

KPMG have been commissioned to evaluate the Bridges to Higher Education initiative. This Interim Report is the second of three studies that will form the basis of a comprehensive evaluation of the Bridges to Higher Education program. It summarises the findings covering the period 1 January 2012 to the end of December 2013, provides an analysis of all work completed so far, and offers some opportunities for further improving Bridges' strategies.

The main purpose of the evaluation is to assess the progress of Bridges in achieving its four key objectives:

1	2
improving students' academic preparedness and outcomes	increasing students' awareness, confidence and motivation towards higher education
3	4
building school and community capacity	increasing capacity to access higher education

## What have we evaluated?

Bridges encompasses 88 projects including student mentoring initiatives, summer schools, tutoring and preparatory programs, virtual academic lectures and community engagement programs. All projects are designed to engage students across primary, high school and TAFE, as well as teachers, parents and communities.

## Who is Bridges connecting with?

To date, Bridges has engaged with thousands of people and will achieve projected reach targets.

At the end of December 2013, Bridges programs had delivered:



143,567  
student contacts



8,595  
teacher contacts



12,225  
parent contacts

And engaged:



269  
schools



2,043  
volunteer helpers

A further 60,948 indirect student contacts and 10,926 indirect teacher contacts were achieved through the TVS television series Enquiring Minds and Models of Achievement.

## How Bridges is helping

*“The school culture has changed to raise expectations of senior students. During year 12 exams a few years ago, we had 15–20 students leaving the exam early as they needed to catch a lift with another student. This reflected a culture of mediocrity. Now very few students leave exams early.”*  
(Teacher, Revesby focus group.)

The evaluation process demonstrates positive indications across all measures, including:

Increasing student confidence in their academic abilities

Improving student preparation for university

Increasing student awareness of higher education

Improving student motivation to continue in school and study at university

Increasing teacher capacity and improving teacher knowledge and skills

Increasing capacity to access higher education through the creation of diverse pathways

## Why Bridges is working

Bridges is well on its way to achieving its desired outcomes:

### Improving students' academic preparedness and outcomes

*"Since I began the HSC Tutorial Program, my grades have improved substantially. In year 11 I was around a mid band 5 in Biology. In year 12, my marks are now in the high 90s." (Year 12 student)*

Bridges programs have had a highly positive effect on students' readiness to face the academic challenges they're likely to encounter throughout high school and university.

There are 46 different projects designed to support this objective, including academic skills sessions, and mentoring and tutoring by current university students. The development of resilience and study skills is also a feature, as is using technology to ensure that teaching and learning experiences are accessible by those in isolated areas.

Teachers have reported improved academic performance for 98% of participating students and improved learning progress for 88% of participating students.

According to focus group feedback, Bridges programs have also had a positive impact on improving students' self-esteem. There's also emerging evidence to suggest that Bridges is changing student attitudes towards learning.



**90%**

of students say they feel better prepared for university as a result of Bridges.



**85%**

of students say they've developed better study skills.



**91%**

of parents and carers say they have a better capacity to support their child with their higher education goals.

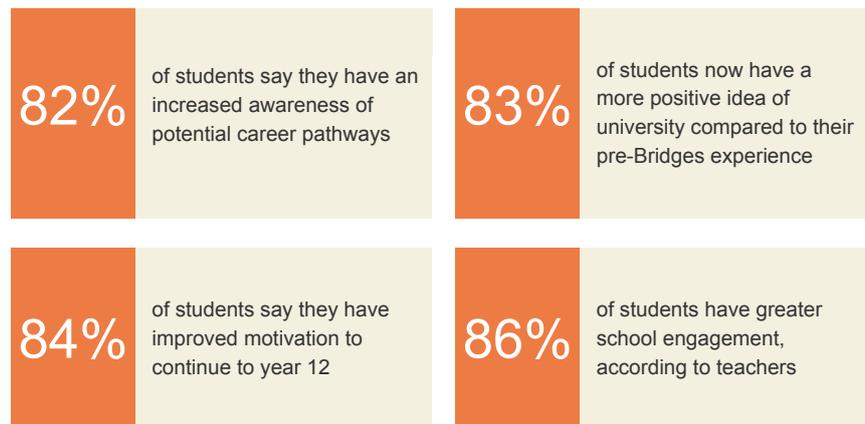
## How Bridges is increasing students' awareness, confidence and motivation around higher education

Students' knowledge and awareness of higher education is often influenced by their parents' educational experiences and their families' financial standing.

Bridges supports 55 projects that focus on improving awareness, confidence and motivation around higher education possibilities. These include activities like parental engagement, on-campus experiences, curriculum enrichment, online career advice, school visits, as well as access to academics and mentors.

**93%**  
of students sought information about possible university options after participating in Bridges

Participating students reported increased confidence and motivation towards higher education, with 89% indicating a greater awareness of what university offers.



Parents and carers are one of the most important influencer groups Bridges engages with. According to feedback, Bridges programs have broadened families' views around the availability and value of higher education opportunities.

As a result of work so far, parent and carer knowledge of higher education options and benefits has increased, with 82% reporting improved knowledge of higher education options while also stating that their knowledge around higher education benefits had improved. Focus group evidence also shows an increase in students' confidence to challenge cultural or gender-specific expectations relating to their education options.

*"Two girls (both refugees) who have since finished school said the [Bridges] program helped them set goals and to see that uni was achievable for them. One student is now studying teaching and the other is doing medical science."  
(Teacher, Revesby focus group)*

## How Bridges is helping schools and communities

*One teacher often used the classroom resources available for download on the Enquiring Minds website and recommended them to other teachers. "I loved how it was set up... and it showed the links of the videos, it was so easy to use," she said. "We've already shared it with the staff here". (Teacher feedback, Enquiring Minds, TVS)*

Bridges is successfully helping schools to enrich classroom practices and engage their students in learning. This has been achieved by channelling the effort, time, resources, and leadership of schools and their surrounding communities towards this important goal. This creates a multiplier effect that builds towards cultural change within schools.

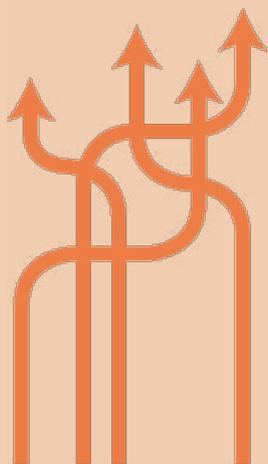
Currently, there are 33 projects designed to build school and community capacity. These initiatives focus on creating partnerships with schools, communities and universities through things like teacher development and community events. Upon being surveyed, 98% of participating teachers reported being better supported to engage students in learning and/or motivate students to learn, while 96% reported that participation had helped them expand their teaching practices. Many schools also reported the development of a more aspirational school culture.

**98%**  
of participating  
teachers reported  
being better supported  
to engage students  
in learning

*"The school culture has shifted as a result of participation. Teachers are pushing their students more and have higher expectations. The programs are adding to the 'social fabric' of the school." (Principal, Parramatta).*

## How Bridges makes it easier to access higher education

**87%**  
of students reported  
an increased  
awareness of diverse  
pathways to university



When it comes to improving and promoting non-traditional/non-ATAR pathways to higher education, Bridges believes that developing positive relationships between universities and other education providers is critical.

Building on existing partnerships between universities and TAFEs, Bridges has helped develop new education access options including 368 pathways, and 184 credit transfer and articulation arrangements to provide alternative routes across vocational and higher education. This has required significant systemic change within these organisations and demonstrates the institutional commitment to this goal.

During the reporting period, Bridges ran 14 projects that ranged from special admissions schemes, early access to university courses and partnerships with VET/TAFE institutions aimed at improving TAFE student access to university courses.

Bridges projects have also contributed to increases in the number of schools involved with alternative pathways and the proportion of successful applications for entry received by universities.

## How Bridges is helping Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students

Bridges programs are having a profound impact on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, their families, and surrounding communities. With a strong emphasis on culturally sensitive program delivery, this demographic is benefiting from initiatives like tutoring, mentoring, the use of role models, as well as community events and forums.

The 11 Bridges projects focused on supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students have made considerable progress in increasing awareness, confidence and motivation towards higher education, with 81% of students reporting improved motivation to continue to year 12 and 86% reporting greater awareness of potential career pathways. Parents and carers have also benefited from awareness-enhancing strategies, with 96% reporting better knowledge of both higher education options available to their child and the benefits associated with higher education.

Bridges projects have also improved the academic preparedness and progress of many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. Teachers reported greater engagement in school for 84% of participating students and an increase in ambition for 96% of participating students. Students also reported having positive academic outcomes following their involvement in Bridges, with 84% indicating greater confidence in their academic abilities.

**96%**  
of parents reported better knowledge of higher education options available to their child

Significantly, Bridges programs are also having a highly positive effect on students' lives and personal development with more students identifying as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and showing more pride in their cultural identity than ever before.

## The power of partnership

The Bridges collaboration ensures that public funds are used in the most effective way while also providing a basis for continued learning and improvement through collective planning, established communities of practice, shared resources, and a fundamental shared vision and commitment.

## How the evaluation works

KPMG has examined evidence and results from the many individual Bridges projects and compared them to the program's stated objectives. For instance, information gathered from universities about the numbers taking part in their programs as well as participants' views on project benefits was then combined with teacher and school principal focus group feedback, as well as interviews with TAFE institutes.

Analysis of both participation and performance data was undertaken for the period 1 January 2012 to 31 December 2013 in order to gain an estimation of the overall effectiveness of Bridges projects across the entire stakeholder population.

## Why the evaluation is important

Evaluation is the key to ensuring that the resulting lessons of Bridges' projects can be shared with other parties who are working to improve access to higher education both in Australia and overseas.

With considerable government and media discussion focusing on the importance and effectiveness of education participation programs, the Bridges report aims to address the shortfall in Australia-based evidence relating to the positive impacts of such programs and provide a strong basis for future government decision-making and planning processes.

Thank you to all those who participated in this evaluation and shared their experiences. Thank you also to the project owners whose hard work ensured that all relevant statistics were captured, and to KPMG for conducting the evaluation and compiling the report.

Percentages presented are statistical estimates which were produced using the KPMG methodology for the number and percentage of all participants who reported positive outcomes for 2012 and 2013. For further information on statistical estimates please contact Rebecca Milne, Senior Manager, Bridges to Higher Education ([r.milne@uws.edu.au](mailto:r.milne@uws.edu.au)) or if you would like to receive further information please register your details at [bridges.nsw.edu.au/projects/evaluation/register](http://bridges.nsw.edu.au/projects/evaluation/register)

Bridges to Higher Education is a \$21.2m initiative, funded by the Commonwealth Government's Higher Education Participation and Partnerships Program (HEPPP), to improve the participation rates of students from disadvantaged communities in higher education.

