

**Effective teaching and support of students
from low socioeconomic status backgrounds:**
Resources for Australian higher education

FAIRWAY UWA

University of Western Australia, Perth, Australia

Applying the practical advice from the LSES resources

The Australian Office for Learning and Teaching funded project **Effective teaching and support of students from low socioeconomic backgrounds: Resources for Australian higher education (SP10-1838 2011-2012)** focused on identifying and making explicit a series of succinct guidelines to assist the teaching and support of students who come to university with varying diversity in terms of their preparedness for higher education, and social and cultural capital. Two major resources were produced in the form of booklets: **Practical Advice for Institutional Policy Makers and Leaders** and **Practical Advice for Teaching Staff** which highlighted the policy frameworks, programs and practices that had facilitated the success of students from LSES backgrounds. The findings are applicable to a range of higher education contexts and appropriate to be taken up to enhance the teaching and support of all students, irrespective of their background.

Four national workshops were conducted in 2013/2014 (South Australia, Australian Capital Territory, Western Australia and Queensland). Participants had the opportunity to actively engage with the practical advice and guidelines that arose from the project and to consider the application of these findings to their institutional contexts.

Workshop outcomes:

- An understanding of the social cultural incongruity conceptual framework.
- An understanding of the key themes emerging from the data.
- An understanding of how to apply the findings in your context/institution.

Workshop leader/s: Professor Sally Kift (James Cook University), Ms Liz Smith (Charles Sturt University) and Professor Karen Nelson (University of the Sunshine Coast)

The resources produced provide guidelines and best practice information and strategies for institutional staff involved with Low SES cohorts:

Project website: <http://www.lowses.edu.au/files/resources.htm>

Practical Advice for Institutional Policy Makers and Leaders:
<http://www.lowses.edu.au/files/leaders.htm>

Practical Advice for Teaching Staff: <http://www.lowses.edu.au/files/teachers.htm>

The outcomes of the workshop produced a small number of vignettes as a way of detailing/exemplifying how these proposed strategies are implemented in the institutional context. The following details the **Fairway UWA** Program at the University of Western Australia, Perth, Australia.

Fairway UWA

Overview

Fairway UWA is a university alternative entry program provided by the University of Western Australia (UWA) which offers an alternative pathway to university study by supporting eligible students during their final year in high school - Year 12. There is no obligation to come to UWA once the program is completed.

Launched in 2012, the program recognises that students who face financial hardship and other difficult circumstances are often prevented from achieving their true academic potential. Students in Year 11 can apply via an online application and are supported in person and through access to online modules throughout their final year of high school. Students must complete an assessment task to complete the program and are then eligible for an offer of enrolment in one of UWA's four three-year undergraduate bachelor degrees (additionally they must have an ATAR of 70 or above and have achieved UWA's English Language Competence outcome). It is noted that standard admission to these degrees requires a minimum ATAR¹ of 80; successful Fairway students can be admitted with an ATAR of 70 or above.

Reflecting on good practice

Students begin the program in January with a four day residential summer school where the students are accommodated at a university college. The summer school gives the students an intensive experience of university life and an introduction to prospective courses of study - but more importantly, helps them develop connections with other students embarking on the same journey and with their student mentors, who act as their summer school leaders. Face-to-face follow-up events are held throughout the year providing further opportunities for study support and engagement. Students can also access the online tutoring service 'Your Tutor' and West Australian Certificate of Education (WACE) Revision courses during school holidays.

Those Fairway students who choose to study at UWA are further supported via access to study and accommodation scholarships and continual transition support "because we understand how it is and what their needs are" (Fairway UWA Coordinator).

The following are quotes from Year 12 students who have so far participated in the program:

Fairway is my pathway to a brighter future.

Fairway is hope, opportunity and blessing.

Fairway is a place where I built my confidence and perspectives on my goals.

Fairway is an amazing program with amazing people that I can connect with.

Applying the practical advice from the LSES resources

Fairway UWA promotes student engagement and embraces diversity:

The good thing about this program is that we are small... you know, we build a relationship with them from the time they start applying for the program, they contact us ... so we establish a relationship with them from year 11 and then throughout year 12. By the time they come to university they are quite comfortable contacting us ... they know they can just walk into our office any time.

(Fairway UWA Coordinator)

¹ The Australian Tertiary Admission Index (ATAR) is the primary criterion for entry into most undergraduate-entry university programs in Australia and is a number between 0.00 and 99.95 with increments of 0.05. It is a numerical measure of a student's overall academic achievement in relation to other students and is awarded at the conclusion of the student's high school studies. (<http://www.uac.edu.au/undergraduate/atar/>).

Fairway UWA is flexible in regards to assessment and deadlines understanding that students have busy lives and multiple considerations (work and family). Fairway students also have membership to the UWA library so that they can access not only the materials but the computer labs and resources to assist them with their study. Table 1 indicates the growth of the program since 2012 as well as its success with more than 95% students getting university offers each year.

Table 1: Fairway UWA 2012-2014

Year	No. of students applied	No. of students accepted in the program	No. of students who accepted the offer	No. of students who completed the program	No. of students who received offers from universities in WA
2012	45	42	40	32	31
2013	105	100	97	80 *	76
2014	139	136	125	Data not available	Data not available

*Of these 80 students, 78 students sat WACE in 2013.

Looking forward:

As the program grows so will the workload on the Fairway team. Student ambassadors and volunteers from second and third year (and from various faculties) are currently recruited to assist with various activities and events.

... And finally ... feedback on Fairway from a parent:

Fairway provided an amazing support network and platform for our son, as a future university student. The access to mentors, programs on offer and University Campus / facilities provided a window that my son would otherwise not had the opportunity to experience. The unconditional support your team offered not only my son directly but also ourselves as parents, in following up our queries on entry requirements, courses etc has been gratefully received and very much appreciated and valued. The UWA Fairway team will always be very special and valued contributors towards his Year 12 experience and his ability to gain University entry.

The activities previewed here align directly to six key pieces of advice provided from the *Resources for Australian higher education: Practical advice for teachers* - and specifically the following:

Advice #1: Know and respect your students

Advice #2: Offer your students flexibility, variety and choice

The activities previewed here align directly to five key pieces of advice provided from the *Practical advice for institutional policy makers and leaders* – and specifically the following:

Advice #2: Promote engagement with, and support from, others

Advice #3: Encourage 'help-seeking' by students

Advice #4: Minimise financial challenges for students

More information:

Fairway UWA: <http://www.studyat.uwa.edu.au/undergraduate/admission/alternative-entry/fairway>

Fairway UWA Information sheet:

<http://www.studyat.uwa.edu.au/undergraduate/admission/alternative-entry/?a=2498280>

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