



The University of Sydney
partnering with our community

What's it about?

Compass aims to encourage pre-tertiary students from low socioeconomic status (SES) backgrounds to participate in higher education. The key goal of the project is to build **attainment and aspiration**.

The University of Sydney is partnering with the NSW Department of Education and Training (DET) and selected secondary and primary schools in Sydney to develop a series of outreach, mentoring and professional development programs that aim to increase school completion rates and raise community expectations, student attainment and aspiration.

The project will also build on the University's capacity for socially inclusive planning and practice and offer a series of public lectures by leaders in the field.

Why is it necessary?

People from low SES backgrounds are significantly under-represented in Australian higher education. Barriers to tertiary study include low levels of academic achievement and aspiration, and low secondary school completion rates.

Nevertheless, students from low SES urban areas that do enrol at university have similar patterns of retention and success as those from other backgrounds.

The Participation and Equity Review commissioned by Universities Australia in 2008 identified multiple ways to address these barriers, including direct work with under-represented schools, activities to support school retention, programs to raise awareness of higher education, alternative pathways to tertiary study, financial support, incentives (such as scholarships), and first-year transition programs.

There is considerable evidence that aspirations are formed early in life, and that family experience of higher education is a key factor in influencing attitudes. This is why Compass will engage with students, and the people who influence them, early in their schooling, with contact continuing throughout their school career.

Why Sydney?

The University of Sydney has a strong history of support for low SES students, including extensive financial, learning and personal support, and a specialised first-year transition program. Low SES students who join the University, often through special entry programs, have excellent rates of retention and success.

Compass will build and extend the University's support programs, focusing on pre-tertiary low SES students and their school communities. Activities have been developed in consultation with faculties, DET and principals of the selected primary and secondary schools.

Compass is currently funded for three years by \$3.4 million from the federal Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (the Structural and Diversity Adjustment Fund), \$2 million from the University, and \$100,000 from DET.

Compass will be overseen by the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Education), supported by an advisory committee of key stakeholders, and managed by the Director of Social Inclusion. A key milestone will be the establishment of a Social Inclusion Unit to initiate and coordinate project activities, manage resources and report results.

Compass will be evaluated on an ongoing basis against baseline data on student, parent and teacher aspiration, student attainment, secondary retention, school attendance and the numbers of students accessing tertiary institutions.

www.usyd.edu.au/compass

Find your way to higher education

Scope of the project

Compass will launch with two secondary schools and six feeder primary schools in the Sydney region. In the second year the activities will expand into a further two secondary schools and their feeder primary schools in south-west Sydney.

Initial research has identified the following issues and opportunities:

- Focusing on the pre-transition period (school years 3, 4, 5, 8, 9 and 10) will allow for sustained involvement and the opportunity to influence the perceptions and choices of students and their parents. Follow-up 'career option sessions' and 'experience days' will be offered in years 9, 10 and 11.
- The schools identified science, mathematics, music and information technology as areas where the University could add value through staff capacity-building programs, and curriculum and student learning support.
- Parents and students need to know about the role, purpose and accessibility of higher education, including information about financial support and relative costs, and develop familiarity with university life. This involves improving awareness of the diversity of current student populations and demystifying entry pathways.

Specific activities will include:

- Visits to the University of Sydney by students from years 3 and 4 for cultural or learning activities.
- Creation of a University 'blog' or online site for primary students, their teachers and University academics to share experiences and feedback across the six partner primary schools. Learning activities may include 'school challenges' to be discussed and reported online.
- Half-day visits to primary schools by University students and staff, to support programs and learning activities.
- Student experience days at the University for years 9 and 10, including faculty-based activities, campus tours and a session on 'what university is really like' by current students.
- Study groups/mentoring for small groups of students in years 9 and 10, facilitated by University students.
- School-based and University-based masterclasses. School-based classes will allow students in years 8, 9 and 10 to work with University staff and students on a specific subject. University-based classes (for years 9 or 10) will involve two or three days intensive on-campus study.

- Science Alliance program, including professional development days for secondary science teachers, and a variety of events for students. These include 'Giant Science' experience days at the University for years 3 and 4, 'Kickstart Workshops' for Higher School Certificate science students, and 'Science in the City' workshops of hands-on experiments, lectures and seminars for years 3, 4, 8, and 9.
- University student ambassadors will visit secondary schools to present at assemblies, daily home group sessions and participate in video conferences.

Opportunities for teachers

The Division of Professional Learning in the Faculty of Education and Social Work will offer teachers the chance to develop and implement small learning projects at their school, supported through a combination of lectures, tutorials and electronic or face-to-face feedback sessions. Teachers can choose to have this work credited towards a Graduate Certificate in Educational Studies.

Early-career mentoring will be offered to help develop quality teaching systems and skills. Activities will include workshops, feedback sessions, online and face-to-face support.

Teachers can attend professional development days at the University to build organisational knowledge of university facilities.

During the first three years of the project, schools will have access to MacquarieNet, the first comprehensive online reference library designed for Australian parents, students and teachers.

The University's Careers Centre will provide professional development and support for careers advisors in secondary schools, including information on career pathways and development opportunities.

Opportunities for parents

University representatives will host parent sessions at each secondary school to discuss the costs of attending university, support options available, and application procedures.

The University of Sydney will also offer primary school children and their parents the chance to visit campus and participate in a learning and/or cultural experience.



The
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of Sydney

For more information >>

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