

Council for the Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences

Creating Capable Students

How Australian Social Science Research Can Increase the Participation of Disadvantaged Students in Higher Education

Australia has a vigorous community of social scientists with a track record of innovative research and engagement with major policy issues, especially those of poverty and social exclusion. The Council for the Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences proposes the Australian Government work with social science researchers to identify key programs and policies to achieve the Bradley Review target of 20 per cent participation in higher education from socio-economic groups disadvantaged through low incomes, remoteness and other causes. We need to create the capable students of the future.

Expert Working Group for Creating Capable Students

CHASS proposes the formation of an expert working group that can assist the policy work in the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) to address the recommendations of the Bradley Review. The primary function of the expert group would be as conduit to researchers and research groups with access to the evidence-based social science knowledge bearing on three interrelated questions:

1. what policies and programs are effective at the tertiary level in encouraging participation by marginalised groups in higher education;
2. how children and young people negotiate the Australian education system, particularly the key life transitions of starting school, going to high school, and leaving school;
3. what programs and policies are effective in reducing the social, economic and cultural barriers that make negotiating the education system more troublesome for children and young people from disadvantaged populations?

CHASS has begun identifying leading social scientists to assist in this enterprise (see list on following page). These researchers have developed or evaluated programs for support for dysfunctional families, early childhood and primary school transitions as well as coordinated efforts in outreach by Australian universities. Key transition periods in the life of potential students have been identified because research has demonstrated that policies aimed at universities alone will not lead to success.

Programs including Griffith University's Pathways to Prevention, Victoria University's Access and Success Program, University of Canberra's U-CAN READ Program, and the National Accelerated Literacy Program have been trialled and tested with documented outcomes. The Innovative Research Universities of Australia Higher Education – ASPIRE program has taken the successful outcomes of its members' outreach programs and consolidated them into a proposed nationwide program.

What is needed is further collaboration between researchers and policy makers on where programs can be built up, or adapted for use across Australia.

CHASS acts as a co-ordinating forum linking research in the Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences sector with Government and Industry. With more than 100 member organisations, the Council can bring

together Australia's best researchers and specialists to work pressing public policy issues. We aim to facilitate the translation of the HASS sector's research knowledge into effective Government policy.

An initial list of researchers for social science collaboration on creating capable students

Many are already familiar to government – now is the time to build a collaboration to use their knowledge effectively.

- Professor Ross Homel, AO (CHASS Vice-President; Professor of Criminology and Criminal Justice at Griffith University)
- Professor Trevor Gale (National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education)
- Professor Robyn Jorgensen (Griffith Institute for Educational Research – Griffith University)
- Professor Johanna Wyn (Education, Equity and Social Change cluster, including the Centre for Equity and Innovation in Early Childhood (CEIEC) and the Youth Research Centre (YRC) – University of Melbourne)
- Professor Peter Saunders (Social Policy Research Centre – University New South Wales)
- Professor Richard James (Centre for the Study of Higher Education – University of Melbourne)
- Professor Ilan Katz (Social Policy Research Centre – University New South Wales)
- Dr Merryn Davies & Dr Bill Eckersley (Access and Success Program – Victoria University)
- Professor Lester-Irabinna Rigney (Yunggoorendi First Nations Centre for Higher Education and Research – Flinders University)
- Associate Professor Tess Lea (School of Social and Policy Research, Charles Darwin University)
- Professor Collette Tayler (Chair of Early Childhood Education and Care, Melbourne Graduate School of Education)
- Dr Jane Pearce (Centre for Social and Community Research – Murdoch University)
- Hywel Ellis (School of Education – University of Newcastle)

Selected Social Sciences Research Expertise on Access to and Participation in Higher Education

- Griffith Institute for Educational Research
- National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education – University of South Australia
- Centre for the Study of Higher Education – University of Melbourne
- Centre for Social and Community Research – Murdoch University
- Social Policy Research Centre – University New South Wales
- Access and Success Research Project – Victoria University
- Yunggoorendi First Nations Centre for Higher Education and Research – Flinders University
- Education, Equity and Social Change cluster, including the Centre for Equity and Innovation in Early Childhood (CEIEC) and the Youth Research Centre (YRC) – University of Melbourne
- Melbourne Graduate School of Education – University of Melbourne
- National Capital Centre for Literacy Research – University of Canberra
- School of Education – University of Newcastle
- Centre for Adolescent Health – University of Melbourne
- Griffith Institute for Health and Medical Research

Creating Capable Students – Key recommendations from the research

Social science research indicates that a whole-of-Government strategy will increase the representation of students from lower SES, Indigenous, and Regional and Rural backgrounds. It will involve cooperation between departments, and between state, local and federal Governments. The research highlights the following target areas:

1. Defining Disadvantage
 - Using best-practice research models for identifying disadvantaged groups;
 - Matching disadvantaged students with appropriate intervention and support.
2. Enhancing the educational achievement of through reform of the Education System:
 - Strengthening Early Childhood education;
 - Supporting students through crucial educational transition periods – e.g. primary to high school, year 10 to year 11 – to improve school retention rates;
 - Working with State and Territory Governments to strength primary and secondary education;
 - National Curriculum Reform, including curriculum for indigenous students;
 - Supporting current community based programs aimed at enhancing the educational participation of disadvantaged students.
3. Families, Communities and Health
 - Identifying and addressing barriers to educational attainment within specific disadvantaged schools, families, and communities, including:
 - Financial – cost of books, school uniforms, excursions;
 - Health – poor general health, and especially eye, ear and dental health;
 - Cultural – encouraging parents to be involved in their children’s education through tutoring programs.
4. Universities
 - Increasing awareness of the value of higher education in the broader community;
 - Supporting schools, families and communities throughout the education cycle;
 - Supporting disadvantaged students through higher education with scholarship, tutoring and pastoral care programs.

Meeting the targets

University of Melbourne Education researcher Professor Richard James notes that “The challenge is not only to remove or reduce barriers, where they exist, but also to *build* possibilities and choices: to raise aspirations, to raise perceptions of relevance, and to boost personal educational achievement.” The essential precursors to higher education – awareness of higher education options; aspiration to participate; education attainment to allow participation – need to be addressed from early on in the education cycle.

Examples of social science research and projects to be used in meeting the 20 per cent target

1. Defining Disadvantage

The Bradley Review recommended (Recommendation 3 on page 39) that the government commission work on the measurement of the socio-economic status of students in higher education with a view to moving from the current postcode methodology

Peter Saunders of the Social Policy Research Centre at the University of NSW has recently completed an Australia Research Council funded project examining deprivation and social exclusion in Australia. (http://www.sprc.unsw.edu.au/reports/ARC_Exclusion_FinalReport.pdf) Saunders highlights how a lack of access and affordability of essential services prevents many children from participating in school activities and blocks their access to other opportunities, which in turn prevents children from having the chance to develop to their full capacity in family, community and educational settings.

This project is useful in quantifying the social and cultural determinants of education disadvantage, and in so doing highlights specific forms of exclusion government policy can target. The research demonstrates the combined impact of deprivation and exclusion in Australia. This research confirms the need for a whole-of-government approach which recognises that step-change in higher education participation requires step-change in social inclusion.

2. Pathways to Prevention Project, Griffith University

Beginning with the 1999 Australian Government report *Pathways to Prevention: Developmental and early intervention approaches to crime in Australia* by Ross Homel and his colleagues, Pathways has evolved since 2001 as a comprehensive service offered through a partnership between national community service agency Mission Australia, local schools and Griffith University, in several ethnically diverse and socially disadvantaged Brisbane suburbs. In early 2009 there were 3757 children on the *Pathways* database, 2072 of whom were enrolled in one of the seven participating schools in 2008. A total of 441 children had been involved directly or indirectly through their families in the family support program (21.3% of enrolled children), and 599 families had been entered on the *Pathways* database of participants by late 2008. Participation in *Pathways* is associated with a range of positive outcomes, including: reduced levels of difficult child behaviour; increased preschool language skills; improved Grade 1 school performance; and higher ratings of school readiness. Importantly, evaluation using a matched pairs quasi-experimental design has shown that the combination of enriched preschool programmes in concert with family support produced better outcomes than either on its own.

Within a universal preventive focus, the Pathways model emphasises comprehensive and integrated practice that supports development in a holistic way. Its overriding goal is to create a *pathway to wellbeing* for all local children as they transit through successive life phases, from conception to youth. Program activities are carefully constructed to enhance the environments of individuals in ways that create the possibility of better developmental outcomes. Within the Pathways model:

1. The central goal of interventions is better outcomes for children and their families, now and across the life course.

2. Interventions in one context (e.g., the home) interact with, complement, and support interventions in other contexts (e.g., school).
3. Relationships, trust and cooperation between staff and clients are valued equally with evidence on what works.
4. Better individual outcomes are achieved by enriching all relevant developmental settings. Child-oriented programs are integrated with family support initiatives and programs introduced through appropriate systems such as schools, childcare and family health centres, or community groups.
5. Intervention effects are enhanced by focusing on life transitions (such as birth and starting school or high school) when people are both vulnerable and receptive to help.
6. A continuum of age-appropriate programs and resources is used to enhance developmental pathways over time.
7. Integrated practice is achieved through concerted efforts to build collaborative working partnerships between organisations, institutions and systems relevant to child and family wellbeing.

Further Information and Contacts:

- Professor Ross Homel AO – Griffith University (r.homel@griffith.edu.au)
- <http://www.griffith.edu.au/arts-languages-criminology/key-centre-ethics-law-justice-governance/research/prevention-developmental-pathways/projects>
- <http://www.aic.gov.au/publications/tandi2/tandi323.html>

**3. Communities for Children program, “Stronger Families and Communities” Initiative
Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs**

‘Communities for Children’ is a place-based early intervention and prevention approach to child protection and development. ‘Communities for Children’ works towards ensuring that children aged 0-5 have the best possible start in life by focusing on well-targeted early intervention approaches that bring about positive outcomes for young children and their families.

Social scientists have played a key role in the development and evaluation of Communities for Children. For example, in early 2004 Professor Ross Homel met with senior FaCSIA managers to share findings from the early stages of Pathways to Prevention, through which process a range of core operating principles for Communities for Children was established. Recently Professor Ilan Katz, Director of the Social Policy Research Centre at UNSW, led a team of researchers from the university and the Australian Institute of Family Studies to produce two evaluation reports that will shortly be published (listed below). These evaluations show that Communities for Children has, on the whole, been successful in producing better outcomes for both children and families.

Communities for Children is funded through Non-Government Organisations (called Facilitating Partners) in 45 disadvantaged sites throughout Australia, who work with local stakeholders to develop and deliver tailored approaches to achieving positive and sustainable outcomes for children and families across 5 key action areas of early learning and care; child-friendly communities; supporting families and parents and family and children's services work effectively as a system. Like the Pathways to Prevention Program, all service delivery is grounded in the principles of community development, partnerships and evidence-based practice.

The Facilitating Partners act as brokers in engaging smaller local organisations to deliver a range of activities in their communities. Examples of activities being implemented under the Communities for Children program are:

- home visiting;
- early learning and literacy programs;
- early development of social and communication skills;
- parenting and family support programs;
- child nutrition;
- community events to celebrate the importance of children, families and the early years.

In implementing their local initiative, Facilitating Partners establish a 'Communities for Children' Committee with broad representation from stakeholders in their community. The Facilitating Partner oversees the development of a Community Strategic Plan and annual Service Delivery Plans with the Committee and manages the overall funding allocation for the community. Much of the funding is allocated to other local service providers to deliver the activities identified in the Community Strategic and Service Delivery Plans.

Further Information:

http://www.facsia.gov.au/internet/facsinternet.nsf/aboutfacs/programs/sfsc-communities_for_children

Evaluation reports (yet to be published):

- *Final Evaluation Report – Stronger Families and Communities Strategy National Evaluation*
- *Final Report on the Stronger Families in Australia (SFIA) Study of the Impact of Communities for Children – National Evaluation of the Stronger Families and Communities Strategy (SFCS)*

4. Higher Education - ASPIRE Program Concept, Innovative Research Universities Australia

IRU Australia has developed this concept for a Higher Education (HE) – ASPIRE program as a new approach to addressing the under-representation of disadvantaged Australians in higher education. The concept co-ordinates current individual university social equity outreach programs into a comprehensive national equity scheme.

The HE – ASPIRE program concept features elements of the UK Aim higher and the US Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs (GEAR UP) programs which have been in operation since 2004 and 1999 respectively. The HE-ASPIRE Program concept formed part of the IRU Australia submission to the Review of Australian Higher Education 2008.

HE – ASPIRE concept is designed to increase participation in higher education through early outreach to young people from disadvantaged groups under-represented in Australian higher education, including Indigenous and low SES groups. The objectives of HE – ASPIRE are to:

- Raise aspirations and motivation to enter higher education among young people from disadvantaged groups in middle primary through to secondary levels.
- Raise the attainment of potential HE students, who are from disadvantaged groups, so that they gain the academic or vocational qualifications and learning skills that will enable them to enter higher education.
- Raise students' aspirations to attend higher education and to apply to the institution and/or course best able to match their abilities.

The HE – ASPIRE program is designed to be delivered on a regional or area basis as appropriate, with the Australian government determining the definition of regions/areas according to a range of factors including: existing methods for defining regions/areas (e.g. statistical subdivisions); measures of disadvantage; physical area; and, location of universities. The HE-ASPIRE program could include the following types of activity:

- Programs for parents aimed at assisting them to support their children’s educational attainment and inform them about higher education options;
- Programs for students (e.g. campus visits; summer schools; student ambassadors; master classes; information, advice and guidance on topics such as scholarships, loans, learning pathways);
- Programs for teachers;
- ‘Joined-up’ service provision as needed (e.g. funds to engage extra tutorial support, social and family support and health services).

Further Information:

- The full proposal can be downloaded from <http://www.irua.edu.au/policy.html>

5. Access and Success Program, Victoria University

Access and Success works collaboratively with schools to understand how the university can contribute to teaching and learning in schools, the community and western region of Melbourne.

Access and Success school-based projects are delivered in partnership with secondary schools, with a particular focus on the needs of students in the western region of Melbourne. *Access and Success* aims to help students succeed in post compulsory years of school by adopting a range of strategies, including:

- improving literacy skills
- mentoring programs
- career counselling
- 're-engaging' young people in learning
- establishing pathways to further education and training
- establishing collaborative networks and links between schools and the community
- developing and sharing resources to assist learning
- establish a professional development program for teachers and principals
- conducting research with a view to expanding existing projects and evaluate the success of current projects

Project outcomes to date

- Enhanced relationship between schools and VU, with establishment of 15+ 3-5 year projects
- Piloting of locally appropriate teacher and student leadership programs
- Stronger engagement and richer experiences of VU students in partnership schools
- Greater awareness of the developing role and capacity of *Access and Success* in the education community
- More teachers and pre-service teachers working as researchers in schools
- Increased school student and teacher awareness of education opportunities offered by VU
- Collection and analysis of data relating to school student destinations and aspirations

The Access and Success Program is underpinned and framed by strategic research. Research teams involving school colleagues, VU students and Access and Success staff have been established to collaboratively negotiate projects based on school needs, and develop a Research process to support evaluation over a 2-5 year period. The research agenda works to:

- develop case studies of practice to deepen understanding of strategies to enhance educational access and success in the region
- track school based data over 3-5 years for indicators of change: school retention, achievement, destination, attitude and pathway data
- investigate and theorise school-based practice
- build knowledge around how universities can work effectively with communities.

Further information and Contacts:

- Dr Merryn Davies – Access and Success Program, Victoria University (Merryn.Davies@vu.edu.au)
- Jo Williams – Access and Success Program, Victoria University (jo.williams@vu.edu.au)
- http://www.vu.edu.au/About_VU/Making_VU/Access_and_Success/Research/index.aspx

6. U-CAN READ Program, University of Canberra

U-CAN READ is a literacy intervention designed to help children who are failing to develop age-appropriate literacy skills. This program is the result of a twenty-five year collaboration between the University of Canberra and ACT Department of Education & Training. This partnership has ensured that the program has evolved in a way that is both grounded in classroom practice and informed by the most up-to-date research and theory in literacy teaching and learning.

Features of the U-CAN READ Program:

- It combines parent seminars with a series of intensive one-on-one literacy learning tutorials. These tutorials are attended by both the child facing literacy difficulties and his or her parent or carer.
- It utilises the *Scaffolding Literacy* pedagogy developed in the National Capital Centre for Literacy Research at the University of Canberra.
- Literacy learning places great demands on children's short term memory. This program overtly addresses the stress placed on both the child and their parent/carer when the child is not progressing in an age-appropriate way.
- It provides a highly integrated method for developing skills in reading, spelling and writing.
- For each child in the program measured outcomes are produced through the use of pre- and post-reading assessments on benchmarked texts.
- The program consists of six two-hour seminars for parents/ carers; and up to twelve one-hour, one-on-one, intensive teaching tutorial sessions conducted by a qualified literacy teacher with the child and parent/carer.
- In 2007, the Schools & Community Centre was contracted to provide 80 places in the Parents as Tutors Program. In all, 85 places were provided catering for 77 families. Students involved ranged from Years 1-11, with a majority coming from Years 3-5.
- In 2007, average gains over the 12 week tutorial program showed a 1.0 – 1.5 Year Level gain on 'supported' (or 'scaffolded') text scores and 1.5 – 2.0 Year Level gains on 'unsupported' text scores.

Further information:

- National Capital Centre for Literacy Research:
<http://www.canberra.edu.au/centres/ncclr/ucanread>
- Axford, B (2007) [Parents and their children working together: A Scaffolding Literacy case study. Australian Journal of Language and Literacy 30 \(1\): 21-39.](#)
- Schools & Community Centre (2008) [Parents as Tutors Program, Annual Report, 2007.](#)
- Williams, P. (2007) [Parents as Tutors Program: Stateline.](#) Australia, Australian Broadcasting Corporation.

7. National Accelerated Literacy Program, Charles Darwin University

The National Accelerated Literacy Program (NALP) aims to remove the educational divide faced by students who can't read. The program uses an Accelerated Literacy methodology to tackle low literacy levels in remote communities around Australia, particularly Indigenous communities in the Northern Territory.

The program is funded by DEEWR and the Northern Territory Government, and is managed and implemented by the Northern Territory Department of Education and Training (DET), in partnership with Charles Darwin University. Currently the Accelerated Literacy program has been implemented in government and non-government schools across the NT, northern Western Australia, South Australia and one school in Queensland.

The DET NALP professional learning team provides support to schools through its Ludmilla office, and three hub schools based at Karama, Gillen and Tennant Creek primary schools. Throughout the project, program training and follow-up professional support will be available to over 700 NT teachers. The program particularly focuses on developing the English literacy of Indigenous learners in remote schools.

Charles Darwin University develops extensive program resources, and conducts independent monitoring and evaluation of the project to identify program strengths and opportunities. Feedback loops with schools enable lessons learned from the field to be incorporated into the project. Knowledge gained through this action research will inform and shape the on-going implementation of the program both in the NT and nationally.

Analysis by CDU shows measurable improvements in literacy levels for students undertaking the program. Whereas the average rate of reading improvement is one reading year level per year, the Accelerated Literacy average is well above this at 1.61 reading year levels per year.

Further Information and Contacts:

- Associate Professor Tess Lea – School of Social and Policy Research, Charles Darwin University (08 8946 7241)
- Associate Professor Gary Robinson – School of Social and Policy Research, Charles Darwin University (08 89466893)
- <http://www.nalp.edu.au/>
- http://www.det.nt.gov.au/education/programs_initiatives/nalp/

8. UniFocus, Murdoch University

UniFocus was an alternative entry program offered on Murdoch University's two regional campuses for students from low socio-economic backgrounds. The UniFocus program has since been incorporated into OnTrack program, a single Murdoch University alternative entry program that allows entry to a broad range of students including those people who have educational disruption or disadvantage.

During the life of the UniFocus Program:

- 350 students participated over a 7 year period;
- 30% of the participants were school leavers;
- the average rate of transition to university was 82%;
- on average 77% of students were still enrolled after two semesters of study.

The success of this program in recruiting students from disadvantaged backgrounds and in enabling such students to study successfully at university is significant in light of the Government's aim to increase the proportion of disadvantaged students participating in higher education. The UniFocus Program is an ideal template as a national framework for alternative entry/bridging programs. Not only does the retention rate attest to the success of the program, the External Review of Enabling Programs Review Panel noted "... the excellent UniFocus curriculum and believes its underlying pedagogy is particularly sound. This program is worthy of wider application and could serve as a best practice model for bridging program delivery" (2005).

The significance and distinguishing features of the UniFocus program is the standpoint design framework embedded within it. This standpoint is firstly, and most significantly, student centred. Standpoint is adaptable enough to be location specific; shaped according to local context and its success is due to the processes, scaffolding, peer support, academic support, emotional intelligence and holistic approach.

Additionally, the UniFocus program was awarded the 2008 Vice-Chancellors Citation for Excellence in Enhancing Teaching (Team Award Elizabeth Moore and Jane Pearce) as well as two 2008 ALTC Awards for (1) Citation for outstanding contribution to student learning (Team Award Elizabeth Moore and Jane Pearce) and (2) Programs that Enhance Learning, Innovation in Curricula, Learning and Teaching (Elizabeth Moore and Jane Pearce).

Further Information:

- Dr Jane Pearce – Murdoch University (J.Pearce@murdoch.edu.au)
- Elizabeth Moore – Murdoch University (emoore@murdoch.edu.au)

9. Indigenous Extended BA Program, Trinity College, University of Melbourne

The Bachelor of Arts (Extended) program is designed to help Indigenous students make a smooth transition into university life and improve the retention rates of indigenous students studying at the University of Melbourne. It is targeted at Indigenous students identified as having the academic ability and leadership potential, but lacking in the necessary skills to succeed.

The course facilitates a supported transition to University through the provision of an additional study year specifically designed to develop appropriate academic skills for success at University. It applies

principles behind the successful *Trinity College Foundations Studies* program for International Students to improving access to and the successful completion of higher education for Indigenous students.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students will access specialised academic support through bridging subjects provided in key areas such as academic literacy, communication and performance, literature, philosophy and environmental studies. These subjects will be taught by Trinity College Foundation Studies program in co-operation with staff from the Faculty of Arts, the University's Centre for Indigenous Education and Academic Skills Unit.

Research has identified culture shock, isolation, housing arrangements and financial management as significant causes of Indigenous students attrition rates. Students participating in the program live in one of the university's residential colleges where they will have ready access to academic, personal, social and financial support services. The course is a unique experience and provides a great opportunity for students to immerse themselves in University life.

The program aims to have 100 students enrolled in the program by 2012, and to extend the program into other faculties.

Further Information and Contacts:

- Campbell Bairstow – Dean, Trinity College, University of Melbourne (03 9438 7162)
- Kay Attali – Trinity College (03 9438 7551)
- http://www.trinity.unimelb.edu.au/academic_programs/indigenous/ba_extended