positive responses from survey that demonstrate clear messaging and communication to students AND All partners sign back onto the program for 2016.	As per our attached Stakeholder Survey (Attachment One).

## Highlights and Issues

The Supported Pathways program has been very successful across a number of measures, in particular:

- Regional Engagement
- Number of students engaged with the program
- Success of the partnerships with vocational providers
- Bridging and Transition Subject co-enrolment

As reported above across our five regions over 350 students were engaged with the program in partnership with 12 vocational providers. Students have gained a meaningful qualification with their provider that will lead to better employment outcomes. In many cases the students also chose to continue their learning journey either into a Diploma qualification or on to a Bachelor's degree. For our Regional sites in particular this has a notable effect on the broader community with students engaged in workplace learning with local businesses. Local business chambers were involved in the study and the graduation ceremonies for a number of pathways cohorts.

A significant part of what made this pathways model innovative was the co-enrolment of students in both their Certificate IV qualification and the university approved UOW Bridging

and Transition Subject. The integrated nature of this Bridging subject allowed for parallel skills development: While students are acquiring generalised skills and acculturation for university within the context of the Bridging subject, they are also becoming familiar with the discipline-specific discursive language of their subject matter within a vocational training context. Feedback from Bridging and Transition students has also reflected students' delight at "discovering another side of themselves", and feeling, for the first time in their lives, that they actually are "smart enough" to attend university.

### **Project Outcomes and 2016**

The project has provided the opportunity to demonstrate the possibility of this kind of pathway program both to our own institution and to our partners and the communities in which we operate. In particular 2016 will bring:

- New administrative framework
- Broader range of articulation agreements
- Bridging and Transition subject offered to all students studying with partner vocational providers
- Continued focus on regional priorities
- Expansion to include online and distance options

The scope of the pilot work done as a result of this funding has allowed us to refine and develop a flexible administrative framework to ensure that the program continues in the future. Through analysis of our stakeholders, students and institutional measures we have developed a three tier engagement model that allows partners to engage with the program at a level appropriate for their needs and outcomes. The model allows us to expand elements of the program like the Bridging and Transition subject to more students whilst focusing funding for sponsored places into key strategic areas. This is a robust and flexible model that will contribute to the viability of the program in years to come.

The new framework also allows for engagement with a broader number of vocational providers and to expand our scope of articulation. In 2016 we will engage across a scope three times the size (in terms of Certificate IV qualifications) and we will be able to engage more directly with Diploma students by offering the Bridging and Transition subject to all students of our vocational partners. This is of particular significance to our Regional Partners.

Future developments of the program are similarly focused in the regional, rural and remote space. We will further develop our Moodle program as part of the Bridging and Transition subject and seek to pilot a version that can be delivered by distance or by a combination of on campus and distance delivery.

### **Issues**

In July 2015 the Academic staff member whom we employed to deliver the Bridging and Transition Programs and undertake resource development and support resigned. This meant that we had to employ a large number of additional casual academics to deliver the program across our locations. We also had to engage an administrative assistant and a research assistant to assist with resource development. The impact on the project was negligible.

Did you undertake an evaluation of your project?

Yes  No

UNDERWAY – Currently pending final census date data

Where applicable, indicate number of the following resulting from this project:

<b>Student contacts</b>	
<b>Journal (or other publication) submissions</b>	N/A
<b>Conference Presentations</b>	Enter number or N/A
<b>Websites developed</b>	1 <a href="http://www.uow.edu.au/in2uni-myway/pathways/index.html">http://www.uow.edu.au/in2uni-myway/pathways/index.html</a>
<b>Educational or marketing campaigns</b>	2
<b>Community organisations engaged</b>	15
<b>Schools engaged</b>	N/A

## 2. OTHER PROJECT MATERIAL (Conditions of Grant, clause 2.2 (b)-(e) of Part A)

*[List the titles of any published reports, pamphlets or other documentation produced in the course of the Project and attach them to this Final Report.]*

**Table 3: Additional materials produced over the course of the project**

TYPE	AUTHOR	DATE OF PUBLICATION	PUBLICATION DETAILS
Conference paper;	Anne Snowball Keirin McCormack Annie Werner	Submitted February 2016	STARS Conference

### 3. ACQUITTAL REPORT (Conditions of Grant, clause 6.4(e), clause 6.7-8 of Part A)

*Have you fully expended the Grant Funds provided under the Conditions of Grant?*

Yes  No

*\*IMPORTANT NOTICE - Unspent 2014 HEPPP Partnership Grant Funds*

- Grant recipients must fully expend these 2014 National Priorities Pool funds in the project period for which the grant is made and report on this expenditure to the Commonwealth, including the amount of any unspent funds.*
- If a provider fails to spend the full amount granted it in respect of a year, the unspent funds may be recovered by the Commonwealth.*

# DECLARATION

I declare that:

- I am authorised by the university to sign this Declaration on its behalf, and
- to the best of my knowledge, the information that I have provided in the **Final Report** and **Acquittal Report** for the HEPPP 2014 National Priorities Pool project *Supported Pathways to Education and Employment* is true, correct and accurate in all particulars.

I understand that:

- The provision of false or misleading information or the making of false or misleading statements to the Commonwealth is a serious offence under the *Criminal Code Act 1995 (Cth)*.
- If any actual or potential conflict of interest arises, I must notify the Commonwealth immediately in writing of the facts giving rise to the actual or potential conflict of interest and to take such steps as the Commonwealth may require so as to resolve or otherwise deal with any conflict of interest that may arise.

**Title** Professor  
**Name** Paul Wellings CBE  
**Position** Chief Executive Officer (Vice-Chancellor)  
**Signature**

# Appendix 1: Pathways Stakeholder Survey 2015

ATTACHMENT ONE

## Pathways Stakeholder Survey 2015

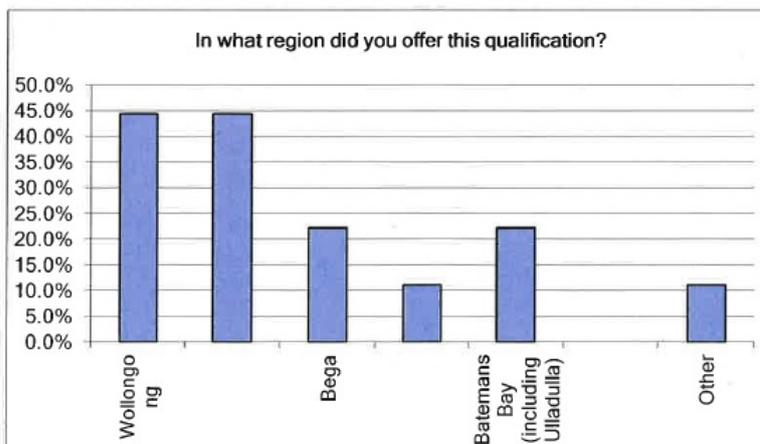
### Supported Pathways to Higher Education and Employment- Vocational Stakeholder Survey

Date/s: July 2015

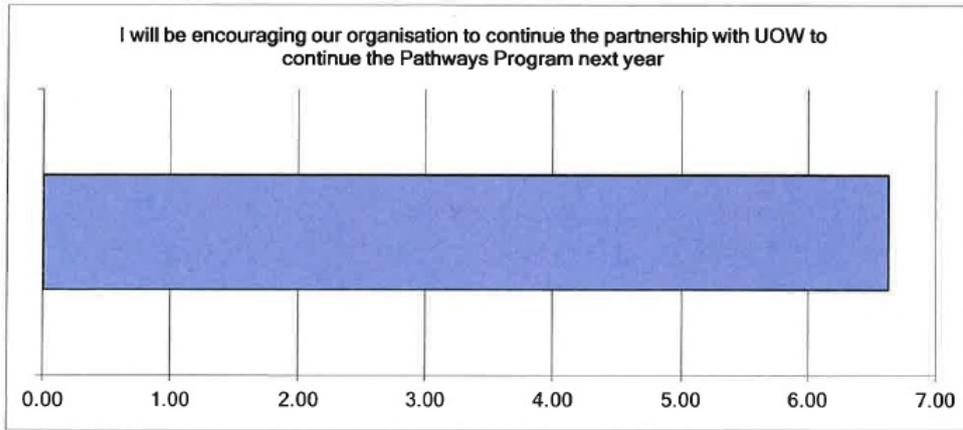
**Overview:** The UOW 'Supported Pathways to Higher Education & Employment' Program is designed to improve the participation of low SES and Indigenous people in higher education. The program targets non-school leavers and aims to increase aspirations, awareness and attainment of individuals and offer them tangible opportunities and pathways to gain employment and further their education. The Supported Pathways Program involves the university collaborating with local government agencies, TAFE NSW and local private registered training organisations to raise the educational capacity of students within the regions of UOW's Campuses (Wollongong, Batemans Bay, Bega, Shoalhaven, Southern Sydney, Southern Highlands). Students who participate in a Supported Pathways Program have the opportunity to complete an AQF program that has specific jobs outcomes with the training provider. At all levels of the pathway, students are provided with industry experience and are able to exit and access employment outcomes or they can continue through the pathway onto university. In late July Vocational providers were surveyed to gain feedback about their engagement with the program, their role as pathways providers and program administration and communication.

### Survey Analysis Report: Stakeholder Responses (highlights)

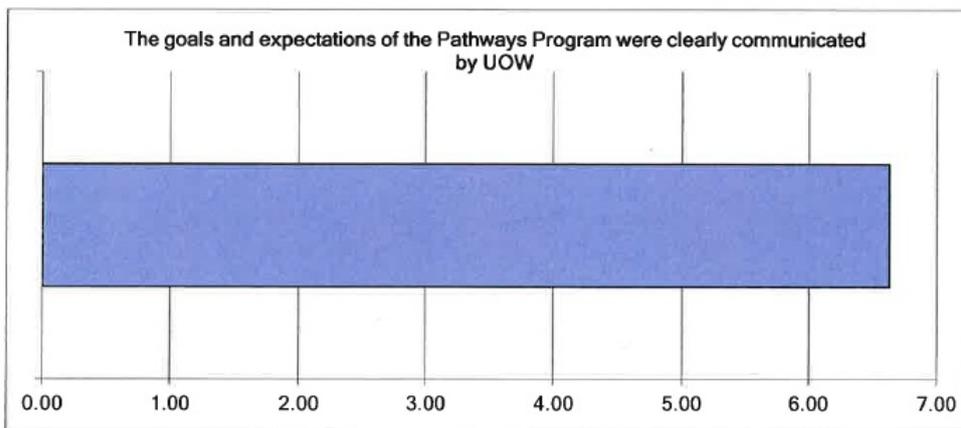
In what region did you offer (your) Qualification?



I will be encouraging our organisation to continue the partnership with UOW and to continue the partnership next year

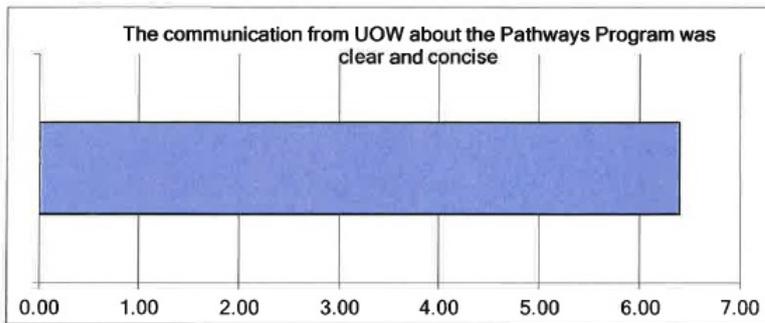


The goals and expectations of the Pathways Program were clearly communicated by UOW

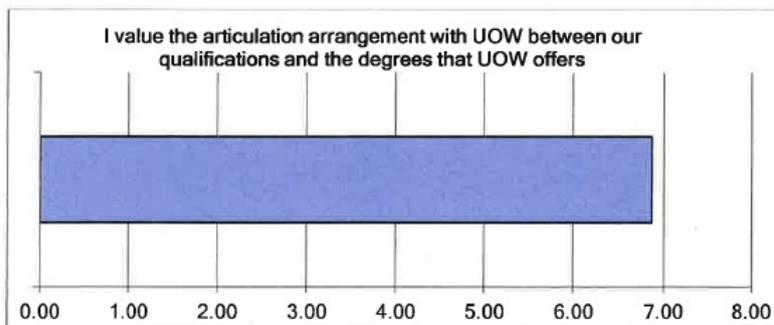


The communication from UOW about the Pathways Program was clear and concise

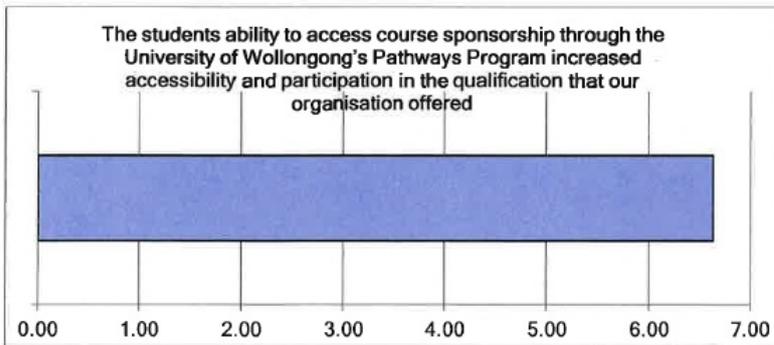
ATTACHMENT ONE



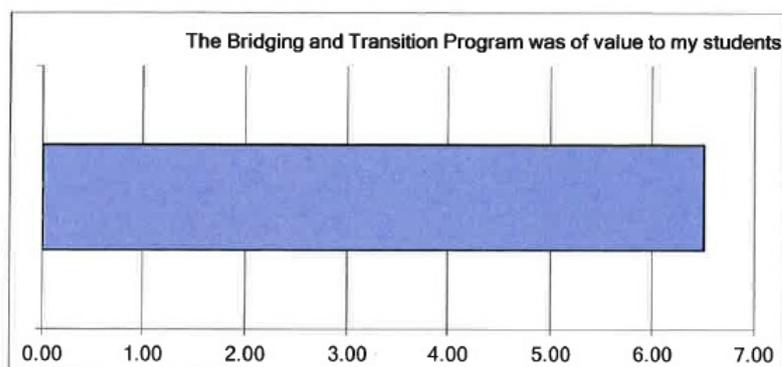
I value the articulation arrangement with UOW between our qualifications and the degrees that UOW offers



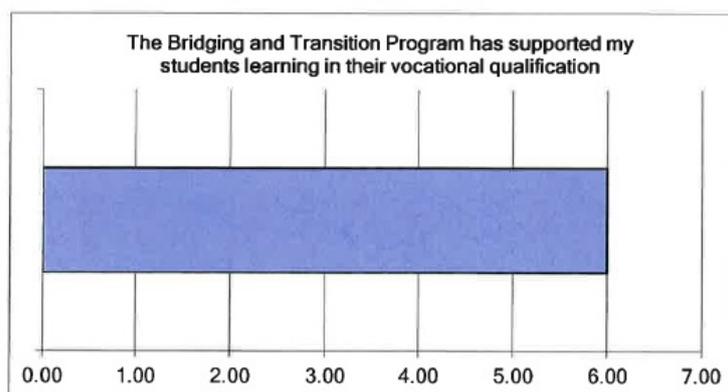
The Students ability to access course sponsorship through the University of Wollongong's pathways program increased accessibility and participation in the qualification that our organisation offered



The Bridging and Transition program was of value to my students



**The Bridging and Transition Program has supported my students learning in their vocational qualification**



**Commentary:**

All stakeholder responses were on the positive end of the scale, the area with the strongest level of agreement was around course sponsorship, the value of articulation agreements and the value of the bridging program. This validates the core elements of the pathways program and would indicate that these particular elements are of value to our stakeholders and should be continued in further iterations of the program.

**The free text sections included the following questions:**

- What was the most beneficial part of the pathways program
- Do you have any suggestions about how we might improve the Pathways Program
- If you could add any idea or initiative to the program (budget concerns aside) what would it be?
- Were there any challenges to the success of the pathways program?

- Can you identify ways in which these challenges can be overcome?

Stakeholder feedback in the free text sections was also positive. In particular, stakeholders said that they valued the relationship with UOW and the opportunity for their students to *"enrol in a course they have always wanted to do, and then being given the opportunity to study at university for a career they have always wanted"*. Stakeholders also identified the opportunity to promote career pathways as being of value. Stakeholder feedback included other positive comments like: *"I found this program extremely well organised. Communication was very clear and often. The UOW staff have always been supportive, knowledgeable and great to work in partnership with."*

**Stakeholders indicated the following key improvement suggestions for next year**

Stakeholders did note that at times, providing enough resources on their part to cope with increased student traffic was a challenge but noted that in future programs, awareness of this issue would allow them to staff accordingly. They noted the following improvement suggestions:

- A broader range of programs at regional campuses
- A greater emphasis on student attraction on behalf of UOW

It is acknowledged that a broader range of programs would be ideal in our regional locations, however there are some limitations in terms of which disciplines students can articulate in to. However, the pathways program will look at areas of opportunity in this space in 2016.

The university did contribute a sizeable investment into student attraction; however, as this arrangement is a partnership and the students are being attracted to a particular provider (who is being funded by us) it is equally the responsibility of the provider to market the program.

**Recommendations for next year**

- Explore increasing the scope of Certificate IV's with articulation at regional locations
- Make the bridging and transition program accessible to all students at a partner provider
- Ensure that all providers understand their responsibilities and options in terms of student recruitment and attraction

# Appendix 2: Collaborative Pathways to Education and Employment: An Emerging Initiative at the University of Wollongong

Section 3: Project Material

## Collaborative Pathways to Education and Employment: An Emerging Initiative at the University of Wollongong

Dr Annie Werner, Anne Snowball, Keirin McCormack

Regional Campuses and Student Diversity, University of Wollongong

### Abstract

*The Illawarra South East and Far South Coast regions of NSW display some of the highest unemployment rates in the state. The University of Wollongong (UOW), with campuses in both of these regions, identified an opportunity to provide potential University students with a multi-layered enabling and bridging program involving co-enrolment with Registered Training Organisations (RTOs) such as TAFE NSW, offering a pathway to University and employment. In 2015, 350 students from under-represented demographics completed the Pathways Program, including the Bridging and Transition Subject. This paper reports on the origins of the UOW Pathways Program, including the Bridging and Transition Subject; how it operates; the basic pedagogical theory behind the development of the curriculum content; and the outcomes and learnings so far.*

### Introduction

The University of Wollongong's Supported Pathways to Higher Education and Employment Program (SPEEP) was developed to help address the under-representation of low SES and Indigenous students in University education in the Illawarra South East and Far South Coast Regions. These regions exhibit some of the lowest employment rates in New South Wales (ABS, 2013), and the University of Wollongong identified an opportunity to support, enable, and encourage under-represented people in these regions to aspire to – and achieve - a tertiary qualification and increase their employability. Specifically, the program seeks to provide an active intervention for target students, and to fulfil the components of the program's Mission Statement – to provide genuine and ongoing opportunities, empowerment, and commitment for transition students. The target groups for the program are: individuals from low SES and Indigenous backgrounds; young people who were unsuccessful in getting into university, and individuals who are currently disengaged with education.

In partnership with selected RTOs including TAFE Illawarra and eleven other vocational providers, vocational students have the opportunity to articulate to a University degree upon successful completion of their Certificate IV qualification. Students are co-enrolled in UOW's Bridging and Transition subject alongside their vocational studies. The primary advantage of this bridging and pathway opportunity is the comprehensive way in which all facets of the students' development – including academic literacy skills, intellectuality and self-efficacy – are addressed. The Supported Pathways to Higher Education and Employment Program was piloted in 2013 and has since been rolled out to all of UOW's campuses,

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including Wollongong, Batemans Bay, Bega, Shoalhaven, Southern Sydney and Southern Highlands.

### **Developing a vocational pathway to University**

A number of recent studies have shown that there are significant barriers for vocational students entering higher education, including a lack of awareness and understanding of the “hidden curriculum” of university and students’ perceived understandings of what university involves (Long, Ferrier, and Heagney, 2006; O’Shea, et. al. 2012). The strategy and curriculum of SPEEP has been tailored to address the diverse pedagogical requirements of transitioning students, and to provide a streamlined, rather than “swirling” or “zigzag” (Harris, et. al. 2005; Harris, et. al. 2006) pathway to further education and/or employment. In particular, the Bridging and Transition subject incorporates the guidelines suggested by Robert Cantwell (2004), and provides a “curriculum sensitive to intellectual change and a pedagogy grounded in and supportive of intellectual development” (Cantwell, 2004). In other words, the course aims to provide students with not only the *skills* to successfully undertake a University degree, but also the *attitudes* (both intellectual and “affective”<sup>1</sup>) to enable their successful transition to tertiary study.

Students undertaking UOW’s Bridging and Transition subject do so at their local UOW campus at the same time as completing their Certificate IV qualification at their local vocational training institution. The Bridging and Transition subject has institutional approval as an enabling subject, allowing students to be co-enrolled at the university. For the duration of their enrolment, students are given full access to the library and associated databases, the Moodle site, and computer labs at their local UOW campus.

The administrative framework of the program includes comprehensive legal agreements with partner RTO’s, negotiated articulation with faculties and internal sign off on admissions and enrolment. The Cert IV qualifications are sponsored by UOW, with eligibility based on the program’s equity criteria. The Bridging and Transition subject represents an additional 3 hours per week for 8 weeks of face-to-face study, and is delivered at the UOW campus, by UOW staff, and is supported by an online Moodle site.

Upon successful completion of their Cert IV and the Bridging and Transition subject, students are guaranteed a pathway to the UOW degree correlating to their vocational study. Students were also equipped to apply to any other institution of their choice. The project outcomes were measured in terms of total number of students going on to any higher education. The removal of the institutional recruitment imperative allowed a greater deal of flexibility in the delivery of the program.

The structure of the Bridging and Transition subject is advantageous for students (particularly those who are undecided about their transition to university) in that the outcomes are flexible. For some students, it will provide a stepping stone to employment, via their vocational

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<sup>1</sup> According to Cantwell, the affective domain is comprised of three components: self concept, self, esteem and self efficacy. For more information on Cantwell’s analysis of this domain, see Cantwell, 2004.

qualification. For others it offers empowerment and opportunity for a more linear transition to tertiary study.

The administrative framework utilised in 2015 has been further developed for 2016 to allow for a flexible and robust model with three tiers of potential engagement for providers.

### **In practice**

To date, the Bridging and Transition subject has been delivered to 350 vocational students, with an estimated 75% going on to enrol in a University degree. The program has been delivered at the Wollongong, Shoalhaven, Batemans Bay, Bega, Southern Sydney and Moss Vale campuses, in collaboration with 11 local vocational training institutions. Program material is delivered at each campus by experienced UOW tutors, and the curriculum materials have been designed to be flexible to the needs of each student cohort, and responsive to the barriers identified by the university and its RTO partners. As Cantwell (2004) points out, transition or enabling courses attract a diversity of students, all of whom have differing needs with regards to academic literacy acquirement and personal development. In response to this, academic staff delivering the Bridging and Transition subject demonstrate finely honed adaptive capabilities, and the lesson plans and subject material have been carefully structured to provide the kind of active intervention that is required to support a successful transition from vocational to tertiary education.

While the structure of the Bridging and Transition course is quite traditional in its inclusion of academic skills such as essay writing, time management, etc, this skills acquisition forms the foundation for more substantial cultural, epistemological and ontological learning experience. Many of the exercises have been designed to also develop students' skills within Cantwell's "affective domain", which has been repeatedly identified as an area in which many non-traditional potential students feel under-confident. This development is, for the most part, achieved via the enablement within the classroom of collective scaffolding and "collective inquiry" (Haggis, 531). There is also an emphasis on cross-cultural knowledge transference within the course. As Wingate (2009) suggests, decontextualized extracurricular academic skills courses are limited in their capacity to fully prepare students for the academic culture of university. The integrated nature of this Bridging program allows for parallel skills development: While students are acquiring generalised skills and acculturation for university within the context of the Bridging subject, they are also becoming familiar with the discipline-specific discursive language of their subject matter within a vocational training context.

Feedback from Bridging and Transition students has also reflected students' delight at "discovering another side of themselves", and feeling, for the first time in their lives, that they actually are "smart enough" to attend university.

Another significant benefit to this integrated mode of delivery is the cultural familiarity that comes from visiting the UOW campus each week, sitting in a 'real' UOW classroom (which is designed to closely simulate the tutorial environment), and becoming familiar with the

campus. As Cantwell (2004) points out, such cultural development is fundamental to a successful enabling program, as it contextualises the more skills-based content of the course. Similarly, O'Donnell and Tobbell identify the potentially peripheral relationship to University resources as problematic and limiting for many bridging students. This problem is explicitly and actively addressed by the Bridging and Transition subject. Campus staff such as academic support staff, careers advisors, and campus administration staff make regular and interactive visits to the Bridging and Transition classroom, meaning that students develop a sense of belonging and inclusion on the campus. The rapport developed within the context of the students' vocational studies translates to a form of "collective scaffolding" (Fry, Skyrme and Emerson, 2014), allowing Bridging and Transition students to become familiar with campus staff, layout, facilities within a 'safe' cohort of their already-familiar vocational studies peers. Students' confidence is also boosted by visits from current university students from under-represented backgrounds who are achieving success in their university degrees.

For many Bridging students – particularly mature students and first in family students – these visits mark a significant turning point in their ability to genuinely envisage themselves undertaking a University degree. As Crossan, Field, Gallacher, and Merrill (2003) explain, non-traditional adults' learning identities can be "contradictory, volatile, and fragile" (Crossan, Field, Gallacher, and Merrill in O'Donnell and Tobbell, 313). Generating a successful transition to higher education, therefore, is often as much about creating a sense of identity as it is about disseminating study skills. The integrative nature of this Bridging subject's content addresses these needs.

The vocational and career-path component of the course is further developed by the inclusion of practical careers workshops facilitated by the University campus's careers advisor, and visits from community members who have graduated from University and are now working in the field related to the students' area of study. These visits from graduates enable Bridging students to visualise the pathway they might take into the workforce. They also provide an opportunity for students to ask practical questions, usually relating to strategies for managing study/work and home life, and provide an opportunity to make informed choices about their study and career prospects. To talk to someone who has 'been there' is a rewarding and reassuring experience for many students, and allows them to process potential anxieties prior to enrolling in their degree.

Students of UOW's Supported Pathways to Higher Education and Employment Program have successfully articulated into 8 UOW degrees including Bachelor of Arts, Bachelor of Information Technology, Bachelor of Social Sciences and Bachelor of Commerce.

#### **Going forward**

The success of SPEEP has confirmed that vocational training-based university pathways are a valid way to increase the aspirations, awareness and attainments of individuals by offering tangible pathways to higher education and employment. In 2016 the Bridging and Transition subject and associated pathway was made available to all students doing Cert IV or diplomas at any of our partner providers, regardless of sponsorship status.

### Discussion points

Are there any other points to consider regarding vocationally-based transitions? Specifically, how best can we approach and cater to the widely disparate needs of our regional students?

Are there any suggestions for the expansion and/or development of this program based on others' experiences with vocationally-based transitions?

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