



Careers breakfasts: A career-information program for parents of high-school students

A case study of best-practice career development learning for students from low socioeconomic status (LSES) backgrounds



University of Technology Sydney:

Sonal Singh

Research Grant Project Team:

Kylie Austin, Sarah O'Shea, Olivia Groves, Jodi Lamanna



**UNIVERSITY
OF WOLLONGONG
AUSTRALIA**

January 2021



Table of contents

| | |
|--|-----------|
| Table of Contents | 1 |
| Acknowledgements | 3 |
| Introduction..... | 5 |
| Background | 5 |
| Context..... | 5 |
| Program aims | 6 |
| Program delivery | 6 |
| Research Methods | 7 |
| Findings..... | 8 |
| Program outcomes and impact..... | 8 |
| Assessment of program delivery..... | 9 |
| Recommendations for Practice | 11 |
| Conclusion | 11 |
| References | 12 |

Acknowledgements

This document was produced as part of a National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education (NCSEHE)-funded project: *Higher-education career advice for students from low socioeconomic status backgrounds*.

This project aimed to critically investigate best-practice initiatives in career advice for students from low socioeconomic status (LSES) backgrounds, including regional, rural and remote students to establish overriding principles to guide career education provided to school students and non-school-leavers across the sector to ensure consistent and meaningful education in this area.

This project case study was led by Sonal Singh, Manager of Student Equity at the University of Technology Sydney.

This document has been written by the core project team led by Kylie Austin and including Sarah O'Shea, Olivia Groves and Jodi Lamanna and by case-study leader Sonal Singh.

We would like to thank the broader project team for their contributions to this document. The full project team are:

- Laurie Poretti, University of Canberra
- Philip Roberts, University of Canberra
- Nicola Cull, Australian Catholic University
- Sonal Singh, University of Technology Sydney
- Sue Kilpatrick, University of Tasmania
- Samantha Skinner, University of New South Wales
- Julia Coyle, University of Wollongong

We would like to thank the members of the Expert Committee for their ongoing commitment and advice regarding this project. The members are:

- Nuala O'Donnell, University of Wollongong
- Sue Trinidad, National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education

- Nicole Crawford, National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education
- Gabrielle O'Brien, Equity Practitioners in Higher Education Australasia
- Amanda Franzi, Department of Education
- Mary Teague, University of Sydney
- Tania Willis, Australian National University
- Stephen Milnes, Australian National University
- Tina Osman, Charles Sturt University
- Simone Balzer, Southern Cross University
- Tracy Hicks, Warilla High School

Please use the following citation for this document:

Austin, K., O'Shea, S., Groves, O., Lamanna, J. & Singh, S. (2021) Careers breakfasts: A career-information program for parents of high-school students. Retrieved from: University of Wollongong and National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education, Australia.

Careers Breakfasts: A career-information program for parents of high-school students

A case study of best-practice CDL for students from LSES backgrounds

Introduction

The “Careers Breakfasts” pilot program was created according to best-practice principles for students from low socioeconomic status (LSES) backgrounds, with the aim of addressing issues in career-education provision identified in the project Higher-education career advice for students from low socioeconomic status (LSES) backgrounds. Specifically, the program sought to address problems related to a lack of ownership for career education and the need for collaborative, multi-stakeholder partnerships between universities, schools and other career-related stakeholder groups. It primarily drew on the Best-Practice Principle “Stakeholders design CDL activities that provide opportunities for parents to engage in programs alongside their children.” To this end, the University of Technology Sydney (UTS) partnered with parents of university students (parent ambassadors) to provide career-information sessions (Careers Breakfasts) to parents of secondary school students. Parent ambassadors are parents of current UTS students from equity backgrounds. The Careers Breakfasts program aimed to support aspiring students in their pathway to higher education and empower parents to support their children in their educational and career journeys.

Background

Context

UTS is situated in Ultimo, Sydney, and is known for its widening-participation programs for students. One program UTS offers is the U@Uni Academy which is a two-year program for senior high school students of 20 partner schools in South-West Sydney. At the end of year 10, students in the Academy are introduced to the university experience and receive tutoring and additional support to enable success at university. Students who complete the program are offered a place at UTS. Some parents of students in the Academy are selected to be UTS

Parent Ambassadors with the role of working in partnership with the university to deliver parent-engagement programs.

In 2020, staff at UTS partnered with the parent ambassadors and drew on best-practice principles for CDL for students from LSES backgrounds to design, implement and evaluate a careers program for parents of high-school students.

Program aims

Researchers, in collaboration with practitioners and parents, designed and implemented an information program with the aim to:

- help broaden educational and occupational aspirations of parents and carers;
- increase parents' and carers' understanding of the diversity of pathways into tertiary education; and
- raise parents' and carers' awareness of education and training opportunities.

Program delivery

Between July and August 2020, UTS delivered Careers Breakfast sessions for parents and carers of high-school students. It was envisioned that these sessions would run face-to-face at the UTS campus with parents being provided with breakfast refreshments whilst they heard from a number of speakers including parent ambassadors. However, due to COVID-19, this series of Careers Breakfasts had to be delivered remotely i.e. online via Zoom.

This case study examines the delivery of three parent sessions which were attended by 83 parents from three schools from Western Sydney. Two sessions were held from 9-11 in the morning and one session needed to be scheduled in the evening (8-9.30pm) to suit the needs of the parents involved.

The sessions shared information about:

- Supporting your child through high school;
- The benefits and reality of university;
- Course selection and careers;
- Pathways into university; and

- Scholarships and the costs of university.

Sessions were primarily information sharing though there was plenty of opportunity to ask questions.

Research methods

The success of the Careers Breakfasts program was evaluated via three methods:

- Quantitative survey of parent participants (n=63);
- Reflection of a parent ambassador who co-designed and co-delivered the program (n=1); and
- Interviews with parent participants (n=12).

At the conclusion of the session, parents were emailed or posted (if they didn't have an email address), a short survey asking questions about the outcomes of the session. 63 parent attendees completed this post session survey, approximately one third female (38%) and two thirds male (62%).

Of the 63 participants, only one quarter (25%) had completed a university course. The primary language spoken by participants was incredibly diverse, with many parents speaking two or more languages. The figure below (Figure 1) shows the languages spoken in the homes of participants.

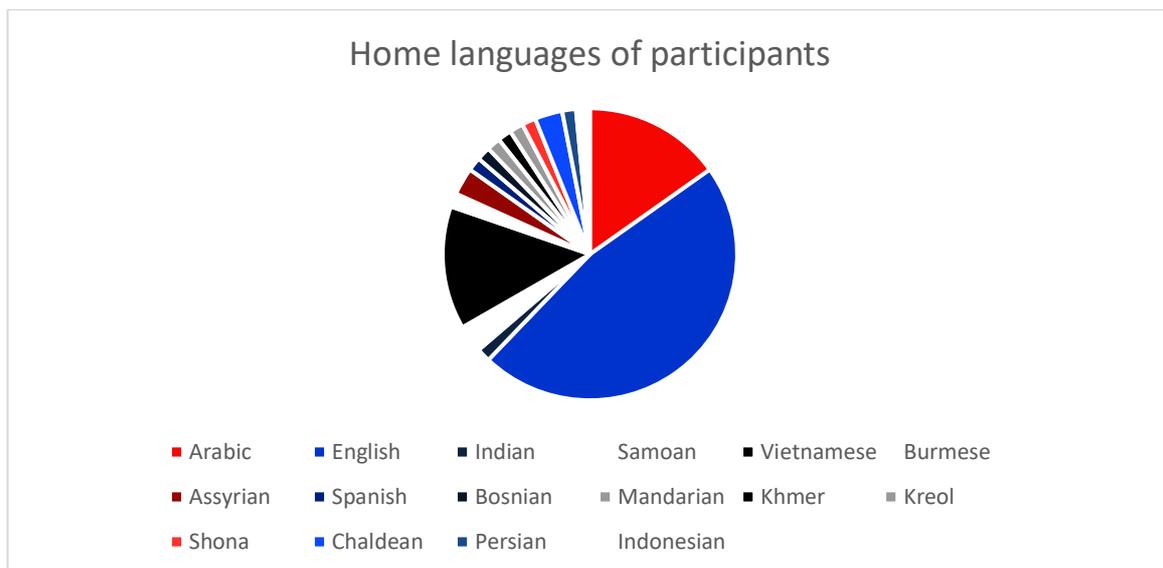


Figure 1 Home languages of participants

Findings

The evaluation of the pilot intervention is presented in three sections:

- Program outcomes and impact
- Assessment of program delivery
- Opportunities and implications

Program outcomes and impact

The post-intervention survey indicated that as a result of the parent information sessions, 77 per cent of parent participants strongly agreed that the session had broadened their awareness of career options for their child (Figure 2).

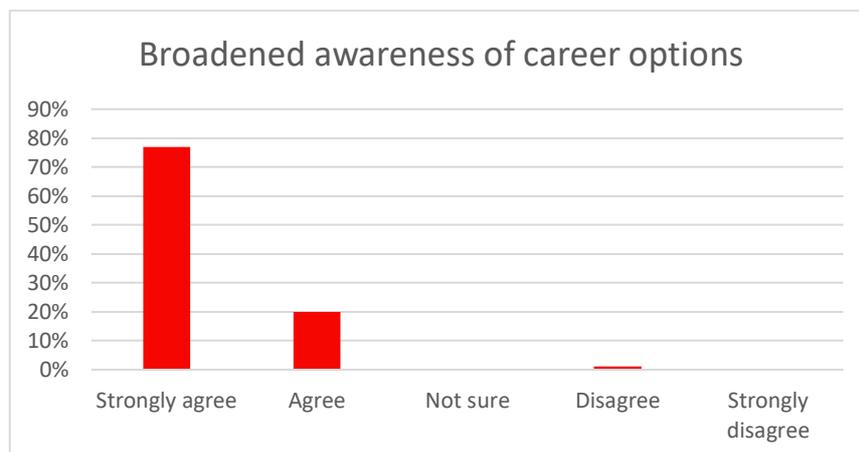


Figure 2: Broadened awareness of child's career options post-session

The post-intervention survey showed that the majority of parents either agreed or strongly agreed that they had confidence in supporting their child with career choices after the parent session (Figure 3).

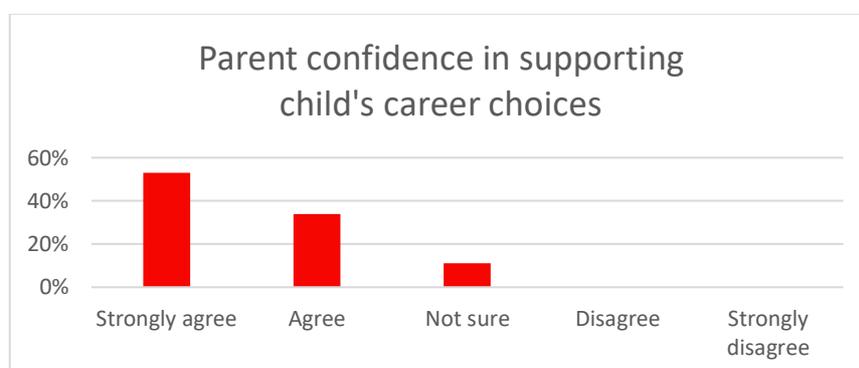


Figure 3: Parent confidence in supporting their child's career choices

Assessment of program delivery

This program was assessed through feedback from parent participants and the reflection by the parent ambassadors delivering the program.

Feedback from parent ambassador highlighted the importance of ensuring that parent voices were central to program development and delivery, as one parent explained: “I think it is so important to share experiences and knowledge with the community. Universities are regarded as key institutions in the processes of social change and development”. After each parent engagement session, the parent ambassadors delivering the sessions evaluated what went well and what improvements could be made to the program delivery. This included amendments to the ice-breaker activities such as use of jam boards and introduction of breakout rooms to encourage interactions between parent participants.

Key feedback from parent participants highlighted that while the parent ambassador program had broadened their awareness of career options for their child, there was a strong desire for ongoing sessions that built parents’ agency and awareness of their rights in relation to their child’s education. Growth in a sense of agency was reflected in the interviews conducted after program delivery, as one parent reflected:

I didn’t know I had the right to ask questions to schools or to universities, and I wish the program could have continued to build my confidence to ask questions (Parent participant).

However, there was also recognition that the program could be further developed and refined as the following comments demonstrate:

Having one-off events limits my growth and learning as a parent. I want to connect and learn from other parents (Parent participant).

There should be a session where we have employers come and talk to us what they think the future job market would look like. Hearing from the people who might give my children a job in future will be useful for me to better support my children (Parent participant).

The survey echoed the need for further development of the program with approximately half of the parent participants (49.2%) still not sure of their ability to support their child at university (Figure 4).

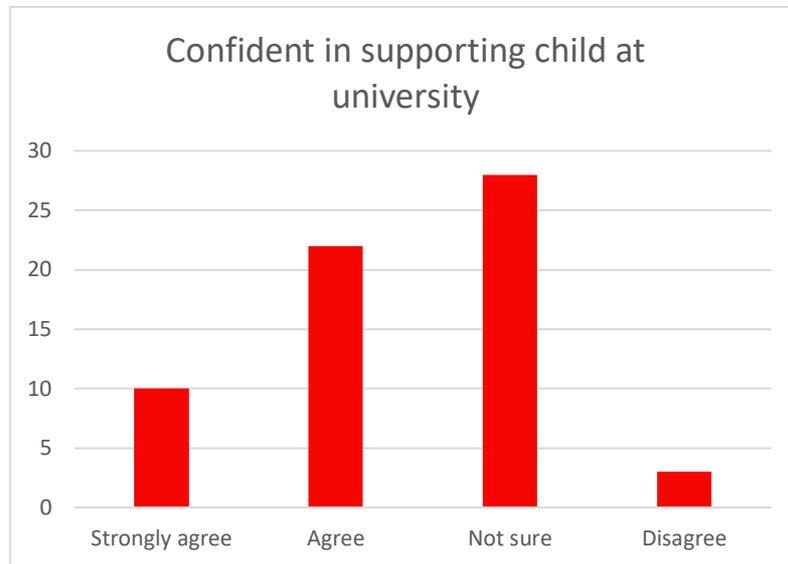


Figure 4: Confidence in supporting child at university

Clearly these parents from diverse language and cultural backgrounds, most of whom had not attended university, university in Australia was still somewhat mysterious and confusing. However, given that one parent ambassador reflected: "I do strongly believe that the parent information session is a really useful program to reach the low socioeconomic families and give the right information to prepare their daughter/son for university", it is likely that these Careers Breakfasts are an effective avenue through which to support parents' knowledge and confidence around university study. It might be that the delivery of this content needs to be re-considered and/ or follow-up individualised support and information provided to further improve parents' confidence in this area.

While there was numerous requests to have ongoing parent engagement session, this was not possible due to current scope of this pilot trial program. With positive feedback from schools and increased interest from parent participants indicating that the program was a success, UTS plans to continue with this program in 2021.

Recommendations for practice

The following are recommendations for practice which relate specifically to this pilot program. The full suite of recommendations and Best-Practice Principles for schools, school leaders, career advisers, students, teachers, and government departments of education can be found [here](#).

Best-practice CDL for students from LSES backgrounds would look like:

- The Department of Education producing a suite of information and resources for parents that increases parent's knowledge and understanding of the opportunities and pathways available to their children.
- Schools publishing a whole-school plan to CDL on the school's website which contains suggestions for parents as to how to extend CDL within the home context.
- Career advisers creating opportunities to engage parents and supporters in a whole-school approach to CDL, including professional development sessions for parents, and communications with parents pre/post career activities.
- Teachers embedding conversations about students' career goals as part of existing parental engagement opportunities e.g. reporting and parent/teacher interviews.
- Students engaging with career advisers alongside their parents/supporters to design the implement their personalised career development plans.

Conclusion

This intervention embedded best-practice principles for CDL in a career-information session for parents and carers of students from LSES backgrounds in South-West Sydney. A post-intervention survey was administered to parents who attended the Careers Breakfast sessions and analysis showed that the sessions helped parents in their awareness of career options for their child and in providing confidence to support their child in their career decisions. The research identified the need for future program iterations to: be expanded to consist of a series of workshops on topics identified by parents as being useful; offer workshops online and in the early evening as a mode of delivery that suits many parents; foregrounds activities which stimulate parent participation and discussion with other parents; and includes activities which connect high school parents with employers.

References

- Austin, K., O'Shea, S. Groves, O., & Lamanna, J. (2020). Career development learning for students from low socioeconomic status backgrounds: Desktop Audit. Australia, University of Wollongong and National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education. Retrieved from <https://documents.uow.edu.au/content/groups/public/@web/@dvce/@in2uni/documents/doc/uow264920.pdf>
- Austin, K., O'Shea, S. Groves, O., & Lamanna, J. (2020). Career development learning for students from low socioeconomic status backgrounds: Literature Review. Australia, University of Wollongong and National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education. Retrieved from <https://documents.uow.edu.au/content/groups/public/@web/@dvce/@in2uni/documents/doc/uow264921.pdf>
- Austin, K., O'Shea, S. Groves, O., & Lamanna, J. (2020). Guide to Partnerships. Australia, University of Wollongong and National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education. Retrieved from <https://documents.uow.edu.au/content/groups/public/@web/@dvce/@in2uni/documents/doc/uow264919.pdf>
- Austin, K., O'Shea, S. Groves, O., & Lamanna, J. (2021). Higher-education career advice for students from low socioeconomic status (LSES) backgrounds: Final Report. Australia, University of Wollongong and National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education.



NCSEHE

National Centre for Student
Equity in Higher Education



Curtin University



**UNIVERSITY
OF WOLLONGONG
AUSTRALIA 13**