

# ALTC LSES Environmental Scan

## 1. Institution

University of Sydney

## 2. Contact Person (and contact details)

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## 3. Name of Program/Initiative

University of Sydney's Compass-Find your way to higher education (Compass) Program

**3.1 URL:** [www.sydney.edu.au/compass](http://www.sydney.edu.au/compass)

**3.2 Start Date/Duration:** June 2009 (launch – present)

## 4. Brief outline of program

The *Compass-Find your way to higher education program* (Compass) is a distinctive, innovative and evidenced based program built in partnership by the University of Sydney and partner primary and high schools in Sydney and South West Sydney. Compass begins working with children in early primary school and is part of their schooling experience through to year 12. It is a cohort-based program with each of the activities in schools, communities or on campus supporting and enriching key learning areas of the school syllabus, as well as building aspiration and awareness of higher education. Compass works with schools to better prepare their students academically for university. Compass engages with the students their parents, teachers and communities, University staff and students to support achievement at school and access to higher education. Compass has a focus on professional development of teachers.

The distinctive design of Compass draws on the national and international research, which identifies early and sustained engagement, the engagement and expectations of parents, and the skills of teaching staff as significant factors. Most importantly, programs need to provide interactions to build awareness and aspiration in combination with activities to improve academic outcomes. For students from disadvantaged communities, as for all students, academic success at school is the key factor in ensuring success at a tertiary level.

Compass impacts across the spectrum of student learning, from the enriched curriculum based learning opportunities provided to students in our partner schools and the increased capacity and skill of their classroom teachers, through the accredited professional development activities they undertake, to the learning opportunities provided to our own University students in their engagement in volunteer programs or service learning activities.

Compass aims to have multiple contacts with students across their schooling with a constant 'conversation' between the University and the school students and their key influences so that interactions with the University are a regular part of their school experience. To achieve this, a combination of regular on-campus events are offered, as well as longer more-sustained programs embedded at the schools and supported by University staff and students in the schools. All the

Compass program activities contribute to the aims of building attachment to schooling, supporting key learning areas; enriching learning opportunities and supporting increased achievement.

**Purpose/Aims** Compass is designed around four principles:

**Supporting continued engagement with school and education.** Compass is not simply concerned with supporting university access; its broader ambition is to support the students in continuing engagement with education, whether high school completion, further education or entry into higher education

**Cohort based engagement that starts early and is sustained.** Compass begins early working with children in early primary school and is part of their schooling experience through to year 12. One of the most distinctive and important things about the design of the program is that each of the activities in schools, on campus or in the community is designed to support and enrich key learning areas of the primary and high school curriculum

**Supporting parent engagement, teacher and community capacity.** The emphasis is not only upon student engagement but also upon engagement with parents, teachers and communities. This engagement is proactive and focused on building capacity to support the students' achievement at school and access to higher education. Compass has a unique focus on professional development of teachers, with more than 400 engagements with teachers, including 120 accredited professional development sessions in 18 months. These sessions focus on the key learning areas, teaching strategies and other subjects identified by the schools. Two teachers are also completing their Masters with assistance from Compass.

**Change within the institution, our students and staff.** The program also aims to grow the university's capacity for inclusive participation, teaching and learning. It includes opportunities for our own students and staff to engage with programs to support communities they might otherwise not have had access or exposure to. This increases their understanding and knowledge about the breadth and diversity of our wider community and the challenges that some individuals and communities face. Opportunities are provided for academic staff to undertake serious engagement in the scholarship of inclusive teaching and research into issues of social exclusion and inclusion.

5. **Breadth of program** (is it in a particular subject, program, school, faculty, across the institution, campus, with a particular cohort, etc)

Since its launch in June 2009 Compass has had more than 20,000 engagements with students and more than 1000 engagements with their parents either at the University or through volunteer or other school-based programs.

Compass has a unique focus on professional development of teachers with more than 500 engagements with teachers, including 120 accredited professional development sessions since the program started. The role and influence of quality teaching and the expectations and capacity of schools to support and engage students cannot be overstated. Students have better outcomes in schools where teachers are well skilled and qualified, and expectations are high.

The assistance provided by university students in schools is increasingly being acclaimed as a strong feature of the Compass program. Clearly there are also positive impacts on the University students as well. The program involves includes opportunities for University staff and students to support

communities they might otherwise not have had access or exposure to. This in turn increases their understanding and knowledge about the breath and diversity of our wider community and the challenges that some individuals and communities face.

**6. Category (please select all that apply and provide explanation where necessary)**

Category	Y?	Explanation
Policy		
Curriculum	Y	
Program	Y	
Other (please specify)		

**7. Resources (optional – we are trying to determine what sort of resourcing is necessary to make the initiative work)**

- 7.1 **Start up budget: (12 schools) \$900**
- 7.2 **Ongoing budget: (25 schools) \$1.5m**

**8. Outcomes**

- 8.1 **Uptake:** We have increased the number of schools we engage with each year. And have many schools interested in the program. The depth of the program also increases each year with more elements being added each year. For example we have added a year 8 goal setting and year 9 leadership elements to this year’s program.
- 8.2 **Evaluation(s) conducted to date - Informal or formal) – and details of findings:** The pilot evaluation was completed in March this year – with very favourable findings for the program. Key findings around the success of the program are related to relationship building (one of the major challenges) and the importance of linking activities so that they support curriculum rather than sit alongside it.
- 8.3 **Evidence of success:** as above, very positive feedback from schools and communities, early indications of higher motivation for higher education.
- 8.4 **Evaluation(s) planned (and dates for this/these):** **evaluation is ongoing with annual reviews of the program and a major review each three years planned**
- 8.5 **Major challenges:** maintaining momentum and sustainability of programs in a tight fiscal environment.
- 8.6 **Other (Please specify):**

**9. Publications/Reports (including links to those publically available)**

<http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/13603116.2011.636235>