

Regional Schools Outreach Program

2011 Annual Report Condensed Version

Equity & Equal Opportunity



"If a student was uncertain about what to do after school, I think you've cleared it up for them...we learnt a lot!"

"I'm more confident to help my daughter now; with our support it will really give her the boost she needs."



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Program Summary & Recommendations

The University of Ballarat's Regional Schools Outreach Program (RSOP) has been in operation since 2008, with yearly evaluations informing ongoing modification and refinement of the Program. The overarching and ongoing aim of the RSOP is to increase access to tertiary education among students from regional/remote and low socioeconomic status (SES) backgrounds.

The need for programs such as the RSOP is clearly reflected in the broader equity and social inclusion literature, the Bradley Review of Australian Higher Education, and the Federal Government's education agendas, including the Higher Education Participation and Partnerships Program (HEPPP), all of which highlight:

- The significant under-representation of students from low SES backgrounds in Higher Education.
- The significant under-representation of regional/remote students in Higher Education.
- The need to address these inequalities through various means, including early intervention or outreach programs that are sustained throughout school and increase the aspirations of regional/remote, low SES students to undertake further education.

With its focus on addressing the above issues, the RSOP represents an important, timely and much-needed program within the broader context of Higher Education. The RSOP has set the following key objectives:

- To build aspirations of students to undertake VCE and tertiary education
- To improve retention and completion rates in the later secondary years, particularly into VCE
- To develop and strengthen collaborative relationships between schools, parents and universities to assist in improving access to tertiary education
- To improve visibility and presence of 'university' in the school community

A number of strategies are used to help meet these objectives, including engaging university students with participants as role models, providing motivating university experiences, helping students to break down barriers to education and providing practical information to help with the transition from secondary to tertiary education.

The RSOP used a range of initiatives in 2011 to implement its strategies. These can be grouped as follows.

Middle Years Program – 'Awesome Futures'

- Year 8 School Visits
- Year 8 Parent Sessions
- Year 8 University Day
- Year 8 University Camp pilot
- Year 9 School Visits pilot
- Year 9 Parent Sessions pilot
- Year 9 University Day pilot



Later Years Program

- Year 10 School Visits
- Year 10 University Days
- Year 11 School Visits
- Year 10-12 Parent Sessions
- Year 10 Hamilton Aspirations Day (Collaborative program with RMIT University)

Supplementary Initiatives

- Student Mentoring
- Teacher Briefings

There were several new initiatives piloted in 2011, including the Year 8 University Camp, Year 9 School Visits, Year 9 Parent Sessions, and the Year 9 University Day. These built on the range of new initiatives added to the RSOP suite of programs over the last few years.

The 2011 Regional Schools Outreach Program (RSOP) delivered initiatives in partnership with 54 Government secondary schools in Western Victoria (Barwon-South West, Loddon-Mallee, Grampians and Western Metropolitan DEECD regions) to a total of 5947 Year 8, 9, 10 and 11 students, as well as 595 parents of these students. This represents significant growth from 2010. A list of participating schools, their regions and their involvement is available on request.

The Program adopted a dual-pronged approach to working with these schools in 2011. Eight schools were identified as high priority, regional/remote, low SES communities for tailored, intensive engagement with the Program. These are referred to as 'partnership' schools, and are heavily engaged in tailored programs and supplementary activities for students, families and teachers from Years 8-11. The remaining schools participated in initiatives targeted at Year 10 and 11 students, and parents. The RSOP adopted a rigorous, data and feedback-driven approach in identifying appropriate schools to partner with, in order to ensure that the Program was reaching those who needed it most.

Evaluation Methods

Participating students, teachers and parents were required to complete an evaluation form at the conclusion of each initiative, designed to capture immediate feedback on its impact on their intentions and aspirations, the effectiveness of strategies employed and program design and delivery. UB students assisting in the delivery completed an online survey to capture their overall program feedback.

Progress towards objectives and the ongoing impact of the strategies used by the RSOP have been captured by the continuation of the long-term case study evaluation employed by the Program since 2009. These case studies have been identified by the Program as an effective way to collect more detailed information on participants' longer term career choices.

Due to the RSOP establishing consistent trends in student and teacher responses and the effects of the Program from 2008-2010 evaluations, the 2011 Program Evaluation (internal document) focused on the aforementioned partnership schools to a) provide a 'snap-shot' of the RSOP's continued effectiveness; b) establish a pattern of development of aspirations in the schools where the RSOP works across Years 8-11; and c) focus on the results and exploration of the Program's newest initiatives in Years 8-9.

For more detailed/broader information about the work completed in Years 10-11, please contact RSOP staff.



A total of 1218 student surveys were analysed for the 2011 Program Evaluation (333 from students in Year 8 and 9, 342 from students in Year 10 and 11, and 567 from students in Year 10 and 11 from the Western Metropolitan DEECD region), along with teacher surveys from each school, 113 parent surveys, 24 UB student surveys and 82 surveys from the Hamilton Aspirations Day.

Summary of Analysis & Evaluation Results

Overall, the 2011 Program Evaluation (internal document) showed very positive results across the range of RSOP initiatives, and indicated that the Program's key strategies were effectively implemented. Areas for improvement and modification were identified across each year level. The usefulness of each initiative as a vehicle for particular strategies was evaluated and this information will be utilised internally to guide program development.

The evaluation of results in the middle years showed that engaging university students with participants was certainly an important strategy and was well implemented over the year, with roles for university students volunteering on middle year initiatives differing significantly to those in the later years. The RSOP also successfully provided motivating and engaging experiences for students, while engaging families through social initiatives. This wide range of initiatives successfully developed self-esteem and confidence among students, though the RSOP continues to seek new ideas to further grow student resilience. Strategies focusing on the relevance of education and connecting current and future education with careers were also implemented effectively.

Those strategies implemented predominately through School Visits, Parent Sessions and the pilot Year 8 University Experience Camp seem to have been the most successful, while the pilot Year 9 University Day appeared to provide an acceptable framework to implement others. Thought needs to be given as to how on-campus initiatives can be further developed to enhance the reach of strategies outside of providing motivating and engaging experiences, and developing self-esteem and confidence, and the RSOP's on campus events will be reviewed for 2012 accordingly. Overall, the growth of the Middle Years Program over the last two years has allowed focused, early intervention of a type not before seen with the RSOP. There will be significant interest in evaluation results over the coming years as the first cohorts of students who have been exposed to early interventions make their transition through to Year 10 and beyond.

There is significant evidence available to suggest that the strategies employed to achieve the Program Objectives for students in the later years were also implemented effectively. The Later Years Program has been in existence for a number of years now and has benefited from a number of development and feedback processes over this period.

The engagement of university students continues to be a strong strategic focus, and the RSOP has continued to ensure that practical and relevant information is supplied to secondary school students with regards to tertiary education.

Removing barriers for students has always been a key objective for the RSOP, and it continued to be in 2011. Sessions focused on understanding applications, pathways and university life, reducing financial barriers by informing students of scholarships and government assistance. Students have been motivated and engaged around university, and have a greater understanding of the benefits available to them from a tertiary education. Continued efforts need to be made to ensure parent engagement established in the middle years continues into the later years, and this is an area of focus moving forward. Program design and delivery play a key role in the successful implementation of these strategies, and



the RSOP's continual development and quality improvement approach ensures that programs stay relevant and effective for the schools and students it serves.

Significantly, the initiation of the Middle Years Program over the last two years should complement and strengthen the ability of future initiatives in the Later Years Program to capitalise on these foundations to influence Program Objectives; in particular raising aspirations for tertiary study. Each initiative was shown to have impacted on relevant objectives to some degree at least and greatly at most.

Broadly, it can be stated that the range of RSOP initiatives, in the short-medium term:

- Built student aspirations for tertiary education
- Impacted positively on students' intentions to complete Year 12
- Developed and strengthened collaborative relationships between key stakeholders
- Improved the visibility of 'university' in partnership school communities

While it is difficult to measure long-term outcomes of the Program in terms of its objectives at this point in time, it is important for the Program to further develop its current case study approach to provide useful evaluation data. Due to the long-term nature of the Program, and the young age of many participants, it will take a number of years to assess final outcomes. Future evaluation plans, given the recent successful \$2.25 million HEPPP bid, will be made in the coming months.

Recommendations & Future Directions

The RSOP is a key partner, along with the University's Addressing Disadvantage and Inequality in Education and Health (ADIEH) research theme, in a major project that has recently received \$2.25 million in HEPPP competitive funds. The RSOP and ADIEH will work on strengthening relationships between UB, schools and community organisations, and enhancing the aspirations of young people from low SES backgrounds for post-compulsory education. This project focuses on schools engaged in the RSOP, along with key areas of disadvantage identified by ADIEH such as Ballarat South and Horsham North. The RSOP intends to use this funding to further deepen RSOP initiatives, including the expansion of its programs into primary schools.

The results obtained through the 2011 Program Evaluation (some of which are summarised above), gave rise to the following recommendations:

1. Continue, and review, the Year 8 and 9 School Visit initiatives.
2. Continue the Year 10 and 11 School Visit initiatives, with adjustments to scope and scale as required.
3. Continue, and review, on-campus initiatives, such as Year 8, 9 and 10 University Days and Year 8 Camp, to ensure their complementary nature to School Visits.
4. Continue and strengthen Year 8, 9 and 10-12 Parent Sessions, with a focus on broadening the participation of Year 10-12 parents.



5. Further develop supplementary initiatives such as teacher engagement and student mentoring for Partnership schools.
6. Develop and implement Grade 5/6 pilot sessions as part of the new Primary School Program aimed at students, teachers and parents for this age level.

Since beginning in 2008 with the Year 10 School Visit program, the RSOP has deepened, developed and extended its work in the areas that need it most. This has included the inception of the Year 8, 9 and 11 School Visits, Parent Sessions, Years 8-10 University Days and a range of complementary initiatives such as Student Mentoring and Teacher Briefings in partnership schools. With the planned expansion in 2012 following the successful HEPPP competitive bid, a new range of opportunities and challenges will confront the RSOP. It is important to ensure that the positive outcomes of the Program to date are not compromised while the Program continues to grow and develop. In doing so, the aim is that the Program will continue to assist in increasing access to, and participation in, tertiary education by students from a regional/remote and low SES background.



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