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## SOCIOLOGY | RESEARCH ARTICLE

# Social value and its impact through widening participation: A review of four programs working with primary, secondary & higher education students

Jioji Ravulo<sup>1\*</sup>, Shannon Said<sup>2</sup>, Jim Micsko<sup>3</sup> and Gayl Purchase<sup>3</sup>

### ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Associate Professor Jioji Ravulo has an extensive history in working across greater western Sydney and beyond with diversity and equity groups striving to create sustainable initiatives and resources through meaningful collaborations and partnerships. Before becoming an academic, Jioji worked across the community sector in youth justice, mental health, alcohol and other drugs, educational engagement and homelessness, alongside clinical private practice.

Dr. Shannon Said was awarded his PhD (Music) in 2017, exploring Christian-Māori diaspora identity expressed through music in a local church within south west Sydney. His research engages with how non-indigenous researchers can engage respectfully in diaspora indigenous communities, and how intercultural music making reflects identity. Shannon engages with his own Maltese diaspora community, and this influences how engagement happens cross-culturally across different diaspora groups in western Sydney.

Mr Jim Micsko is an experienced practitioner in the field of Widening Participation and has successfully developed and implemented multiple programs leading to increasing numbers of disadvantaged school students accessing Higher Education. Mr Micsko has extensive knowledge of the primary and high school educational sectors, Higher Education Participation Partnerships Program (HEPPP), and widening participation programs including membership of collaborative cross-institutional funding grant projects.

Ms. Gayl Purchase has a strong practitioner background in the widening participation sector, having worked in tertiary education management for the past nine years, and has extensive experience with strategic management within the non-profit sector. Her remit includes student recruitment and enrolment, student and staff welfare, widening participation, community engagement, staff requirement and management, enquiry management, admissions and training.

### PUBLIC INTEREST STATEMENT

Widening participation programs across Australian universities seek to engage with potential students who may not typically come to university for a range of reasons, such as not having any family or friends who know the processes and experience of university, by being from a non-English speaking background or not being aware of the benefits a university education can bring. This article evaluates the social impact of four widening participation programs based at Western Sydney University, how they engage with primary and high school students, and feedback from participants about what changed for them as a result of being part of the program. The Social Return On Investment (SROI) research framework was used throughout these four evaluations, which focuses on narrative/experience-based feedback, as well as a fiscal cost-for-benefit analysis, to provide a holistic and detailed account of how such programs affect change in specific contexts.

**Abstract:** In 2017 the Office of Widening Participation conducted a program-wide analysis of the Social Return On Investment (SROI) to evaluate the impact of four Widening Participation programs at Western Sydney University (WSU). The programs evaluated were Fast Forward, Strive Towards Educational Participation and Success (STEPS), First Foot Forward, and Pasifika Achievement To Higher Education (PATHE). The overlapping aim amongst the four programs is to increase higher education participation rates, particularly for students coming from low socio-economic backgrounds. The SROI framework provided a holistic analysis by intertwining qualitative and quantitative data. The analysis showed that each program—albeit with differences—produced a collection of positive outcomes, and made important progressions to increasing and widening participation for “non-traditional” students. This is verified by the SROI ratio which is represented as a return, for every dollar invested—the combined four programs equated to an average return of \$5.78 for every \$1 invested.

**Subjects:** Educational Research; Study of Higher Education; Equality & Human Rights

**Keywords:** widening participation; social return on investment; socio-economic status (SES); access and outreach; evaluation

## 1. Introduction

The role of Widening Participation within universities across Australia has shifted dramatically in the last several years. The Australian Government’s higher education goals to have 20% of all undergraduate students coming from low socio-economic (SES) backgrounds coupled with 40% of those aged 25–34 years holding a bachelor’s degree by 2025 (Australian Government, 2009, pp.12–13 cited in Gale, 2011, p. 669) has inspired a greater appreciation of the need and work of widening participation departments across the university sector. The provision of HEPPP (Higher Education Partnership and Participation Program) funding in 2010 sought to “ensure that Australians from low-SES backgrounds who have the ability to study at university have the opportunity to do so” (Australian Government, 2009, p.12 cited in *ibid*). The challenge of meeting these goals is not simply creating spaces for students to enrol in a desired course of study, but a detailed understanding of the backgrounds of students, especially those that do not traditionally participate in higher education, and actively taking steps to make higher education appealing to these groups (Gale, 2011; Leathwood & O’Connell, 2003). Further, educational institutions are required to learn about the kinds of cultural capital that these populations bring to institutions they choose to study at and thereby become more culturally relevant and competent at meeting the needs of what has been described as a “new student” in higher education (Leathwood & O’Connell, 2003)

This article evaluates the impact of four Widening Participation programs at Western Sydney University (WSU)—Fast Forward, Strive Towards Educational Participation and Success (STEPS), First Foot Forward, and Pasifika Achievement To Higher Education (PATHE). To analyse the effectiveness of the program, the research utilised a Social Return On Investment (SROI) methodology (Nicholls, Lawlor, Neitzert, & Goodspeed, 2012). This methodology considers the social impact that such Widening Participation programs have upon communities in a multifaceted way, rather than only seeking to ascertain a cost–benefit analysis. In doing so, it seeks to contribute to the “creation of an evidence base to guide future practice and policy” (Reed, King, & Whiteford, 2015, p. 384) as a means of using HEPPP funding in an economic and strategic way, promoting innovation and collaboration between a range of stakeholders (parents, teachers, students, community group workers and internal Western Sydney University staff, including academics) that have taken part in these programs.

### **1.1. Widening participation as an emergent force of equality**

Much work has been done around the role of widening participation and equity for students who come from non-traditional backgrounds (Archer, 2007; Blackmore, Hutchison, & Keary, 2017; Reed et al., 2015; Rissman, Carrington, & Bland, 2013). Scholarship within this field highlights that institutional cultures often do not support the cultural shifts that are required to foster an environment that truly seeks to engage these students as those that are just as deserving of higher education as their counterparts (Greenbank, 2007). The need for a cultural shift in universities around Australia has been argued as that which has the potential to redefine the terms through which students from low-SES backgrounds are understood and framed as a demographic that engages meaningfully with higher education. Rather than speaking of students from non-traditional backgrounds as coming “from a deficit perspective that assumes lower standards are operating” (McKay & Devlin, 2016, p. 161), widening participation programs function to bridge “socio-cultural incongruity” (Devlin, 2013 in *ibid*). It has been historically argued that students from low-SES backgrounds do not typically aspire to higher education as readily as those from higher SES backgrounds (Bennett, Southgate, & Shah, 2016; Blackmore et al., 2017; Gale, 2011). According to Gale (2011), it is incumbent upon universities seeking to engage students from these backgrounds to understand why some of these students do not aspire to attend university, as the cultural realities of these institutions are often incongruent with the cultural realities of these potential students’ lives (*ibid*).

### **1.2. Non-traditional students and building aspiration**

Appadurai (2004) frames the concept of aspiration as one that “denotes a cultural relationship to the future that is generally obscured by the language of economics ... [and is] framed in economic terms: growth, ownership, productivity, competitiveness, human capital” (cited in Gale, 2011, p. 678). In the context of widening participation, Archer (2007) argues that “framing diversity in business terms involves a reification of diversity that is untenable within a social justice agenda” (p.642), as certain demographic groups, such as mature age students, have specific needs that do not align with Government objectives that institutions are seeking to meet. These economically driven virtues are derived from a Western perception of progress and success, and do not take into account “aspiration[s that] form parts of wider ethical and metaphysical ideas which derive from larger cultural norms” (Appadurai, 2004, p.67 cited in Gale, 2011, p. 678). Bennett et al. (2016) consider the Western notion that individual choices determine their prosperity or lack thereof (Bennett et al., 2016, p. 243), and fail to consider external factors that influence socio-economic status that are often beyond students’ control. There appears present within this concept the idea that once these students are “skilled up”, these differences simply disappear (Blackmore et al., 2017, p. 112). Conversely, it is argued that “people are born into cultures that provide them with meaning for their world. These meanings, informed by others around them, shape their thinking and behaviour throughout their lives” (Crotty, 1998 in Rissman et al., 2013, p. 6–7), which may stand in contrast to the cultural assumptions of institutions of higher learning. Enforcing a one size fits all approach towards determining the kinds of “development” and “progress” that are valuable to all students does little to validate the position of low-SES students being a needed and respected part of higher institutions of learning, and stifle the reality of what they do bring into the institution “different knowledges and ways of knowing” (Gale, 2011, p. 670). When these diversities are embraced by institutions of higher learning, they benefit students and staff alike by these groups encountering and having to develop new ways of interacting with different value systems and worldviews. In this way, WP programs can bolster the Australian Government’s multiculturalism agenda, which considers one’s cultural identity, social justice and economic efficiency as pertinent to the development and integration of all peoples within society (Koleth, 2010; 2013, cited in Reed et al., 2015, p. 391).

### **1.3. The changing “student” in higher education**

WP programs also have the potential to accelerate the shift that is occurring to the perception of the “traditional” student by inclusive practices that welcome a diverse range of students to tertiary institutions. Morley (2002, cited in Leathwood and O’Connell, 2003, p. 598) argues that the

perception of the traditional student is changing, albeit gradually, as the former definition has historically been based upon the “learner [being] constructed as male, white, middle class and able-bodied” (Ruddick, 1996, cited in Leathwood & O’Connell, 2003, p. 599), someone who is “an autonomous individual unencumbered by domestic responsibilities, poverty or self-doubt” (Leathwood & O’Connell, 2003, p. 599). Clinging to this historical construction of the “typical” student creates a dichotomy between the “normal” (traditional) student and the “non-traditional” student; the latter potentially being “homogenized, pathologized and marked as ‘Other’ compared with existing students who are perceived to be there ‘as of right, representing the norm against which the others are judged and may be found wanting’” (Webb, 1997, p. 68 cited in *ibid*).

Hattam and Bilic (2019) maintain that university pedagogy also has inherent biases to who is considered a “ ‘proper’ ... (read legitimate)” student (p.67). Citing Burke (2017), they argue that universities promote appropriate students as those who are “confident and independent, and someone who has a voice (but knows when to be quiet)” (*ibid*, p.66). This legitimisation of students occurs “along class, ethnic and gendered lines” (*ibid*). Students with a disability also face persistent “narrow attitudinal and cultural understandings of disability within institutions” (Burke, 2013 cited in Rooney, 2019, p. 37) that can be exclusive in practice. Widening participation efforts must focus on *widening*, and not merely increasing, access to tertiary study for all students, which requires an understanding of their backgrounds, and how to make the university an accessible place for all, rather than problematising students “because of their background and/or circumstances” (*ibid*). This approach requires universities to interrogate current practices that seek to assimilate those from minority groups into the dominant culture, rather than considering how institutional culture and practice ought to change at a more fundamental level to be truly inclusive to those outside of the “traditional” student stereotype (Rooney, 2019, p. 38).

The framing of the dichotomy between traditional and non-traditional students, whilst shifting, is a key aspect that the WP agenda can challenge, if its role is not simply to increase the number of non-traditional students attending tertiary institutions, but rather foster cultural environments that embrace a diversity of life backgrounds, so as to make higher education truly desirable for as many students as possible. Mirza (2003, cited in Archer, 2007) clarifies that this diversification cannot afford to treat students that come from non-traditional social identities, manifested in social class, gender and ethnicity, “as essentialised, static and clearly bounded phenomena” (p.643), but must allow the richness of the “complex, shifting and contested interlinking indices” (*ibid*) to inform how such students are engaged with and, in turn, how they affect institutional epistemological and ontological understandings of their purposes as educational providers. Although students can be present in institutions that have many “non-traditional” students, they can “feel little sense of entitlement or belonging there” (Archer & Hutchings, 2000; Archer, Hutchings, & Ross, 2003, cited in Archer, 2007, pp.646–647). There is a tendency to think that diversity is invariably considered as a moral “good” that resists elitism within higher education; it must, however, be diversity based on *students’* requirements, rather than meeting the numbers set by Government decrees, in order to be meaningful for those it is intended to serve (Archer, 2007, p. 648).

#### **1.4. Threats to equity in WP**

The aspiration to diversify student cohorts is not presented without criticism. Archer (2007) emphasises how attracting students from non-traditional backgrounds can often be “designed to snare those who are needed to make up the [given] target” (p.637), whilst not providing the cultural and pedagogical changes necessary to truly embrace these students and their educational needs. Further, these students can often be steered “towards particular forms of HE, what Jary and Thomas (1999) refer to as “perverse access” ... [these] students ... in a hierarchically stratified system ... gained access to a part of the system deemed less “worthwhile” than those institutions in a more prestigious part of the HE field (Jary & Jones, 2006, p.14, cited in Bathmaker, 2016, p. 20). It has been further argued that HEPPP goals are pervaded by a “cruel optimism” (Blackmore et al., 2017, p. 122) that promises employment it cannot guarantee, and yet WP programs and their

facilitators can “feel compelled to promote” (ibid) them as part of their discourse to those contemplating university study.

WP programs that challenge institutional perceptions of students from non-traditional backgrounds have the potential to shift foci within university settings to place value upon cultural differences, including class and socio-economic differences, and validate and legitimise students’ participation from these backgrounds as beneficial to institutional culture, rather than understanding these histories as lacking or deficit. As Gale (2011) asserts, “There is little incentive to join or remain in a system in which you are invariably positioned as being ‘without’” (p.679). It is argued that the Widening Participation programs described in this article advocate for this very reality—shifting university culture to be that which serves the needs of its populations whilst maintaining the Government’s trajectory of meeting the objectives outlined in the Bradley Review (Australian Government, 2009), promoting a more educationally and therefore socially equitable society for those from non-traditional backgrounds.

### **1.5. Widening participation praxis and social justice**

Engaging in the widening participation space in a way that challenges current practice is an ongoing concern of scholarship in the area. Writing from an Australian perspective, Bunn and Lumb (2019) cite Burke (2018) who “notes [that] efforts to reimagine equity through praxis offer ‘time and space to rethink and to reconstruct the discourses that shape what we do and how we do it and with what effects’ (p. 13)”. (Bunn & Lumb, 2019, p. 1). Measuring effective widening participation programs is not simply a matter of attracting non-traditional students to institutions they typically would not attend; the field of WP allows for a critique of current structures, which students are typically admitted, and grounds for challenging the status quo in order to create more inclusive higher education environments. Part of this critique includes a recognition of the unique nature of each program, operating at each university, and the importance of context for evaluation—widening participation program outcomes and responses are difficult to generalise onto other contexts as a result (Burke & Lumb, 2018 cited in Bunn & Lumb, 2019, p. 2).

Criticism has been levelled at evidence-based models for assessing the impact of widening participation programs, as their validity is based on models that depend on “objectifying, paternalistic and/or colonising technologies that construct ‘the disadvantaged’ in pathologising ways (Mirza, 2015) and which regulate and discipline our imaginations (Burke, 2012)” (Bunn & Lumb, 2019, p. 3). The kinds of knowledges that are promoted within academia often do not come from those from non-traditional backgrounds (Bunn & Lumb, 2019, p. 4), and this can reinforce a lack of symbolic power that those from these backgrounds experience (ibid). Widening participation can, therefore, disrupt these dominant epistemological bases that often (albeit unintentionally) exclude the knowledges and practices of those from outside the dominant cultural group such programs seek to engage with. As a matter of social justice, widening participation priorities ought to form a more focussed area for institutions of higher learning, rather than existing on their “peripheries” (Burke, 2012 in Bunn & Lumb, 2019, p. 5). Should widening participation remain on the peripheries of institutions, “parity of participation” for those from non-traditional backgrounds will remain elusive (Bunn & Lumb, 2019, p. 6). Further, students from these backgrounds are made to work towards mimicking the institutional culture, as a result of their own cultures being foreign to that which they are surrounded by (ibid)—“they are not afforded the ease of being at home within a familiar cultural setting” (ibid, p.6).

Nancy Fraser’s (2009) theory of inequality consists of three specific domains: status inequality, where one cultural and its hierarchy is esteemed over others; distributive inequality, or “privileged access” to resources and economic structures (Falconer, 2019, p. 23), and political inequality, where particular groups’ voice and representation is diminished (ibid). Falconer suggests that “meso-level” strategies can be used within widening participation programs, such as “a whole-of-university equity strategy” that would extend beyond a particular department, but rather an ethos and practice that permeates the entire university (Falconer, 2019, p. 24), and function



“synchronistically to collectively address all three Fraserian targets” (ibid, p.25). In particular, such efforts ought to tackle four main areas that those from equity backgrounds experience difficulty in realising: completion of full degree programs (without considerable interruption), completing undergraduate courses and moving onto post/graduate studies, gaining “higher status graduate employment” and working in their relevant field of study (ibid, pp.26–27). Indeed, where programs and efforts to increase equity are not met with more nuanced interventions, it is argued that the massification of education becomes “regressive” (Marginson, 2016, p.234 cited in Falconer, 2019, p. 27) and actually reinforces “social and economic stratification” (Falconer, 2019, p. 27).

Those from regional and remote backgrounds can be particularly disadvantaged when seeking to engage with higher education, primarily due to the “barriers of distance, cost, academic achievement and motivation” (Gale et al., 2010 cited in Poretti, 2019, p. 80). This is also partnered with the reality that those from rural and remote backgrounds, alongside others from equity groups, often belong to more than one of these groups (Zanen, 2019, p. 13; Poretti, 2019, p. 81), often including coming from low socio-economic backgrounds. While participation rates by students from low-SES backgrounds have increased over the past 5 years, participation from students from regional and rural areas has not (ACIL Allen Consulting, 2017, cited in Poretti, 2019, p. 81).

### **1.6. Evaluations of widening participation programs**

Outreach models that draw upon the characteristics of the Design and Evaluation Matrix for Outreach (DEMO) offered by Gale et al., (2010) can be utilised as those which may increase the aspirations of students from equity groups, including those from rural and remote backgrounds. The characteristics of the DEMO model are: “people-rich, collaborative, academic, sustained, place-based, and cohort-specific” (Poretti, 2019, p. 80). These characteristics can be used as determinants of predicting “the overall likelihood of school outreach program effectiveness” (van Zanen, 2019, p. 12). By utilising this framework, universities and their widening participation efforts are able to develop more “targeted, systematic approaches that consider contextual nuances” (van Zanen, 2019, p. 13), especially for those from backgrounds of significant disadvantage, such as those from low SES and regional and/or rural backgrounds (ibid). The work of widening participation is often context-dependent, and therefore a range of different attributes and considerations need to be apprehended in order to appreciate the impacts of these kinds of programs, explored below within the SROI evaluative framework for the stated widening participation programs.

## **2. SROI methodology**

In order to analyse the uniqueness of each of the four programs described in this document, a methodology that considered the experiences of participants, alongside the need to evaluate the quantitative and fiscal benefits of such a program, was needed. The Social Return On Investment (SROI) methodology seeks to meet these objectives, aiming to measure the social impacts of programs and provide a monetary value to the outcomes it has reached. It details how change is realised “by measuring social, environmental and economic outcomes and uses monetary values to represent them (Nicholls et al., 2012, p. 8). This methodological approach is also seen as a way of incorporating a multi-faceted perspective on the reality of social change deriving from programs like those described throughout, as it addresses social, economic and environmental amongst other concerns (Salverda, n.d., paragraph 1). This is understood as a “holistic perspective” of change (ibid), one that seeks to reduce poverty and foster “new opportunities ... [and] initiatives” that improve the quality of life for those involved (ibid). Two of the authors underwent a two-day training course to learn how to apply the SROI methodology across a range of different program evaluation contexts. This methodology was selected as it seeks to measure the social impact of programs, and considers both quantitative and qualitative realities experienced by research participants, explored below.

Seven principles form the SROI methodological approach:

- (1) **Involve stakeholders.** The import and impact of the program are determined by research participants. This makes each program unique, as specific schools and cultural groups (in the case of PATHE) are being targeted, each with their own unique stories of engagement with higher education. Participants in the methodology are referred to as stakeholders; the stakeholders inform what is valuable and significant within these programs, and how these concepts are measured.
- (2) **Understand what changes.** What has changed, and how is this validated by the community? This means valuing change that is positive and negative, intentional and unintentional.
- (3) **Value the things that matter.** For those concepts that are considered valued as per step two, financial proxies are used to quantify the value of these outcomes.
- (4) **Only include what is material.** That which is “material” is the content that, if not present, would misrepresent the social impact of the program. Again, participants decide what is material by the way they engage and comment on the programs.
- (5) **Do not over claim.** The programs discussed in this report cannot claim the impact that they did not have. This aspect of the analysis is divided into four parts to determine what is indeed the impact of the program:
  - Deadweight: which outcomes would have been met without the program being present?
  - Attribution: who/what would have been responsible for meeting these outcomes apart from the program?
  - Displacement: Is the program having an impact, or simply displacing (moving) an extant service to another area?
  - Drop-off: after the program is completed, what is the lasting (time-based) impact of the program? Do the outcomes and effects last one, three, five years on?
- (6) **Be transparent.** This methodology seeks to honestly reflect the views of participants, even if they are neutral and/or negative. It also recognises the position of the authors, in that we believe that these programs are of worth and uniquely engage with their target groups in a meaningful fashion to foster aspirations, motivations and confidence towards higher education being a real and attainable possibility in the futures of the young people that took part in these programs.
- (7) **Verify the result.** Stakeholders were presented with a two page summary report of the program they took part in.

Each step of the methodology is now expounded, reporting the impact of the four programs across their different contexts and cohorts. Steps two and three are reversed, so as to complement the order of the survey questions that were used to capture the data.

### 3. Step one: involve stakeholders

Each of the programs engaged a different number of survey respondents, with each group forming a different stakeholder group. At the time of conducting the evaluations, two of the research team members were managers in the WSU Office of Widening Participation, and guided the selection of schools on the basis of longevity of involvement in the programs—the research team attempted to engage with schools that had been in the program for 5 years, to consider the impact of the programs over a considerable timespan, and/or those schools that had previously been active in communications between the Office of Widening Participation and had strong rapport with it, to ensure timely turnaround to ensure the research timelines (one academic year) would be adhered to. Students, parents and student ambassadors completed a paper-based survey, whilst teachers, Project Officers, WSU support staff, PATHE university students and community members (in the PATHE program) completed online surveys. One member of the research team attended schools and met with principals and other staff to explain the evaluations, and principals distributed consent forms to parents, prior to students completing the paper surveys. Participants who completed the online surveys read through an information sheet



explaining the evaluation, and were provided researcher team members' contact details if they required more information prior to completing the survey.

The compositions of the groups are outlined below. Year followed by a number (e.g. Year 9) refers to the education year level attained. In Australia, primary school's final 2 years are Year 5 and 6; Years 7 to 10 are a junior high school, and Years 11 and 12 are a senior high school. Some participants did not complete all survey questions, explaining why some answers below do not total 100%.

### **3.1. Fast forward stakeholder groups**

Fast Forward works with Year 9 to 12 students, their parents and university widening participation staff officers. A total of 109 participants took part in the surveys, consisting of:

- Year 9: 42 participants, 20 male (47.50%) and 22 female (52.50%)
- Year 10: 26 participants, 11 male (44%), 14 female (52%), 1 other (4%)
- Year 11: 19 participants, 5 male (26.32%), 10 female (52%)
- Year 12: 13 participants, 3 male (23.08%), 10 female (76.92%)
- Parents: 4 participants, 4 female (100%)
- Project Officers: 3 participants, 1 male (33.33%), 2 female (66.67%)
- WSU Support Staff: 2 participants, 2 female (100%)

### **3.2. STEPS stakeholder groups**

STEPS works with high school students in Years 9 and 10, alongside university widening participation project officers and university support staff. A total of 82 participants took part in the research, consisting of:

- Year 9: 62 participants, 22 male (35.48%), 37 female (59.68%), 3 other (4.84%)
- Year 10: 17 participants, 3 male (17.65%), 14 female (82.35%)
- Project officers: 2 participants, 2 female (100%)
- WSU Support Staff: 1 participant, 1 male (100%)

### **3.3. First foot forward stakeholder groups**

First Foot Forward works alongside Year 5 and 6 students, their parents and teachers, and university project officers and university support staff. A total of 230 participants took place in an evaluation of the program, made up of:

- Year 5 and 6: 203 participants, 100 male (49.26%), 102 female (50.25%), 1 other (0.49%)
- Parents: 20 participants, 4 male (20%), 16 female (80%)
- Teachers: 2 participants, 2 female (100%)
- Project officers: 3 participants, 1 male (33.33%), 2 female (66.67%)
- WSU Support Staff: 3 participants, 1 male (50%), 1 female (50%)

### **3.4. PATHE stakeholder groups**

PATHE works with Pacific Islander high school and university students, their teachers, community participants, as well as university project officers and PATHE student ambassadors. A total of 35 participants took part in the evaluation of the program, consisting of:

- Year 7–10: 18 participants, 4 male (22.22%), 14 female (77.78%)
- Teachers: 2 participants, 2 female (100%)
- Community participants: 2 participants, 2 female (100%)
- Project officers: 5 participants, 1 male (20%), 4 female (80%)
- PATHE students: 3 participants, 3 female (100%)
- Student ambassadors: 7 participants, 3 male (42.86%), 4 female (57.14%)

The majority of participants were students—a total of 400 out of 552 responses collected, or 72.4%. The perspectives derived from the data are, therefore, more representative of the views of students than any other stakeholder group, and rightly so, as these programs are designed to increase aspirations for higher education and training specifically towards this group, and to a lesser extent the others.

Each of the programs engage with different schools across the Greater Western Sydney Region, and some schools participate in multiple programs. These programs target those from low socio-economic backgrounds to consider university or other further study as an option for their future. Table 1 below shows the school year groups engaged for each program, the activities they take part in, and the number of schools engaged in each program.

It can be seen that each program has a range of different stakeholder groups. Fast Forward and STEPS school years were divided into separate groups, whereas First Foot Forward and PATHE combined some of these groups together. This was done as the age groups for the former two groups undergo considerable change in the program, their schooling careers, and the impacts of the program, whereas First Foot Forward (years 5–6) and PATHE (years 7–10) have similar deliverables across these age groups.

### 3.5. Parental university attendance

More than any other factor, the data revealed that many of the students who engage with WP Programs have parents that either did not engage with university in their own lives, or did not tell their children about it or make it known in a foundational way (the latter represented by the “unsure” responses). On average, 65.62% of the students across all programs stated that their parents did not go to university or else they were unsure of their doing so. As parents are the most influential source of a child attending university (Hegna & Smette, 2017), these WP programs are meeting a vital need for students that want to consider university or higher education as a part of their futures. The average response rate for one or both parents attending university cumulatively was 34.38% across all programs. Tables 2 to 5 show these trends visually. This total was calculated

Table 1. Program information			
Program and year started	Year Groups	Number of Schools	Activities in Program
Fast Forward (2004)	Years 9–12	63	<b>Years 9–11:</b> 1 full day on campus (9:30am–2:30pm); 2–4 workshops in school (1.5 hour average length). <b>Year 12:</b> As with year groups above, plus optional access to HSC preparation/attendance at WSU and Open Day.
STEPS (2014)	Years 9–10	20	<b>Years 9 and 10:</b> 2 full days on campus (5 hours each); 1 in-school meeting per year, 1 hour each.
First Foot Forward (2013)	Years 5–6	39	<b>Years 5 and 6:</b> One 1 hour in-school workshop per year; three 5 hour on campus workshops.
PATHE (2012)	Years 5–12	8 primary, 58 high school	Targeted specifically at Pacific students, ranging from Years 5–12, and also includes WSU students from these cultures. <b>Years 5–6:</b> 3 in-school workshops, invitation to PATHE community events across region and on campus <b>Years 7–10:</b> 1 full day on campus, check it out campus tour (9:30am–2:30pm); 3 in-school workshops (1.5 hour average length); Chase the Dream conference (Year 9, 9:30am–2:30pm December 2017). <b>Years 11–12:</b> 2 in school workshops, 1 pathways to further education workshop, parent workshops, invitation to community events

**Table 2. Fast Forward Parental University attendance**

Year Group	Unsure	Neither	Both Parents	Father	Mother
Year 9	32.50%	27.50%	12.50%	15%	12.50%
Year 10	11.54%	65.38%	7.69%	15.38%	0%
Year 11	0%	55.56%	7.69%	16.67%	16.67%
Year 12	0%	58.33%	16.67%	0%	25.00%

**Table 3. STEPS Parental University attendance**

Year Group	+Unsure	Neither	Both Parents	Father	Mother
Year 9	22.58%	53.23%	14.52%	4.84%	4.84%
Year 10	23.53%	47.06%	11.76%	5.88%	11.76%

**Table 4. First foot forward parental university attendance**

Year Group	Unsure	Neither	Both Parents	Father	Mother
Year 5 and 6	39.81%	29.13%	16.50%	6.80%	7.77%

**Table 5. PATHE parental university attendance**

Year Group	Unsure	Neither	Both Parents	Father	Mother
Year 7 to 10	11.76%	47.06%	11.76%	11.76%	17.65%

by adding all percentages for each student stakeholder group (eight groups across all programs), and dividing by eight.

### 3.6. Parental university encouragement

In contrast to the former question, the majority of parents encouraged their children to attend university as a part of their futures at some level (between the “a lot” and “somewhat” responses) before the program began. On average, 88.57% of parents encouraged their children to attend university, emphasizing the vital role that these programs play when considering the former responses of how many parents did not have a direct experience of university themselves, or at least did not make this known in some impressionable way to their children. 11.43% of parents did not encourage their children to attend university, which highlights the fact that for these children, these programs are exposing them to future possibilities they may not be encouraged to pursue at home. Tables 6 to 9 show the level of parental encouragement for each program.

The programs discussed here are, therefore, forming a conduit between the desires of parents to send their children to university with staff members that can give them the tools they need to do so, even when parents have not attended university themselves.

### 4. Stage two: value the things that matter

All stakeholder groups were asked a few qualitative questions in order for the participants to freely share their experiences of the individual programs, thereby promoting subjective and contextualised reflections on whether or not the program was meeting with the Office of Widening participation goals, and how the program is doing this. These qualitative questions were developed by the research team to align with the general goals of widening participation, and how the program is/is not meeting these goals. These questions also provided space for critiques of the program to be heard via open-ended answers.

<b>Table 6. Fast forward parental university encouragement</b>			
<b>Year Group</b>	<b>A lot</b>	<b>Somewhat</b>	<b>Not Really</b>
Year 9	60%	35%	5%
Year 10	23.08%	30.77%	46.15%
Year 11	68.42%	31.58%	0.00%
Year 12	75%	25%	0%

<b>Table 7. STEPS parental university encouragement</b>			
<b>Year Group</b>	<b>A lot</b>	<b>Somewhat</b>	<b>Not Really</b>
Year 9	35%	51.67%	13.33%
Year 10	41.18%	47.06%	11.76%

<b>Table 8. First foot forward parental university encouragement</b>			
<b>Year Group</b>	<b>A lot</b>	<b>Somewhat</b>	<b>Not Really</b>
Year 5 and 6	60.68%	23.30%	16.02%

<b>Table 9. PATHE parental university encouragement</b>			
<b>Year Group</b>	<b>A lot</b>	<b>Somewhat</b>	<b>Not Really</b>
Years 7 to 10	77.78%	0%	22.22%

The first question asked was, what are the best parts of being involved in the program? A range of responses were expressed.

#### **4.1. What are the best parts of being involved?**

##### **4.1.1. Fast forward**

For Fast Forward students, there is a clear sense that awareness, a greater knowledge of what a university is and how it operates, and consequently a sense of confidence when considering university study has been developed. Students enjoyed the opportunity to ask staff members relevant questions, and staff members considered it a privilege to be able to engage students at such a meaningful time in their lives. Aspirations have clearly shifted from feeling alienated from the experience and processes of the university to university attendance becoming an attainable future goal.

##### **4.1.2. STEPS**

Students highlighted the social aspect of engaging with the STEPS program, as it afforded them the opportunity to meet other students learning the same things. This socialization process helps to normalise university as an option for students' futures. Staff members enjoyed being able to change perceptions of what tertiary education is like, and the impact they have on these young people as a result of the program.

#### **4.2. First foot forward**

Students repeatedly mentioned that they enjoyed learning new things they were not usually exposed to in school, and came to realise what place university may have in their futures. Parents appreciated how the program helped their children prepare for the future, and exposed them to university and its opportunities. WSU staff members highlighted how working with children from diverse and disadvantaged backgrounds was something they considered valuable, and that the role of education was shown to be something of worth for all students.

#### 4.2.1. *PATHE*

Students responded positively to the fact that they were able to engage with a program that celebrates their cultural heritage and encourages them to set goals and be exposed to new forms of knowledge. Teachers came to realise the importance of engaging culturally with students, and the impact this has upon students from similar cultural backgrounds. Community participants enjoyed the nature of the program and its service delivery, and how representatives from WSU were able to connect and be culturally responsive to those they engaged with in Pacific communities. Project Officers valued the ability to be mentors to Pacific students on campus, as well as changing perceptions of Pacific peoples' engagement with higher education and training. PATHE students appreciated the level of support offered by PATHE staff members, and the social aspect of undertaking a journey into higher education with people that have similar experiences to them. Student ambassadors<sup>1</sup> felt that they could inspire change in perspectives of education, as well as encourage the next generation to engage meaningfully with higher education.

Taken together, these programs are exposing young people to the experience and processes of university, helping to normalise the idea of higher education for all involved. Parents, teachers, community participants and staff members have been encouraged by seeing the aspirations of their young people bolstered through these programs, with goal setting and future planning becoming something that is received with anticipation and excitement by all involved.

The second qualitative question of the survey will now be considered.

#### 4.3. *What have you learned from being involved?*

##### 4.3.1. *Fast forward*

Fast Forward students reported that the exposure to university, alongside developing meaningful skills that helped in their current and future lives (such as study techniques and time management), were of value to them. They were also inspired to persist in the face of challenges, and believed that university is a viable option for their futures, as well as recognizing the availability of help. Parents recognised and appreciated the opportunities university affords their children, whilst Project Officers recognised the need to establish and maintain rapport with students in order for such programs to be effective. WSU Support staff stated that they were able to influence young people, and they realised that this is a position to be treated with respect and care.

##### 4.3.2. *STEPS*

Students from the STEPS program were challenged to consider university as a viable option for their futures, and realised the help that was available to them, such as discussing different intelligences that could influence job selection. Project Officers reported that most students in the program expressed their wish for a "good" life with a "good" salary. Again, exposure to a positive university experience was considered important here, as was the different staff members who engaged with the program. WSU support staff realised how to work to influence high school students' perceptions of university and themselves in relation to the university, no matter their backgrounds.

#### 4.4. *First foot forward*

Students in this group were taught that university requires hard work, but the opportunities present and the exposure to new skills were considered desirable. Parents appreciated the opportunities that these programs afforded to their children, and noted they had an increased interest in going to university. Moreover, parents noted that their children had become more informed about the options open to them.

Teachers came to realise the pathways of entry to university, and that increased exposure gives them leverage to make the connection between why their students' parents tell them to work hard at school—because it can result in university study. This creates a focus point and goal to their

school careers, which would be helpful in future goal setting and orientation pertaining to their education. Project Officers realised that students learn in many different ways, and the importance of keeping them engaged, asking questions, and growing in their educational journey. WSU Support staff noted a deeper appreciation for Greater Western Sydney's culture, and how impactful information about the university can be for young people from the region.

#### 4.4.1. PATHE

School students learned of their potential through the program and valued that this experience of university was shared with other Pacific Islanders. Hard work was presented as important to accessing university, as was a practice of not believing stereotypes that are often aimed at Pacific peoples. Teachers were surprised by how important the connection between shared cultures is for Pacific students, and noted how this impacted retention of and engagement with information shared by PATHE staff. Project Officers considered factors both internal and external. Working together as a united community, as well as the need for more specifically Pacific programs like PATHE, were considered valuable to community participants. PATHE students enjoyed the support offered by the program, the ability to socialise with other Pacific students, and professionalizing their skills through paid work opportunities, whilst student ambassadors valued how to choose their own future path, learning how to seek and receive help, and the importance of education, especially for Pacific communities.

Each of these programs are increasing aspirations for a range of young people, showing them the opportunities that university offers them, and informs not only students but families and teachers of the futures they are able to access through higher education. Staff have reflected on their practice within these spaces, and have considered the need to keep engaging and encouraging these aspirations amongst young people in relevant and culturally engaging ways.

### 5. Stage three: understand what changes

Stakeholders were then asked about several categories pertaining to educational aspirations and attainment. The subsequent subheadings explore the categories that were most important for the stakeholder groups in each program.

#### 5.1. Fast forward

The students of this program clearly identified with and recognised the importance of two notions: completing school by finishing year 12 and getting a job they are passionate about. Separately, year 9 valued going to university and supporting the family; year 10 being able to balance study and work commitments, year 11 supporting their family, and year 12 being able to balance school-based time priorities and those of family alongside study commitments effectively. Project Officers highlighted: completing the final secondary year, going to university, getting a desirable job, participating in activities and groups outside of school, being able to balance study, family and community commitments, and the need to balance study and work. Parents assigned value to getting a job students are passionate about, balancing study, family and community commitments, and study and work, whilst WSU support staff focused ongoing to university and time management in relation to both study/family and community commitments and paid work commitments.

##### 5.1.1. STEPS

STEPS participants highlighted different areas depending on their relation to the program. Years 9 and 10 stated that completing high school by finishing year 12 and getting a job they enjoyed are important. Project Officers recognised the following as being particularly important for the cohort: a desirable job, being able to balance time commitments between non-school commitments and study, family and community, and paid work and school commitments, and WSU support staff highlighted the importance of completing year 12, getting a satisfying job, and being able to balance study, family and community and work and study commitments.



## **5.2. First foot forward**

Parents, teachers, Project Officers and WSU Support staff considered high school completion and getting into a job which students are passionate about important. Project Officers considered university attendance significant, whilst both teachers and Project Officers saw TAFE/College as important. This same pairing considered students getting an apprenticeship as important, and all groups considered getting a job you are passionate about as valuable. Only year 5 and 6 thought supporting one's family was noteworthy, and parents, Project Officers and WSU support staff emphasised the need for students to participate in sport and other community commitments.

### **5.2.1. PATHE**

Participants in this group valued more of the categories than any other group, with all cohorts highlighting the importance of completing year 12 successfully, getting a job one is passionate about, and being able to balance study and paid work commitments. Only teachers considered it important to finish school before year 12 to get a job, and only year 7–10 students did not prioritise going to university when comparing these categories in significance. All but year 7–10 and students considered going to TAFE/College important, whilst teachers, community participants and Project Officers noted the worth of getting an apprenticeship/traineeship. Only community workers and student ambassadors did not place as much emphasis on “supporting your family” as one of their primary concerns, and teachers, Project Officers and PATHE students considered it valuable for students to participate in other non-school commitments. All respondents except student ambassadors saw the need to balance study, family and community commitments.

The values of these different categories have expressed a diversity of emphases for stakeholder groups. Whilst some responses may be surprising, such as PATHE's year 7–10 students not selecting university or TAFE/College study as one of their most important goals, it is to be remembered that each program offers a wide array of engagements, services, and exposure to new information, and some categories have reflected some of these aspects over others. Overall, however, the programs are promoting the desire to get a job one is passionate about, with all groups responding positively to that category, and most groups responding to the need to complete high school alongside the need to balance study, family and community commitments alongside the need to balance paid work and study. These programs are therefore preparing primary and high school students with the skills they need to succeed in their chosen professions and future paths.

## **6. Stage four: only include what is material**

The following subheadings pinpoint and examine the key outcomes of each program and stakeholder.

### **6.1. Fast forward**

#### **6.1.1. Areas that have improved**

Most of the outcomes were responded to positively by at least one stakeholder group, showing that the program had positive impacts. Year 10, Project Officers and WSU support staff recognised a change in students' understanding of going to university, and years 10 and 12, alongside Project Officers, felt that more confidence had been developed in students as a result of engaging in the program. Years 11, 12 students and Project Officers reported that interest in finding out more about university had increased, and all groups apart from year 9 stated that they better understood how further education and training can help their futures. All but years 10 and 11 students have a greater awareness of time management when dealing with homework and study.

#### **6.1.2. Areas that have changed**

Year 9 students, parents, Project Officers and WSU support staff noticed that participants felt more comfortable on campus. Year 11 students, Project Officers and WSU support staff noticed that participants were more familiar with how a university operates, with year 12 students, parents and Project Officers valuing the fact that participants were more aware of the services offered by the

institution. Only WSU support staff said that students had more confidence to talk to parents, whilst years 9 and 12, Project Officers and WSU support staff observed that students are more motivated to go to university as a result of engaging with the Fast Forward program.

## **6.2. STEPS**

### *6.2.1. Areas that have improved*

Project Officers noticed that students' confidence to go onto further study had improved, whilst year 9 students and Project Officers considered that their interest in finding out more about university had increased. All stakeholder groups except WSU support staff realised that engaging with STEPS led to a deeper understanding of how further education and training could help their futures, and year 10 highlighted that the program encouraged them to manage their time better.

### *6.2.2. Areas that have changed*

Project Officers and WSU support staff noted that students were more comfortable on campus, whilst only the latter said that students had become more familiar with how a university operates. Year 9 students and WSU support staff realised an increased familiarity with the services for students available at a university, whilst year 10 and WSU support staff noted an increase in participants' confidence to talk to their parents about the university. Both staff stakeholder groups noted that students were more motivated to go to university through the STEPS program.

## **6.3. First foot forward**

### *6.3.1. Areas that have improved*

Participants of the First Foot Forward program highlighted improved confidence in going onto further study (parents, WSU support staff), interest in finding out more about going to university (parents, teachers, WSU support staff), a deeper understanding of the benefits of higher education upon young people's futures (all groups) and more effective time management (years 5 and 6).

### *6.3.2. Areas that have changed*

All categories in this section were responded to by no less than two stakeholder groups. All adult respondents noted that students are more comfortable going onto campus, and teachers and Project Officers saw that students became more familiar with the operations of a university. Years 5 and 6 and Project Officers noted a change in familiarity with the services offered at the institution, and Project Officers and WSU support staff emphasised an increase in confidence to talk to parents about the university and increased motivation to attend overall.

## **6.4. PATHE**

### *6.4.1. Areas that have improved*

Of all the programs analysed in this report, PATHE stands out as the one that has affected the broadest range of change. Stakeholders noted an increase in understanding of how to access university (all groups except community participants), increased understanding of how to get into TAFE/College (teachers, Project Officers, student ambassadors), confidence to go onto further study (all except teachers), and interest in finding out more about going to university (all except community participants). All groups noted an increased understanding that further education and training can help their future, and all but community participants saw an improvement in students' time management for homework and study.

### *6.4.2. Areas that have changed*

All except student ambassadors noted a change in comfort about going onto a campus, and all but year 7–10 students saw a change in students' familiarity with how a university operates. Teachers, Project Officers and PATHE students saw that school students are more familiar with what services are available at a university, while teachers, PATHE students and student

ambassadors felt that students had more confidence to talk to their parents about attending university. The majority of respondents underscored that students are more motivated to go to university as a result of engaging with the PATHE program.

#### *6.4.3. Summary of outcomes and changes*

Overall, Fast Forward has been seen to help more senior students (years 10–12 particularly) to be prepared mentally and academically with access to and success in higher education. The development of confidence to attend higher education, and a deeper understanding of its processes, serves to prepare these students for success no matter their chosen field of engagement with further education. Project Officers have similar reflections on the impacts of the program, whilst other groups have valued the exposure to a positive experience of university, as well as the life skills being developed through the program.

STEPS students have highlighted that their perspectives of what higher education has to offer has been enlarged, to the point where they feel more confident to talk to their parents about attending university. Staff members have witnessed an increase in confidence, familiarity and comfort and understanding than the students have of themselves.

A clear division was also observed in the stakeholder groups for First Foot Forward. Whilst adult stakeholder groups could see changes in confidence, interest, comfort, familiarity and motivation to attend university and be on campus, students themselves spoke of a broader understanding of the importance of higher education upon their futures, the need for time management, and a familiarity of services. Again, it appears that for students, the exposure to and familiarity of services delivered through the program were more immediately obvious than what their adult counterparts noticed of them.

PATHE stakeholder groups saw the most diverse impacts as a result of the program, which may reveal the need for more culturally specific programs to engage with different cultural groups to affect such change in culturally responsive ways. Students noted more changes in the understanding of the university and its function, confidence to attend in future, interest in finding out more, and increases in understanding the benefits of study upon their futures, time management, being comfortable on campus and increased motivation to attend university. Adult staff members also resonated with these changes, but also saw that students were becoming more familiar with the processes associated with accessing and studying at university, which may have been less of a focus for students due to the culturally responsive engagement they received through the program, with more focus being on the mode of delivery rather than a direct recognition of becoming more familiar with university services.

These outcomes were then used alongside financial proxies to monetise these rather abstract concepts into something more concrete and measurable. As an example, any outcomes that created a deeper sense of “comfort” about being on campus were monetised to align with material things that make people more comfortable, such as clothing or having a mobile phone.

#### **7. Stage five: do not overclaim**

Part of completing the SROI analysis on each of these programs was to apply deadweight, displacement, attribution and drop-off as a percentage of impact to each of the outcomes and financial proxies, to ensure that overclaiming did not occur. Deadweight refers to what would happen within the presence of the program. What would teachers, parents, older siblings, career and year advisors, and others do to increase aspirations amongst stakeholder groups? Displacement, or moving one service away in place of another, was not considered applicable across all programs, as the students chosen to take part in the program are selected on the basis that they are not engaging with other widening participation programs from any other universities. Attribution considers who else (apart from those involved in the program) would fulfil a similar

role/realise similar outcomes, which was applied. Drop off was not applied, as the evaluations for each program looked only at the year 2017 and the programs' impact throughout this 1 year.

### **8. Stage six: be transparent**

The authors believe that these four programs are fulfilling a much needed area of engagement with student cohorts that have aspirations to attend higher education, but are often without the resources, either from home or within their own self-belief, to access and progress through to access it. When calculating the overall dollar for dollar impact, the SROI model ties together all of the aforementioned qualitative and quantitative data, and realises a ratio from this.<sup>2</sup> After completing these analyses, the average SROI ratio was 1:5.78, meaning that for every one dollar spent, the programs are averaging a return of \$5.78.

Applying this methodology has shown not only the qualitative import of these programs, but also financially expedient outcomes. It is the firm belief of the research team and the professionals that staff these programs that together, these programs are shifting aspirations for those who may not have the cultural or economic capital to access university to access higher education as freely as others. The programs, then, are a force to equalise educational aspirations and goals for young people across Greater Western Sydney, helping to normalise the idea of attending university. These programs help to create a space where students from non-traditional backgrounds are made to feel that they can belong at institutions of higher learning, and therefore make educational prospects more appealing for those involved in these programs (Gale, 2011; Leathwood & O'Connell, 2003).

Another key aspect of these programs is recognising and celebrating (rather than diminishing) what potential students bring from their backgrounds into the learning environment, and build on extant cultural capital rather than seeking to replace it, challenging the deficit perspective towards low-SES background students (Archer, 2007; Gale, 2011; McKay & Devlin, 2016) and promoting the "non-traditional" student as just as legitimate as the "traditional" one (Hattam & Bilic, 2019). When widening participation programs are done well, as argued that the above programs are, a shift can begin to occur so that those from lower SES backgrounds will readily access and feel a part of higher education (Bennett et al., 2016). The programs' results discussed in this article show that widening participation programs can destigmatise low socio-economic communities as those that have low aspirations, and most certainly challenges the idea that university is only for those that have been born into more privileged households. As such, the aspirations of Government through which HEPPP funding is given is being put to effective use, and is bridging a gap between educational aspiration and educational attainment for the stakeholder groups presented in this analysis.

### **9. Stage seven: verify the results**

After each program, a two-page summary sheet was sent to the schools, which can be viewed at by contacting the authors. The summary sheet provided further context to the stakeholders, and discussed the key findings and insights of the program. The summary sheet further engages the stakeholders and increases the transparency of the SROI process.

### **10. Conclusion**

The SROI analysis showed the immense and numerous positive outcomes produced by the four programs. Fast Forward (targeted at years 10–12) showed that students were better prepared mentally and academically with access to and success in higher education. The key finding from the STEPS program was that students felt more inspired to consider university as a viable option for their future. First Foot Forward (targeted at years 5–6 students) found that students began considering university and other tertiary educational pathways as a result of the program. The PATHE program demonstrated that Pasifika students had increased aspirations to access, progress and complete tertiary education.

The data indicate that each program has different outcomes, though there were many salient and overlapping results. Each program gave students a deeper understanding of what university is like, and thus a sense of normalization and comfortability. There was also a strong development of confidence to attend higher education. These results are instrumental as it is what the programs set out to achieve. This positive narrative-based data is supported by the quantitative aspect of the research—the SROI ratio. The ratio further highlights the effectiveness and efficacy of the program, showing that for every \$1 spent, \$5.78 is returned (1:5.78).

The combination of qualitative and fiscal approaches that the SROI framework promotes is stakeholder-centred, and underscores the uniqueness and social change aroused by the programs discussed here. Rather than a top-down approach, which some evaluative tools can use and pathologise those from “disadvantaged” backgrounds (Burke, 2012; Mirza, 2015), SROI promotes social change on *stakeholder’s* terms, and not those of the researchers, and resists notions of creating knowledges that are academia-centric (Bunn & Lumb, 2019, p. 4). Such focus on stakeholder’s experience, combined with fiscal responsibility being shown through its quantitative elements, highlight the effectiveness of the SROI framework as one that could potentially move widening participation programs and their ethos from the “peripheries” (Burke, 2012 in Bunn & Lumb, 2019, p. 5) and towards a more central place of focus for universities, and therefore promote more readily the “parity of participation” (Bunn & Lumb, 2019, p. 6) that universities and governments alike are striving towards.

#### Authors Statement

The research team consists of two social work academics and two managers of widening participation programs. This research team completed individual evaluations of the four programs discussed in this paper, and presents this article as a culmination of the findings of these individual investigations. Given the geographical position of Western Sydney University, the research team have a strong focus on considering how to advocate for equality for a range of potential university students, including those from low SES, non-English Speaking, and other non-traditional student backgrounds, and considers tertiary education an equalising force for these students. To this end, the widening participation programs and their evaluations presented by the team seek to promote a space for a range of epistemological and ontological realities to be recognised and celebrated within higher educational contexts, and thereby promoting the university as a welcome place for students no matter their socio-economic/cultural backgrounds.

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#### Notes

1. Those who work directly in the PATHE program, as opposed to the aforementioned students who are recipients of the university support offered through PATHE.
2. A specially designed Excel spreadsheet was used to do this, which is offered free from the team that developed the SROI model. This is available from <http://socialvalueint.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/SOCIAL-VALUE-UK-IMPACT-MAP-TEMPLATE-1.xlsx>.

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