

EXCITE
explore
EMPOWER



EVALUATION OF FEDERATION UNIVERSITY AUSTRALIA'S

Regional Schools Outreach Program

SUMMARY OF 2008–2013 EVALUATION
FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

Building aspirations for higher education

What do you want to be when you grow up? – A familiar question that children hear from parents, family, friends and teachers.

But how do young people aspire to and decide what is possible for them? How do young people become confident to formulate and pursue their desires or goals?

Research shows that socio-economic circumstances, level of educational achievement of parents and siblings, rural location, distance to education institutions and family expectations contribute to a young person's belief in what they may do when they grow up – whether to ...complete Year 12, continue studying after school, take an apprenticeship, or look for a job. Young people from rural and regional areas compared with their metropolitan counterparts continue to leave school earlier and are less likely to participate in tertiary education.

The Regional Schools Outreach Program (RSOP) located at the Federation University Australia (FedUni), targets low socio-economic rural areas in Western Victoria. The RSOP Collaborates with schools to Excite, Explore and Empower students' aspirations and decision-making by:

- presenting education and career information and options with particular relevance for students in rural settings
- strengthening students' self-efficacy and capacity for decision-making and planning for their future
- building confidence in young people and their families, to address 'fears and barriers' of pursuing education and career options outside their immediate community.



The RSOP's core goal, 'to improve access to higher education among students (participating in the RSOP) from low SES, regional and remote backgrounds' is implemented through targeted activities including: In-school Workshops, Parent Information Sessions, Teacher Engagement, Classroom Resources, Student and Parent Information Resources, Student Mentoring and University Experience Days and Camps.

The RSOP has been successful at partnering with schools and developing ongoing working relationships with students, teachers and families. The RSOP's success at engaging at all levels of the school community was consistently reported as a unique attribute of the program and a significant support for low SES and rural students' education and aspirations.

LOCATION OF GOVERNMENT SCHOOLS SERVICED YEARLY BY THE RSOP BETWEEN 2008-13



In 2013 the RSOP delivered programs in 49 schools, involving students from Years 5/6 through to Year 12.

Excite – Explore

An independent evaluation of the RSOP was undertaken in 2013. Key findings from the evaluation on the impact of the RSOP for participants – students, parents and schools – are summarised below under key RSOP strategies of Excite and Explore.



Previously parents were disengaged from the school. The RSOP helped getting parents on board.

SCHOOL PRINCIPAL

EXCITE

RSOP STRATEGY	Excite	
RSOP OBJECTIVE	Build aspirations for VCE and higher education. Improve school retention.	
KEY EVALUATION FINDINGS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Students, principals, teachers and parents consistently report that the RSOP contributes significantly to building student aspirations for VCE and higher education. In addition it was found that the program had some influence on school retention, particularly for students who were undecided about staying at school. 	<p><i>If this information (RSOP) wasn't here we would be more reluctant to go to university and would stay in our local area, do a trade or get a job.</i> STUDENTS YEAR 11/12</p> <p><i>The RSOP has given students the spark to ignite thinking.</i> PARENT</p> <p><i>Our retention rate now is high and partly because of students having their eyes opened through RSOP to finish Year 12 and to have options.</i> SCHOOL PRINCIPAL</p>

I knew nothing before the RSOP told me. I didn't see the point of finishing Year 12 or university. But RSOP showed me some options.

YEAR 11 STUDENT

EXPLORE

RSOP STRATEGY	Explore	
RSOP OBJECTIVE	Improve understanding of the benefits, importance and relevance of secondary and higher education.	
KEY EVALUATION FINDINGS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Students, principals, teachers and parents overall reported that the RSOP contributes to improving students' understanding of the benefits, importance and relevance of secondary and higher education. The RSOP was reported to have a positive impact on student-parent-school relationships. 	<p><i>Isolation is our biggest difficulty as a school community. The RSOP gives students opportunity to think outside the box and to see options outside their everyday – different options, courses and pathways helps them to see beyond our town.</i> PARENT YEAR 8 FAMILY</p> <p><i>Students access more tertiary information and resources since RSOP. Students walk past the information in the corridor and pick up leaflets about university and TAFE.</i> SCHOOL PRINCIPAL</p>

Empower – Collaborate

An independent evaluation of the RSOP was undertaken in 2013. Key findings from the evaluation on the impact of the RSOP for participants – students, parents and schools – are summarised below under key RSOP strategies of Empower and Collaborate.



We see more kids going to open days, we see that as a direct result of the RSOP.

CAREERS TEACHER

EMPOWER

RSOP STRATEGY	Empower	
RSOP OBJECTIVE	Build self-efficacy and confidence in career planning and decision-making.	
KEY EVALUATION FINDINGS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Students, principals, teachers and parents consistently reported that the RSOP contributes to empowering students to understand, think, aspire, decide and plan for their schooling and career pathway. 	<p><i>The RSOP shows us how to apply, what to expect, how to compare universities and helps you develop your ideas of where you want to go.</i> STUDENT FOCUS GROUP</p> <p><i>Yes it definitely helps. RSOP caters for country kids. It reduces your worry.</i> STUDENT YEAR 9/10</p> <p><i>The RSOP parent sessions have been an eye-opener. Parents were amazed to hear about scholarships and other support that students can get.</i> SCHOOL PRINCIPAL</p>

Once university was a rare thing to talk about in our community – now it is common.

PARENT

COLLABORATE

RSOP STRATEGY	Collaborate	
RSOP OBJECTIVE	Strengthen the family, school and university support structures for students.	
KEY EVALUATION FINDINGS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Principals, teachers and parents consistently reported that the RSOP contributed to strengthening the relationships between schools and families. Principals, teachers and parents consistently reported that the RSOP effectively collaborated with schools and parents. 	<p><i>The RSOP takes a partnership approach and directly supports our work with students. It presents what schools are striving for.</i> SCHOOL PRINCIPAL</p> <p><i>Previously parents were disengaged from the school. The RSOP helped getting parents on board.</i> SCHOOL PRINCIPAL</p> <p><i>The RSOP provides inspiration around how to have conversations and informal discussions with students about careers.</i> TEACHER INTERVIEW</p>

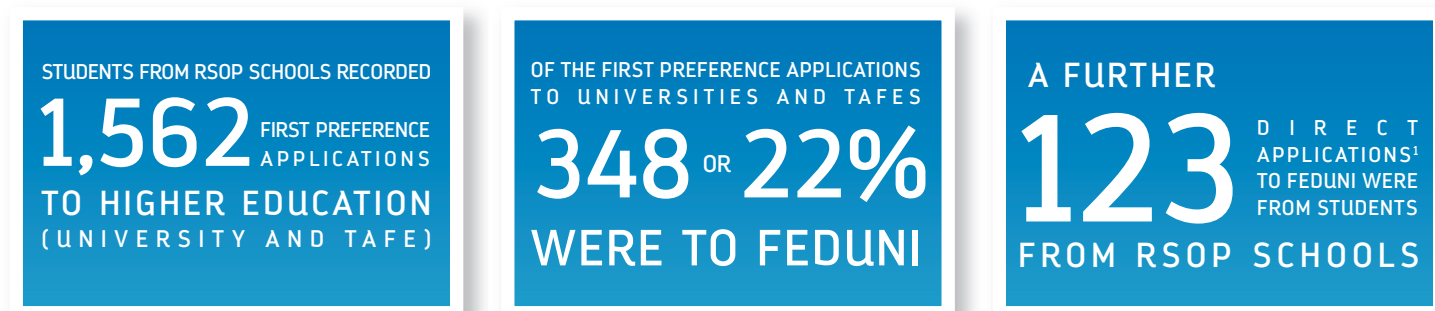
Increasing higher education/university applications

A key goal and focus of the RSOP is to increase students' aspirations for higher education. In addition to collecting qualitative data from RSOP participants the evaluation explored a range of quantitative data on student numbers and applications to university and TAFE from students in RSOP schools.

The RSOP activities stimulate some peer discussion – 'you could do this' 'I could see you doing this' etc. It's a boost for their self-esteem.

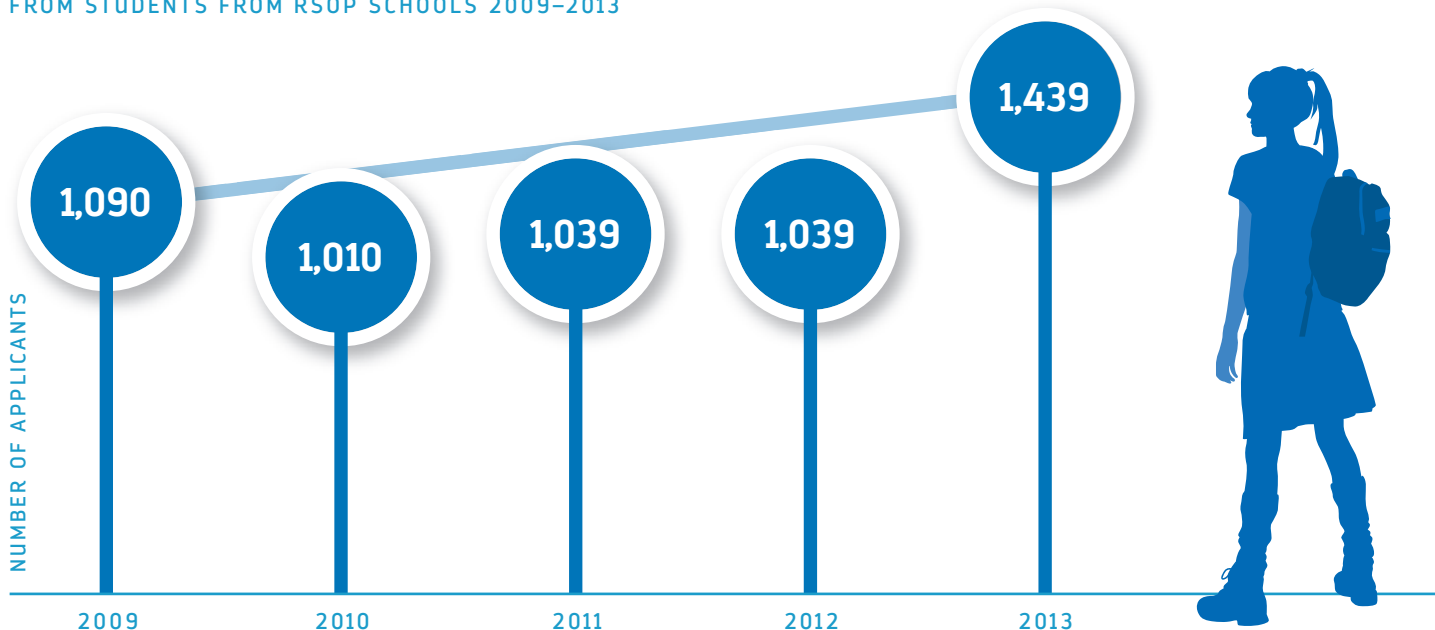
PARENT

A SNAPSHOT OF FIRST PREFERENCE APPLICATIONS DATA FOR 2013 SHOWS:



The evaluators concluded that it is not possible to establish a firm quantifiable link between the RSOP and an increase in higher education applications due to quantitative data limitations and constraints of time to show effect. The data to date provides a baseline for future analysis of change in students applying for higher education over time.

FIRST PREFERENCE APPLICATIONS TO VICTORIAN UNIVERSITIES FROM STUDENTS FROM RSOP SCHOOLS 2009–2013



¹ Direct application data reliability is dependent on consistency of practice in recording applicant details.

Source: First preference applications and offers data by secondary school and other attributes from VTAC in July of each year, provided by FedUni. To note: 2010 was the first year that any of the students involved in the RSOP were eligible to apply for higher education. (RSOP commenced with Year 10 students in 2008)

RSOP reach and development

RSOP reach

Since commencing in 2008, the RSOP has grown in the number of participants alongside program expansion to respond to arising needs in school communities.

ON AN ANNUAL BASIS THE RSOP ENGAGEMENT EXTENDS TO ALMOST

5000 STUDENTS **ACROSS** **49** SCHOOLS

RSOP development and expansion

The RSOP continues to develop specific programs for different school year levels in response to identified need and RSOP goals and priorities.

In addition to its work with schools in western Victoria, in 2011 the RSOP identified eight 'partnership schools' to deliver a more extensive program resulting in a deeper engagement with students, teachers and parents in these schools from Year 5/6 through to Year 12.

IN 2013 AN ESTIMATED

8,600
RESOURCES
WERE DISTRIBUTED

RSOP resources

RSOP has developed over 14 individual year level resources specifically to engage rural young people and their families and teachers. The classroom resources for students and teachers align with Victorian Careers Curriculum Framework.

RSOP best practice

The evaluation identified a high level of support for the RSOP and received consistent reports regarding the high quality and professionalism of the program content and delivery.

Best practice features were identified as:

- activities are informed by an understanding of the nature of aspirations of young people
- information, activities and workshops are tailored to year levels and the socio-economic, cultural and rural environments of the students, school and community
- program and activities increasingly build a foundation for education
- program provides a range of accessible resources for students, teachers, parents and schools
- program applies consistent feedback systems and evaluation to inform program development.



Evaluation conclusions

The RSOP evaluation has provided an independent assessment of the impact of the program for participating students, parents and schools as well as the *contribution* of the RSOP towards student aspirations for school and higher education.

Data collected through evaluation focus groups, interviews and surveys provides a strong and consistent view of the positive contribution that the RSOP makes towards exciting students to stay at school, assisting students and families to explore and understand the possibilities of undertaking higher education, and empowering students and their families decisions on education and career pathways. Principals and teachers unanimously rated the RSOP as 'significantly' or 'substantially' influencing students to aspire to higher education.

A key challenge for the evaluation was that the RSOP does not work in isolation and there can be multiple factors that influence student aspirations and decision-making. Difficulties of drawing consequential conclusions about the impact of the RSOP program on students, parents and schools includes the inability to control a range of possible factors that may influence a person's actions and/or experience of the program and/or outcomes from the program. To this end the evaluation does not draw a correlation between participating in the program and outcomes, but explores the perceived contribution that participation in the program made against RSOP aims, objectives and anticipated outcomes.

In addition, current data and the timing of the evaluation limit establishing the quantitative relationship between the RSOP and an increase in higher education applications. The number of students eligible to apply for higher education at the time of this evaluation represents only a relatively small proportion of students involved in the program.

Taking into consideration the many challenges and limitations of the data and the context for the evaluation, the evaluation identified that the views of students, parents, principals and teachers were strongly consistent. This data is also consistent with RSOP annual student and parent feedback data, reported since 2008.

The consistency of information about the RSOP from students, principals, teachers, parents and RSOP staff suggests the program makes a significant contribution in educational achievements and aspirations for students from low SES backgrounds from regional and remote areas of western Victoria.

The ongoing need to assist and support these students to reach their educational capacity was reiterated in the evaluation interviews and discussions.

The RSOP activities make the students focus on their personality, their strengths and what might suit them. There are no negatives, it is really empowering.

PARENT

One of my children is currently at university. Without RSOP he would never have a) applied, or b) gone to university.

PARENT

The RSOP has taken away the 'fear factor' for students from small communities.

SCHOOL PRINCIPAL

This is a very isolated area, there are no tertiary institutions nearby. The RSOP has had a substantial impact. We estimate that 10-15% of students from here going to university/further education is a direct result of the RSOP.

SCHOOL PRINCIPAL

Being so isolated the RSOP has given us a better opportunity and shows us what the opportunities are outside our small community.

STUDENT FOCUS GROUP

One of our students from a disadvantaged family had not considered going to university because of the cost.

The RSOP informed them of financial support options and through having conversations this student was inspired and encouraged to apply for university. The student is now studying at university.

SCHOOL PRINCIPAL

The RSOP shows us how to apply, what to expect, how to compare universities and helps you develop your ideas of where you want to go.

STUDENT FOCUS GROUP

Our retention rate now is high and partly because of students having their eyes opened through RSOP to finish Year 12 and to have options

SCHOOL PRINCIPAL

FEDERATION UNIVERSITY AUSTRALIA'S

Regional Schools Outreach Program

SUMMARY OF EVALUATION FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

RSOP evaluation

Effective Change, an independent research company conducted the evaluation of the RSOP in 2013. The evaluation aims were to identify the contribution of the RSOP to motivate students from low SES backgrounds in regional and remote areas to stay at school and aspire to higher education. The evaluation had DEECD approval and permission from principals prior to undertaking evaluation activities schools.

Effective Change conducted the Evaluation of Federation University Australia's (Fed Uni) Regional Schools Outreach Program (RSOP).

The Regional Schools Outreach Program is funded through the Commonwealth Higher Education Participation and Partnerships Program (HEPPP) until December 2014.

The RSOP is located within the Federation University Australia (formerly the University of Ballarat).

Evaluation sample	Participation	Sample size
Students	Survey respondents	240
	Focus groups	70
Principals/teachers	Interviews	29
Parents	Focus groups/ interviews	8
Parents	Surveys	9
RSOP/university staff	Interviews	7
Total participants		363
Total schools		26

Evaluation data sources included:

- Evaluation data collected through the evaluation focus groups and interviews has been analysed using a thematic analysis approach
- Information from the RSOP annual evaluation reports 2008–2013
- Snapshot data from the RSOP welcome lunch in 2013 of first year FedUni students
- Quantitative data includes *My School* data *On Track* data, VTAC first preference university and TAFE applications data, *Compulsory Completion Achievement Information* and FedUni direct applications data

A full report of the Evaluation of Federation University Australia's Regional Schools Outreach Program is available from:
www.federation.edu.au/outreach/RSOP-outcomes

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Information about the Regional Schools Outreach Program is available from:
www.federation.edu.au/outreach

Regional Schools Outreach Program (RSOP)

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