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Community influence on university aspirations: Does it take a village...?

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List of abbreviations

ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
ANZSCO	Australian and New Zealand Standard Classification of Occupations
ANZSIC	Australian and New Zealand Standard Industrial Classification
ASGS	Australian Statistical Geography Standard
GEE	Generalised Estimating Equation
HSC	Higher School Certificate
ICSEA	Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage
IST	Information and Software Technology
LGA	Local Government Area
NAPLAN	National Assessment Program Literacy and Numeracy
NESB	Non-English Speaking Background
NSW	New South Wales
OR	Odds Ratio
P&C	Parents and Citizens
PCA	Principal Component Analysis
SES	Socioeconomic Status
TAFE	Technical and Further Education
UAC	Universities Admission Centre
UK	United Kingdom
UMAT	Undergraduate Medicine and Health Sciences Admission Test
US	United States of America
VET	Vocational Education and Training

Executive summary

This project, *Community influence on university aspirations: Does it take a village…?*, examined how post-school aspirations are formed within, and shaped by, the communities in which young people live. While "aspirations" have become a key feature of Australian higher education policy and practice in an effort to widen the participation of under-represented groups, research attention has often been directed towards individual, familial, and school-related effects in the complex process of aspiration formation. As a result, comparatively little is known about the role of local communities in shaping what students imagine for their post-school futures and how they are positioned to navigate these futures.

Two key questions were addressed in this project:

What impact does community have on student aspirations for higher education?

What community factors are important for increasing equity participation?

To answer these questions, we investigated the structural characteristics of the communities in which young people live as they form their post-school aspirations, as well as the subjective experiences and perceptions of young people and adults within these communities.

Data used in the project were drawn from two existing studies on the post-school aspirations of school students enrolled in Years 3–12 across a diverse range of communities within New South Wales, Australia, together with additional data collected from key community members. Taking a mixed methods approach, we analysed the effect of community-level variables on university aspirations; identified a number of case study communities for further analysis; and undertook case studies in a sub-sample of eight communities.

The eight case study communities were: Damperia, a higher socioeconomic status (SES) community located in a major city with many residents coming from Anglo-Australian backgrounds; Teasel, a higher SES community located in a major city with many residents coming from ethnically diverse backgrounds; Excelsa, a lower SES community located in a major city with a large retiree population; Pimlea, a lower SES, inner regional community with a high proportion of residents not in the labour force; Ironbark, an outer regional, mid SES community with many residents coming from ethnically diverse backgrounds; Olearia, a lower SES, remote community with a high proportion of Indigenous Australians and high levels of unemployment; Muellerina, a lower SES, inner regional community with a high proportion of Indigenous Australians; and Oldfieldii, a mid SES, outer regional community with a large proportion of residents who care for children and where vocational education is the most common educational pathway.

Major findings of the project were:

- Across all case study communities, higher education is the most popular educational aspiration, although the proportion of students aspiring to this pathway differs across geographic and socio-cultural dimensions.
- Aspirations for university are "high" in many disadvantaged communities, challenging the simplistic view that young people from equity target groups have "low" aspirations for their futures.
- Across all case study communities, aspirations for university are higher than existing levels of educational attainment; similar trends are evident when examining the proportion of young people who aspire to professional careers, which far exceeds the proportion of local residents working in these careers — even in urban, higher socioeconomic communities.

- On average, females are more likely than males to aspire to university across the case study communities, while males are more likely than females to aspire to technical and further education (TAFE).
- The careers that young people aspire to are highly gendered, regardless of the community in which they live. Commonly, females aspire to be teachers and veterinarians and to work in the arts. In contrast, sports-related careers are popular among males, as well as policing, the defence force, and engineering.
- Students in higher socioeconomic urban communities aspire to more prestigious occupations, on average, in comparison to students living in regional and remote areas and communities characterised by disadvantage.
- Aspirations are formed within very different contexts, in which "community" can be seen as a form of collective socialisation, as an amalgam of time and place, and as a symbolic boundary. That is:
    - "Community" acts as an important site of socialisation, in combination with home and school.
    - Aspirations are not only linked to the future, but also to time and place.
    - The territorial and relational elements of "community" can coalesce to form a symbolic boundary, thus shaping views of the world.
- The fusion of geographic, structural, and relational elements within a community work in both overt and more subtle ways to shape aspirations and the capacity for young people to navigate the pathway towards their imagined futures.

Recommendations for communities (including schools and community organisations) and higher education providers are offered at the end of the report.

Introduction

Access to university remains a significant issue for the Australian higher education sector. Expanding enrolment numbers have been accompanied by an increase in student diversity, and yet no significant gains have been made in achieving a student body that is a fair reflection of Australian society more broadly. Three groups, in particular, continue to be seriously under-represented in higher education compared to their share of the Australian population: people from lower SES backgrounds, Indigenous Australians, and people living in regional and remote locations (Bennett et al., 2015; Bradley, Noonan, Nugent, & Scales, 2008; Harvey, Burnheim, & Brett, 2016; James, Baldwin, Coates, Krause, & McInnis, 2004). Even within the context of the demand-driven system, which saw the federal government lift caps on the number of undergraduate places at university, progress towards population parity for these groups has been extremely slow and diluted by growth in the sector overall (Edwards & McMillan, 2015).

In addressing this issue, "aspirations" have become a key feature of Australian higher education policy and practice. Despite a deficit view of under-represented groups in some government policy that assumes desire for higher education is "low" (Sellar & Gale, 2011), a growing body of evidence demonstrates that aspirations for higher education are actually "high" among school students from the targeted equity groups (Bok, 2010; Gore, Patfield, et al., 2017; Hawkins, 2014; Kenway & Hickey-Moody, 2011; Smith, 2011; Somerville, 2013). Such evidence provides a crucial foundation for equity initiatives designed to nurture and support aspirations, particularly through early intervention and outreach programs in schools that take place well before the point of access to higher education (Bennett et al., 2015; Naylor, Baik, & James, 2013). While a multitude of interventions are currently in place tailored towards students from under-represented groups (Bennett et al., 2015), there have been calls for nuanced approaches that recognise heterogeneity and move beyond a 'one size fits all' agenda (Gore, Holmes, et al., 2017) if substantial gains in participation rates are to be made.

This study answers such calls by providing insight into the context-specific formation of aspirations, foregrounding the influence of local communities. Consideration of prevailing equity target groups guided our selection of sites. However, the specific focus of the project was the communities in which young people live, rather than the equity groups themselves. The aim of the study was to better understand how aspirations are formed within, and shaped by, local contexts, including variation within and between communities. To achieve this aim, we drew on a rich dataset comprising: surveys completed by students in Years 3–12 enrolled in government schools in New South Wales (NSW), Australia; focus groups involving students, their parents/carers and teachers; and extended interviews with key community members. Two key questions were addressed:

1. What impact does community have on student aspirations for higher education?
2. What community factors are important for increasing equity participation?

In so doing, we consider "community" as an additional site of aspiration-formation, shifting away from the traditional emphasis on the individual, family, and school.

Background and context

In recent years, there has been a proliferation of research on the post-school educational and occupational aspirations of young people. Given significant interest from the federal government and higher education sector in the notion of "aspiration", this burgeoning body of research is not unexpected. Aspirations matter not only as a policy focal point, but because of their relationship to future outcomes (Croll, 2008; Helwig, 2008) and their role in shaping how individuals imagine and construct their future selves (Archer, DeWitt & Wong, 2013; Sellar & Gale, 2011). Much of the research on aspirations focuses on the complex interplay of individuals with their families and schools in the process of aspiration-formation, examining a host of socio-demographic factors such as gender, SES, location, language background, Indigenous status, and prior academic achievement, as well as familial expectations and peer effects (Archer et al., 2012; Archer et al., 2013; Basit, 2012; Bok, 2010; Gale et al., 2013; Gemici, Bednarz, Karmel, & Lim, 2014; Gore, Holmes, et al., 2017; Gore, Holmes, Smith, Lyell, et al., 2015; Gore, Holmes, Smith, Southgate, & Albright, 2015; Harwood, McMahon, O'Shea, Bodkin-Andrews, & Priestly, 2015; Hawkins, 2014; Kenway & Hickey-Moody, 2011; Khattab, 2015; Smith, 2011).

However, comparatively little attention has been paid to how aspirations might also be shaped by the communities in which young people live; that is, to the "nesting" of individuals and families within communities (Corbett et al., 2017). The purpose of this review is to begin to shed light on the role of community in aspiration-formation. First, we tease out what "community" means, as well as key methodological considerations for research in this area.

Disentangling the concept of "community"

Various terms have been used in research that take up the concept of "community" to examine how individuals' life chances and social outcomes are formed within, and influenced by, the milieux in which they live. The main terms used are "community" (Lupton & Kintrea, 2011; Reid & McCallum, 2014; Senior & Chenhall, 2012), "neighbourhood" (Jensen & Seltzer, 2000; Johnston, Lee, Shah, Shields, & Spinks, 2014), and "place" (Kintrea, St Clair, & Houston, 2015; Webb, Black, Morton, Plowright, & Roy, 2015). These three terms are somewhat analogous, essentially concerned with the collective impact of a designated socio-spatial locality as a powerful arena of secondary socialisation beyond the home (Furlong, Biggart, & Cartmel, 1996). While these terms are imbued with varying meanings in the literature, scholars agree that "community", "neighbourhood", and "place" all convey more than just a physical setting or location.

Community

The specific concept of "community" has long been theorised to include both territorial and relational aspects (Gusfield, 1975). From Gusfield's (1975) perspective, the territorial aspect highlights a geographic notion of community while the relational aspect highlights human relationships. Arguably, the relational dimension is key, since a geographic location does not, by itself, constitute a community, although a sense of community can be formed on the basis of geography. At the same time, communities can exist without any kind of tangible, marked territory *per se*, such as online and virtual communities (Budu, 2018), learning communities (Somerville, 2013), and communities of practice (Hughes, Jewson, & Unwin, 2007), all of which are based on relationships between individuals who share a common interest or concern rather than being from the same distinct locality. With the advent of globalisation and digital technologies, community has also been constructed at a hyper-macro level, such as through the idea of a "global village" whereby the world is actually seen as a single community (McLuhan, 1962).

Neighbourhood

In sociology, human geography, and urban studies, “community” has also been delineated through the more territorial notion of ‘neighbourhood’. Broadly speaking, a neighbourhood is a spatial construction relative to a particular area, which can be conceptualised along a continuum ranging from immediate next door neighbours, apartment buildings and residential blocks, to suburbs, districts and whole towns (Andrews, Green, & Mangan, 2002). Underlying this territorial boundary is the relational aspect of community. In other words, neighbourhoods are socially produced and practised. In particular, face-to-face exchanges and actions between individuals and families form a core component of any neighbourhood, as do the habits of people’s daily lives (Martin, 2003). However, any neighbourhood can also comprise many “micro-neighbourhoods” of smaller networks (Visser, Bolt, & van Kempen, 2015). This point is elucidated by Forrest and Kearns (2001) who argue that a neighbourhood is actually “overlapping social networks with specific and variable time-geographies” (p. 2134). Thus, a neighbourhood is an intersection of the spatial *and* social, but also with a temporal component given that what is defined as a neighbourhood can be *re*defined over time as relationships shift.

Place

The idea of “place” is also closely entwined with “community”. Arguably, a neighbourhood is a type of place (Martin, 2003), which means that a community can also be described as a place when it has a geographical basis. Such a view comes to the fore within Agnew’s (1987) elaboration of place as consisting of three elements: a location (relating to the geographic and territorial); a series of locales (as relational sites between individuals and groups); and a sense of place (manifest in the affective). The sense of place is crucial in this conceptualisation, given that a space, or location, only becomes a ‘place’ when imbued with meaning by people (Cresswell, 2004; Visser et al., 2015). Martin (2003), in particular, proposes that the locale acts as the key juncture between the more objective location (the physical spot where we live) and the subjective sense of place (how we feel and what we think). In this light, a place can have multiple meanings derived at both individual and collective levels and, as such, is fluid and open to question (Cresswell, 2004; Visser et al., 2015). In sum, while a space is abstract and even mathematical, a place is lived, rooted, and organic (Bieger & Maruo-Schröder, 2016).

It is clear, therefore, that the concept of ‘community’ is multi-layered, inclusive of the notions of both “neighbourhood” and “place”. While a community can be delineated by territory and geography at different levels of spatiality, in other cases it may not have any tangible boundary at all. However, what is central to the concept of community is the relational and affective aspect — the people. It is this macro-level societal influence that is often missing in research on aspiration formation (Stewart, Stewart, & Simons, 2007). Yet, researchers also face considerable complexity in determining how to investigate the role of community.

Research on community influence: Methodological considerations

A key methodological tension associated with research on communities stems from the paradigms underpinning quantitative and qualitative research. On the one hand, some scholars believe that the best approach to understanding the influence of community is quantitative in nature, focusing on the objective characteristics of a designated community. Others deem that the best approach is qualitative, focusing on subjective experience and perceptions within a community. This means that quantitative studies focus on broad populations while qualitative studies focus on individuals and groups. To date, community influence has largely been investigated in relation to broader life chances and social outcomes, rather than aspirations *per se*. Topics in the realm of community influence on education include achievement (Leckie, 2009; McCulloch & Joshi, 2001), school drop-out

rates (Brooks-Gunn, Duncan, Klebanov, & Sealand, 1993), the likelihood of graduating from secondary school (Galster, Marcotte, Mandell, Wolman, & Augustine, 2007), and behavioural and emotional problems (Leventhal & Brooks-Gunn, 2000). In addition, a number of studies have looked at the aspirations of young people *within* a designated community (see, for example, Bok, 2010; Hawkins, 2014; Kenway & Hickey-Moody, 2011; Smith, 2011), rather than examining the actual influence of community *on* post-school aspirations.

Quantitative studies

Particularly popular in the United States (US), the quantitative study of so-called "neighbourhood effects" has experienced steady growth in interest over the past few decades (van Ham, Manley, Bailey, Simpson, & Maclennan, 2012). In order to explore such effects, spatial proxies are used to delineate the boundaries of a distinct geographic locality, meaning that community is defined by location. This methodological decision is more practical than theoretical given the convenience and availability of large datasets such as census information to ascertain structural characteristics of a given locale and, hence, independent variables for analysis at varying magnitudes of population (Johnston et al., 2014). The size of spatial proxies differs substantially in extant research, from relatively small geographical units such as residential blocks (Case & Katz, 1991) to larger units, such as census collection districts in Australia (Overman, 2002), census tracts in the US (Leventhal & Brooks-Gunn, 2000), postcodes (Jensen & Harris, 2008; Jensen & Seltzer, 2000), and local government areas (Jensen & Seltzer, 2000). The selected proxy not only has a bearing on the outcome of the research but also shapes the specific context of the research (Jensen & Harris, 2008; Jensen & Seltzer, 2000). For example, in remote parts of the Northern Territory or Western Australia, neighbours within a community can be located at a considerable geographic distance, which is in stark contrast to neighbours in densely populated urban areas (Webb et al., 2015).

Qualitative studies

Qualitative studies move beyond structural characteristics of a "neighbourhood" to instead look closely at experiences within communities by giving voice to residents. While drawing on notions of community, neighbourhood and place, the idea of place is particularly salient in considering how people assign meaning to a neighbourhood or community and how, in turn, their behaviour is influenced (Visser et al., 2015). As a result, qualitative researchers tend to take the view that "people are the place" (Webb et al., 2015, p. 35) and hence, that place is more than a simple postcode or local government area (Kintrea et al., 2015; Stahl & Baars, 2016); that is, community is not what is measured, but what is lived. This perspective comes to light in research demonstrating that individuals conceive of boundaries in different ways, and on a different scale, than what is determined by official means (Leventhal & Brooks-Gunn, 2000; Martin, 2003) — what Webb et al. (2015) call a "conceptual map". Other research has shown that residents' views of their own neighbourhoods often differ substantially from the hegemonic constructions of the media and government, insights that can only be uncovered through elevating the subjective view of residents (Visser et al., 2015; Webb et al., 2015). These studies reveal that a place can form an important component of an individual's identity (Visser et al., 2015), rather than simply being a physical indicator of where they live. From this perspective, there might not be any physical boundaries around an area, but instead, emotional borders as evidenced through a connection to place (Webb et al., 2015).

Conceptual and methodological challenges

In a major assessment of the state of research on community influence, van Ham et al. (2012) propose that we are a long way from uncovering the real influence of a neighbourhood, or community, on life chances and social outcomes. While such influence exists and the idea is "academically intriguing" (van Ham et al., 2012, p. 1), the role of

community, particularly over and above the roles of the individual, family and school, is not clear. Indeed, in a comprehensive review of quantitative research in this area, Leventhal and Brooks-Gunn (2000) found that most effect sizes are small to modest, while variables related to the family are more strongly correlated with social outcomes than variables at the level of the community. Methodological complexity challenges such analyses, especially given "simultaneity", where the spatial proxies used to quantitatively measure an effect are also related to the individuals who reside there (van Ham et al., 2012). Some scholars have identified "sorting" or "pooling" as a particular issue within quantitative studies, since families tend to reside in a community with others who share similar characteristics and are then likely to relocate to a new area if a change in circumstance occurs (Andrews et al., 2002; Overman, 2002). It is perhaps not surprising, then, that qualitative studies have more powerfully illustrated the role of community in life chances and social outcomes, since an individual might perceive an effect that is not quantitatively significant (van Ham et al., 2012).

With these methodological issues acknowledged, the final section of this literature review narrows the focus to look at the role of community in aspiration formation, which has largely been studied through qualitative methods. The broader body of literature on life chances and social outcomes has focused primarily on communities characterised by socioeconomic disadvantage and areas classed as "deprived communities" (see, for example, Sinclair, McKendrick, & Scott, 2010; Stahl & Baars, 2016; Visser et al., 2015). This emphasis on disadvantage has largely continued into aspirations-based research, starting from the premise that aspirations are tempered by the socio-spatial context and circumstances in which young people find themselves, which, in turn, augment or alter individual and familial effects (Furlong et al., 1996; Lupton & Kintrea, 2011).

The role of community in aspiration formation

Beyond 'low aspirations' in disadvantaged communities

Reflecting government rhetoric and higher education policy, it has been presumed that young people living in disadvantaged communities have lower aspirations, on average, than those from more advantaged communities (Lupton & Kintrea, 2011). While research often focuses on disadvantaged rather than advantaged communities, such studies have begun to challenge the simplistic view that aspirations are "low" in these areas. In a study examining the role of disadvantaged places in shaping aspirations across three communities in the United Kingdom (UK), it was found that educational and occupational aspirations are 'high' and, in fact, higher than the roles available in the local job market and higher than the national university participation rate (Kintrea et al., 2015; St. Clair, Kintrea, & Houston, 2013). The influence of the local job market functioned in a complex way, in that some young people saw university as a form of security against the constraints of localised unemployment and as a way out of the community to 'somewhere else', with different kinds of jobs and more opportunities (Kintrea et al., 2015). Similarly, research conducted in a low SES, regional community in Australia found that poor economic circumstances and employment options can necessitate a move to a larger urban area, highlighting the reality faced by young people as they weigh up their futures (McInerney & Smyth, 2014). Such a pragmatic view means that some young people in these communities see university as a way to attain their occupational aspirations, rather than as a separate aspiration in its own right (Campbell & McKendrick, 2017).

By examining the broader context of aspiration formation, other research has drawn attention to the problematic discourse of "low aspirations". In examining how the occupational aspirations of working-class boys are shaped by space and place across two deprived neighbourhoods in the UK—South London and South Manchester—Stahl and Baars (2016) highlight two different, but intersecting, groups of students: those with "high" aspirations for professional careers, who face an inner struggle of place attachment with having to relocate away from the community to undertake further education; and, those with

aspirations that require lower levels of skills and post-school training, which is seen as an avenue for steady employment that offers a reliable income within the community. In so doing, the authors argue that the label of “low aspirations” overlooks the agency of young people, since none of these working-class boys technically have “low aspirations” when framed by the setting and circumstances of their broader community.

The situated nature of aspirations is also evident in Bright’s (2011) ethnography of a former coal-mining community in the UK. Social memory and intergenerational, cultural transmission powerfully shaped what the young people living in this post-industrial area envisaged for their lives, with Bright (2011) calling this the “hidden history” of a community. Subsequently, the author argues for positioning young people in relation to the history of a community, rather than as individuals detached from their communities. Similarly, differences between aspirations and expectations can be overlooked by the discourse of ‘low aspirations’. Research conducted in another deprived community, this time in Glasgow, Scotland, found that young people might imagine life in a better job but not actually expect to obtain a better job (Sinclair et al., 2010). The authors propose that, in this context, aspirations need to be seen as anything but “low”, since these young people had a strong work ethic and had not assumed a fatalistic view of their future based on life in their community, largely characterised by welfare dependency and high concentrations of multiple deprivation (Sinclair et al., 2010).

Differences across disadvantaged communities

A small number of studies have examined different kinds of communities characterised by disadvantage. One Australian study investigated the geographical and place-based dimensions of educational aspirations and life chances across four disadvantaged communities — one characterised as urban fringe; two characterised as rural and urban fringe; and one remote community (Webb et al., 2015). While occupations requiring vocational education and training were the most popular aspiration among young people across all four sites, there were differences in aspirations associated with the geographic dimensions of place, as well as what Webb et al. (2015) conceptualise as “embodied psychologies of place”. First, mobility played out differently, as young people in the remote setting faced considerable travel barriers to pursuing further education while those in urban fringe areas had access to a comprehensive network of public transport. Second, different kinds of social networks across the communities meant that university was viewed as a more realistic and achievable pathway for some students, particularly when the social mix of a community permeated the school. Third, what was seen as familiar and accessible was largely limited to an invisible radius of one hour, which ranged from more professional roles in one community, to services and trades in others. The authors subsequently propose three community-level factors that shape aspirations: geographic; social; and critical events and disruptions, such as serendipitous encounters with people who have been to university or work experience programs that open up horizons of choice (Webb et al., 2015).

Some analytic attention has also been given to distinct community types, which highlights variations across contexts and the intersection of disadvantage with other factors. One such line of enquiry focuses on regional communities, emphasising the emotional and material realities young people face in these areas (Corbett & Forsey, 2017). For example, in regional Tasmania, it is historically common for residents to not complete secondary school due to the location of matriculation colleges (offering Years 11 and 12) in the state’s cities (Corbett et al., 2017). This means that limited exposure to higher education in regional Tasmania is coupled with the unlikelihood of young people from disadvantaged backgrounds even being in a *position* to enrol in university, thus impacting on how they think about possibilities for their futures (Corbett et al., 2017).

There can also be considerable difference *between* regional communities that play out in aspiration formation. Labour markets and population dynamics were highlighted in a case study of two regional communities, one in Nova Scotia, Canada, characterised by population

implosion, and one in Western Australia, characterised by “boom” (Corbett & Forsey, 2017). These case studies illustrate that not only can aspirations and out-migration often reflect each other but, in times of boom, the dilemma of whether to stay local through relying on the promise of income from ‘a trade’ or going elsewhere to pursue a “profession” can intensify. This perspective rings true in another study on different communities across Australia, which found that in order to ‘be someone’ or “do something”, many regional students felt that they had to leave their community (Alloway, Gilbert, Gilbert, & Muspratt, 2004).

The particular role of “community capacity” in aspiration formation was taken up in an Australian study by McDonald, Harrison, and Blaiklock (2012). Focusing on four regional areas in Victoria, with comparable levels of socioeconomic disadvantage and regional decline, community capacity was examined by measuring human, social, and product capital, and by giving each community a rating from 1 to 3 across nine domains, with data derived from interviews with local residents. The domains were: school-community participation; leadership; organisational structure; problem assessment; resource mobilisation; ability of the community to critically assess inequalities; links to others; the role of outside agencies; and program planning and development within the community (McDonald et al., 2012). While the voices of residents are included in the report, so too is an attempt to create a quantitative measure of “capacity”. A number of findings are particularly pertinent to post-school aspirations. First, reciprocity between the school and broader community positively shaped and nurtured students’ educational aspirations, and helped them to achieve these aspirations. Second, some communities had untapped resources and networks within the area that could have been mobilised in facilitating and enhancing aspirations, most notably when there was a disjuncture at the school-community interface. Third, collective support from community was often critical in producing an environment of high expectations for young people to complete schooling and go on to pursue their aspirations (McDonald et al., 2012).

The importance of place and time

Differences between communities also exist along cultural, geographic, and historical dimensions in what Somerville (2013) calls the “placetimemattering” of aspirations. Take, for example, one study looking at a remote Indigenous Australian community in the Northern Territory (Senior & Chenhall, 2012) and another looking at two metropolitan suburbs in Western Sydney (Somerville, 2013). In the first study, the aspirations of the young Indigenous women in the community were largely constrained by local experiences and observed employment options in the town; post-school education was rarely mentioned (Senior & Chenhall, 2012). The young women also largely viewed their futures through the lens of their mothers, with early pregnancy, marriage, and the threat of male violence seen as almost inescapable components of their lives, regardless of the occupations they saw themselves pursuing. In the second study based in Western Sydney, aspirations were also shaped by materiality and vulnerability, with financial security a key concern among residents in terms of getting to university, despite the community being physically close to a number of campuses (Somerville, 2013). While this region is home to a large population of Indigenous Australians it has, more recently, experienced change in cultural and linguistic diversity due to increasing numbers of migrants. This change has resulted in a shifting profile of the two suburbs featured in the study — one characterised as low SES and the other charactered as mid-high SES. Although located in the same local government area in NSW, the students in the former suburb had an aspirational trajectory towards occupations requiring less education as they aged, while in the latter, they aspired to occupations requiring more education (Somerville, 2013), showing how aspirations can differ between communities situated in relatively close proximity.

The intersection of the socio-spatial with place and time came to the fore in two case studies conducted in Belfast, Northern Ireland; one looking at young women (Connolly & Healy, 2004a) and the other at young men (Connolly & Healy, 2004b). Focusing on young women

across two discrete working-class communities—one Catholic, one Protestant—the first case study illustrates that the aspirations of these young women were defined by boundaries of their day-to-day milieu, largely reflecting the employment patterns of those around them (Connolly & Healy, 2004a). Thoughts of boyfriends, marriage, and motherhood dominated their aspirations, with the intensity of their gendered identity formed in light of extreme levels of politicised, sectarian violence between the two communities, limiting their mobility. Indeed, violence remains ever-present in their lives through para-military graffiti and wall murals tangibly marking out the territories of each community. The second case study focused on middle-class young men from one Catholic school and working-class young men from another Catholic school, and identified contrasting gendered identities and considerable differences in terms of mobility and attachment to place along class lines (Connolly & Healy, 2004b). For the middle-class boys, place was little more than the locality where they lived, and their aspirations were all about attending the "right" secondary school followed by the "right" university. Although these boys were well aware of the threat of violence, particular areas of the city were simply seen as areas to be avoided. However, these same areas shaped part of the lived experience of the working class boys, who had developed strong masculine identities associated with notions of protection, with their aspirations revolving around their localised existence and what they had witnessed via their fathers, uncles, or older brothers (Connolly & Healy, 2004b).

Making meaning

It is evident, therefore, that differences in lived experience both within and across communities can directly influence aspiration formation. This view is elaborated in a small number of studies that have considered how young people attach meaning to place, beyond the geographic and territorial. Through a unique methodology incorporating the visual tool of "mental mapping", White and Green (2015) illustrate variation in how young people conceptualise their community across three urban areas in the UK. In the more centrally-located community with good public transport, students' mental maps tended to comprise a larger spatial area than in the maps of the other two communities that were more spatially limited. These more geographical notions of community then manifested through different spatial 'horizons of choice' in aspiration formation, with clear potential for new opportunities when place is perceived as less confined, or a more bounded sense of opportunity when place is constrained to the familiar. Similarly, researchers have also interpreted 'community' to be the meanings and stories conveyed by young people, with an Australian study by Reid and McCallum (2014) using photographs taken by students to identify community factors that shape aspirations. A wide range of factors were identified; for example, the local library, which represented a young girl's love of books and part of her aspiration to study literature at university; and, the local Scouts club, which was tied to a young boy's dream to become an engineer in the armed forces (Reid & McCallum, 2014).

The "average case"

Collectively, these studies focus on subjective experiences within a community, though occasionally also provide descriptive quantitative data. In contrast, little analytic attention has been paid to the structural, objective characteristics of a community that are important in aspiration formation. While such research can only reveal information about the 'average case' within a community (Johnston et al., 2014), it tends to look more broadly across both advantaged and disadvantaged communities. In so doing, studies have shown that mean neighbourhood income, unemployment, deprivation, rurality, education, and occupational status are all significantly related to aspirations (Furlong et al., 1996; Jensen & Harris, 2008; Jensen & Seltzer, 2000). In particular, a higher level of education and more prestigious occupations within a community have unsurprisingly been related to higher educational aspirations (Jensen & Harris, 2008), while disadvantage has been related to lower aspirations in the particular case of African Americans in the US (Stewart et al., 2007). Beyond these socioeconomic factors, ethnic diversity and living in a more "established"

community have also been found to be related to increased university aspirations (Johnston et al., 2014).

It is important to note, however, that across such studies, each community-level factor tends to be included in a single model predicting the outcome, signalling a high degree of correlation among community factors. The importance of simultaneously controlling for individual and familial characteristics (Jensen & Harris, 2008; Jensen & Seltzer, 2000) and, where possible, school effects (Johnston et al., 2014) has been noted. This approach, however, leads to inherent tension in quantitative analysis. Specifically, after introducing school effects in a multiple regression framework, Johnston et al. (2014) found that the statistical significance of any community-level variables largely disappeared, suggesting a close relationship between a school and the broader community in which young people live, so much so that any effect of the community may be mediated by the effect of the school.

Community influence on university aspirations: Does it take a village…?

Our study, *Community influence on university aspirations: Does it take a village…?*, takes a mixed methods approach to examining the role of community in aspiration formation. Positioned by the three equity target groups dominating Australian higher education policy—students from lower SES backgrounds, students from regional and remote areas, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders—our research focuses on structural characteristics of the communities in which young people live as they form their post-school aspirations, as well as subjective experiences and perceptions within these communities. Our study also goes beyond a sole focus on disadvantage, as much of the research in this area has tended to do, to include communities of relative advantage for comparative purposes. Indeed, we provide a comprehensive profile of eight different communities in NSW, Australia, characterised by extreme variations in both the territorial and relational aspects of "community". In so doing, we show how aspirations are situated and shaped within and across vastly different communities. At the same time, we bring to light important parallels among the communities with implications for increasing equity participation in higher education.

Research design

Drawing on multiple datasets involving school students in Years 3–12 and augmented by rich, detailed case studies, our *Community Influence* study was designed to analyse how post-school aspirations are formed within, and shaped by, the communities in which young people live, particularly in relation to school students from targeted equity groups. A three-step approach was utilised:

- Step 1 involved combining community-level data from the 2016 Census with our existing database on students' aspirations.
- In Step 2, the augmented database created in Step 1 was used to analyse the effect of community-level variables on university aspirations and to identify a diverse set of case study communities for further analysis.
- Step 3 took the form of case studies in eight diverse communities, selected on the basis of the analysis completed in Step 2.

Each of these steps is described in detail below.

Method and data

Step 1: Combining community-level data with student aspirations data

For the purposes of conducting our quantitative analysis, "community" was delineated by officially gazetted Local Government Areas (LGAs) as defined by the NSW Local Government Department. LGAs throughout Australia were initially identified for our study by matching school addresses from our existing database on students' aspirations (97 schools in total across major cities, regional and remote NSW), to official data reported by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS). As a result of this process, we identified 38 LGAs for which we had existing data on students' aspirations. Community-level data for each LGA from the 2016 Census (Australian Bureau of Statistics [ABS], 2017) was added to our database.

Community-level data were drawn from the following Census categories: employment, income and unpaid work, education and qualifications, selected family characteristics (the composition of households and families and the characteristics of people within them), and selected person characteristics (socio-demographic characteristics such as age, Indigenous status and place of birth). In total, 35 separate measures were added to our database; further information on these measures are available in Appendix 1.

Our existing database on students' aspirations was developed in two prior studies: the *Aspirations Longitudinal Study*[1] (see, for example, Gore, Holmes, Smith, Lyell, et al., 2015; Gore, Holmes, Smith, Southgate, et al., 2015) and the *Locating Aspirations Study*[2]*.*

The *Aspirations Longitudinal Study* involved school students from 64 government schools located east of the Great Dividing Range in NSW, from LGAs on the northern side of Sydney to the Queensland border. Four cohorts of students were involved in the study over four years of their schooling (2012–2015), commencing when they were in Years 3, 5, 7, or 9, and thus concluding when they were in Years 6, 8, 10 or 12.

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[1] The full title of the study is *Educational and Career Aspirations in the Middle Years of Schooling: Understanding Complexity for Increased Equity*. The study is an Australian Research Council Linkage project jointly funded by the Australian Research Council and the NSW Department of Education. A list of publications to date from the study can be found in Appendix 2.

[2] The full title of the study is *Locating Aspirations: Evidence to support participation in higher education of low SES students from regional and remote* Australia. The study was funded by the Australian Government Department of Education and Training Higher Education Participation and Partnerships Program within the National Priorities Pool scheme.

Student surveys were administered annually using an online format. The primary and secondary student surveys differed slightly, with some questions modified to account for age. The main focus of the survey was post-school educational and occupational aspirations, as well as questions about students' background and home life. Parents/carers and teachers were also invited to complete online or paper surveys in each year of the study. A total of 6,492 individual students completed the survey in one or more waves of the study, resulting in 10,543 student surveys overall.

Focus groups were conducted in a sub-sample of 30 schools in order to gain a deeper understanding of students' aspirations. Students were purposively sampled in relation to SES, prior academic achievement and the prestige of their stated occupational aspirations, based on the answers they provided during the first year of the study. During the period 2013–15, 187 focus groups were conducted with 553 students. Student discussions focused on: their post-school plans; their job interests; who they discussed their future plans with; and their thoughts about university and/or Technical and Further Education (TAFE). In addition, focus groups were conducted with 90 parents/carers and 215 teachers (including careers advisers and school principals) to gain their perspectives on students' aspirations.

The *Locating Aspirations Study* extended the *Aspirations Longitudinal Study* into 33 additional government schools, situated in LGAs across regional, remote and very remote areas of NSW. Using a similar online survey, a total of 1,525 students across Years 3–12 completed the survey during 2017.

Focus groups were similarly conducted with students, some of their teachers, and parents/carers to gain a deeper understanding of the formation of post-school educational and occupational aspirations in these locations. In addition to the topics included in discussions previously used in the *Aspirations Longitudinal Study*, participants were also asked about challenges to participation in further education beyond secondary schooling. During 2017, 173 focus groups and interviews were conducted with 144 students, 46 parents/carers, and 49 teachers and principals in a sub-sample of 26 schools.

Step 2: Analysing the effect of community and identifying case study communities

We used the augmented database from the *Aspirations Longitudinal Study* and the *Locating Aspirations Study* to analyse the effect of community-level variables on students' post-school aspirations. We analysed a cross-sectional sample of survey data from the *Aspirations Longitudinal Study* from 2013 (n = 3,996 unique students), together with the survey data from the Locating Aspirations Study (n = 1,525 unique students). Statistical modelling explored significant predictors of university aspirations in relation to the community-level variables. Next, the same community-level variables formed the basis of an exploratory factor analysis, in order to identify a range of community "types" for further analysis in Step 3.

The identification of the community 'types' was used as the primary criterion for the selection of sites for the case studies, using purposive sampling methods (Etikan, Musa, & Alkassim, 2016). As secondary criteria, we sought a range of communities in terms of SES, geographical area, and proximity to university campuses. The advantage of purposive sampling was that we were able to select communities previously involved in the *Aspirations Longitudinal Study* and/or the *Locating Aspirations Study* that illustrated the diversity of community 'types' across NSW.

Step 3: Case studies

We undertook case studies of eight selected communities, representing the range of community "types" identified in Step 2. Case study design was selected to provide "context-dependent knowledge" (Flyvbjerg, 2006, p. 221) about specific communities that could be

explored in depth using a range of data. These case studies involved: (a) mapping of the existing survey data from the full sample of students in each community to develop a picture of community-level aspirations, in combination with focused analysis of focus group/interview data collected from students, parents and teachers within each community (sometimes involving a cluster of schools); and, (b) collection and analysis of additional qualitative data through interviews with school leaders, teachers, and key community members to learn more about ways in which communities contribute to shaping aspirations and encouraging higher education participation.

In order to identify key community members, we partnered with a number of schools who were involved in the original *Aspirations* studies. Of the 25 schools invited to participate, 11 schools were recruited, grouped into eight communities. A snowball sampling technique was used to identify interview participants. Principals at each school were asked to participate in an individual interview, and were asked to nominate at least two key community members to also participate in an interview, such as a member of the Parents and Citizens (P&C) association, local business owners, government officials, sporting coaches, and Aboriginal elders within Indigenous communities.

For the present study, 37 interviews were conducted with 39 participants in the eight case study communities. All interviews were facilitated by a Chief Investigator of the present study, or by a research assistant. Whenever possible, interviews with Indigenous participants were conducted by an Indigenous research assistant.

Table 1 provides an overview of the quantitative sample drawn on for the mapping of community-level aspirations, while Table 2 provides details about the qualitative sample.

Table 1. Quantitative sample: Community case studies

	Aspirations Longitudinal Study	Locating Aspirations Study
Community[3]	*n* [a]	*n* [a]
Damperia	122	
Excelsa	1,462	
Ironbark		341
Muellerina	329	
Oldfieldii		63
Olearia		12
Pimlea	296	
Teasel	442	

Note. [a] Unique students who completed at least one survey. The quantitative results reported in the case studies should be interpreted with caution given the varying sample sizes of students in each community.

Table 2. Qualitative sample: Community case studies

	Aspirations Longitudinal Study		Locating Aspirations Study		Community Influence Study	
Community	Focus Groups *n*	Participants *n*	Focus Groups *n*	Participants *n*	Interviews *n*	Participants *n*
Damperia	4	11			4	4
Excelsa	51	172			3	3
Ironbark			9	14	4	4
Muellerina	58	121			14	14
Oldfieldii			10	12	3	3
Olearia			8	11	3	5
Pimlea	7	26			3	3
Teasel	7	28			3	3

[3] Pseudonyms are used for all communities and individual participants.

Throughout each study, demographic information for each student is provided where relevant, particularly in relation to Indigenous status and for those from a NESB Non-English Speaking Background (NESB).

Statistical analysis

A two-stage process of statistical analysis was employed to assist in understanding the influence of community on student aspirations for higher education. The first stage of analysis applied a logistic regression model to investigate community-level effects on student aspirations for higher education. The second stage utilised exploratory factor analysis to identify community "types" for further analysis as part of the case studies. These methods of statistical analysis are explained in detail below.

Logistic regression

Logistic regression models were used to analyse the significance of community-level variables on students' post-school aspirations, controlling for student background variables and school-related variables.

Outcome variable

We derived the outcome variable, educational aspirations, from student responses to the survey question *What is the highest level of education you plan to complete?* Primary students selected from the options of "High school", "TAFE", "University", or "I don't know". Secondary students selected from the options of "Year 11", "Year 12", "Certificate or Diploma from TAFE or other training provider", "Bachelor degree from university", "Masters or Doctorate from university", or "I don't know".

For this study, both primary and secondary student responses were reduced to a binary outcome of university aspirations (yes/no), given that higher education participation was the primary interest of our study. Students who indicated high school, TAFE or "I don't know" had their survey answer recoded as "no", while students who indicated university had their survey answer recoded as "yes".

Independent variables

Independent measures of analysis were community-level variables, student background variables, and school-related variables. Community-level variables were derived from the 2016 Census and are detailed in Appendix 1. Student background variables were derived from the student surveys and from linked demographic data provided by the NSW Department of Education; these variables were sex, SES, location, Indigenous status, NESB, and cultural capital. School-related variables were similarly derived from the student surveys and from linked data provided by the NSW Department of Education, and were school socio-educational advantage (measured by the Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage [ICSEA]), prior academic achievement, and self-perception of relative academic performance. All student background and school-related variables are detailed in Appendix 3.

Each community-level variable was included as a single predictor in a set of regression models for the outcome of university aspirations (yes/no). This means that only a single community-level variable was tested each time. In Model 1, the results are adjusted for Stage level only (to account for age, as per the Stages of formal schooling in NSW[4]), and reported as adjusted odds ratios and adjusted *p*-values. A second regression model included student background variables in addition to Stage level and community-level variables, reported as adjusted odds ratios and adjusted *p*-values in Model 2. A third regression model

[4] Our dataset includes students from Years 3–12 inclusive: Stage 2 (Year 3 and 4); Stage 3 (Year 5 and 6); Stage 4 (Year 7 and 8); Stage 5 (Year 9 and 10); and Stage 6 (Year 11 and 12).

included school-related variables in addition to Stage level, community-level and student background variables, reported as adjusted odds ratios and adjusted p-values in Model 3.

In order to adjust for the clustering of students within schools, logistic regression models were fitted within a Generalised Estimating Equation (GEE) framework, a method robust against violations of normality and missing data assumptions (Zeger, Liang, & Albert, 1988). The GEE model was compared with an equivalent random effects Generalised Linear Model of the same data and variables, both of which produced similar estimates and *p*-values. Data were analysed using SAS software version 9.4 and statistical significance was set at 0.05.

Factor analysis

Using the same community-level variables, exploratory factor analysis was used to identify community "types" for further analysis. This approach was chosen in order to reduce the set of census variables into a smaller set that explains much of the variation among LGAs. Our goal was to identify a number of LGAs to represent the overall diversity among the communities associated with the schools in our dataset.

Determining the number of factors

The method of extraction of the initial factors was via Principal Components Analysis (PCA). This method involved calculating the eigenvalues of the correlation matrix; each eigenvalue measures the amount of variance between the variables that is explained by a factor. Thus, the total number of factors equals the number of variables in the analysis and the higher the eigenvalue the more variance is explained (Beavers et al., 2013).

Initial factors were extracted in decreasing order of the amount of variance they explained, i.e. in the order of largest-to-smallest eigenvalue. We sought to reduce to a much smaller number of interpretable factors that explain as much of the variance as possible.

The number of selected factors was based on two criteria: (1) the eigenvalue must be at least 1 (known as the Kaiser criterion), and (2) inspection of the Scree plot. Scree plots were used to determine the number of factors by examining the steepness of the curve's descent. Factors beyond the point at which the curve begins to flatten or level off (begins to decrease much slower than before) were discarded. In other words, only the first few factors at the steepest part of the curve were retained (Beavers et al., 2013).

Interpreting factor loadings

The next step in analysis was to transform the factors into a "simple" structure for interpretation. The most common method is an orthogonal transformation called Kaiser's varimax criterion, which transforms the initial factors into uncorrelated rotated factors. Rotation is a mathematical operation that provides a more interpretable solution while preserving the structural relationships (Beavers et al., 2013). The resulting structure is simple in that each variable correlates strongly with one factor and correlates weakly with other factors. Hence, each factor should be able to be represented by at least three to five variables that exhibit a strong influence on it.

Factor loadings or coefficients are the estimates of the correlations between each variable and a given factor. Coefficients are interpreted similarly to correlations; they are always numbers between –1 and 1, whereby positive coefficients indicate a positive relationship and negative coefficients indicate a negative relationship. Coefficients that are close to 1 in absolute value indicate that the factor has a strong influence on the variable, coefficients that are close to 0 in absolute value indicate a weak influence. Note that variables may have moderate coefficients for more than one factor.

Interpretation of the factors was based on examining the coefficient patterns for the rotated factors (rather than the initial factors) (Beavers et al., 2013). In a simple structure, this means we identified variables that have a high coefficient for only one factor and have low or moderate coefficients for all other factors.

Interpreting communality estimates

Communality is the proportion of a variable's variation that is explained by all of the retained factors. These values indicate how well the variables are explained by the retained factors, with communality scores closer to 1 the better the variable is explained by the retained factors. Communality estimates are sometimes denoted h^2 because they are calculated as the sum of squares of all the factor loadings for a given variable (Beavers et al., 2013).

Case studies

In order to develop a deeper understanding of the role of local communities in shaping students' aspirations, a series of case studies was undertaken in eight communities identified as a result of the factor analysis.

Quantitative analysis

For each of the eight communities, descriptive analyses were conducted using student survey data from the *Aspirations Longitudinal Study* and the *Locating Aspirations Study*. Community-level aspirations were mapped by grouping the data for all schools in our database for a given community. Educational aspirations were derived from student responses to the survey question *What is the highest level of education you plan to complete?* Occupational aspirations were derived from student responses to a survey question W*hat would you like to do when you grow up?* (primary students) or *What kind of work would you like to do when you're 25?* (secondary students). Answers to this open-ended survey question were coded according to the Australian and New Zealand Standard Classification of Occupations (ANZSCO), which is the national standard for classifying occupations based on all jobs in the Australian workforce.

Community-level educational aspirations were mapped against the highest level of educational attainment within a community, as per data from the 2016 Census (ABS, 2017). Community-level occupational aspirations were mapped against existing occupations for all employed people aged 15 years and over within a community, as per data from the 2016 Census (ABS, 2017). Occupations are reported in relation to the following ABS categories: managers, professionals, technicians and trades workers, community and personal service workers, clerical and administrative workers, sales workers, machinery operators and drivers, and labourers.

Qualitative analysis

Focus group and interview data from the *Aspirations Longitudinal Study* and the *Locating Aspirations Study*, together with additional interview data collected from key community members in each LGA, were thematically coded using inductive and deductive logic (Creswell, 2013). The analyses of data from the selected communities were used to develop case studies that provided detailed and contextualised descriptions of particular communities, bringing together analyses of a range of data (Simons, 2009; Yin, 2003). By bringing together multiple perspectives, the use of case studies allowed us to develop rich understandings of contemporary phenomena and examine how changes in these communities might shape the aspirations of young people. The purpose of these case studies was not only to build deep understandings of individual communities but to undertake a cross-case analysis to identify key implications for understanding community influence on aspirations and participation in higher education.

Findings

Results are reported in relation to three key areas: (1) the effect of community on university aspirations; (2) the identification of case study communities; and (3) the presentation of the eight case studies. As is consistent with much of the literature on the influence of communities, the quantitative findings are less informative than the qualitative findings. The case studies commence on page 31.

The effect of community on university aspirations

Results from the logistic regression analyses are reported in Table 3. Each row in the table is a separate set of three models, where a single community-level variable is tested each time. The results indicate that there are some community-level variables in Model 1 (bolded in Table 3) that are predictive of aspirations for higher education; the variables positively related to university aspirations primarily include those linked to education (completion of formal schooling and having a university qualification), income ($2,000 plus per week category), and NESB/migrant status. However, these results should be interpreted with caution given the substantial odds ratios (OR) associated with a number of variables. The addition of the student background and school-related variables also led to instability in the models, most likely due to correlations between the community-level variables and the student background and school-related variables in Model 2 and Model 3, respectively.

Table 3. Logistic regression results

	Model 1 Community-level variables			Model 2 Student background variables			Model 3 School-related variables		
Continuous Variable	Type III *p*-value	log OR	OR	Type III *p*-value	log OR	OR	Type III *p*-value	log OR	OR
Pct Persons aged 0–19	0.2024	–2.84	0.06	0.1027	–1.87	0.15	0.0643	–1.33	0.27
Pct Persons aged 20–34	0.1580	4.05	57.47	0.5472	–0.80	0.45	0.6866	–0.57	0.56
Pct Persons aged 35–64	0.0806	5.06	157.32	**0.0055**	3.95	52.09	**0.0378**	4.71	111.05
Pct Persons aged over 65	0.8518	–0.33	0.72	**0.0187**	2.72	15.24	**0.0084**	2.94	18.98
Pct Under 19 in education	0.0658	1.13	3.09	0.4418	0.32	1.38	0.3005	0.34	1.40
Pct 20–24 in education	**0.0055**	12.82	369276.14	0.1881	3.83	45.97	0.1811	5.06	156.96
Pct Indigenous	**0.0009**	–3.71	0.02	0.6848	0.46	1.59	0.1422	2.67	14.46
Pct Parents not born in Australia	**0.0024**	2.57	13.00	0.1736	0.74	2.09	0.7591	0.22	1.25
Pct Not born in Australia	**0.0031**	3.44	31.32	0.1425	1.05	2.85	0.8085	0.22	1.25
Pct Other language at home	**0.0224**	3.02	20.40	0.4924	0.42	1.53	0.8900	0.10	1.10
Pct Non-English speaking	0.0920	13.71	897169.42	0.8074	–0.85	0.43	0.8061	–0.92	0.40
Pct Over 20s university qualification	**0.0017**	2.90	18.23	0.0884	0.88	2.41	0.7805	–0.36	0.70
Pct Over 20s TAFE qualification	**0.0217**	–2.22	0.11	0.9022	–0.05	0.95	0.2205	1.95	7.02
Pct Completed Y12	**0.0016**	2.34	10.35	0.1783	0.64	1.89	0.2861	–1.05	0.35
Pct Household income under $999	**0.0177**	–2.54	0.08	0.1003	1.12	3.08	**0.0004**	3.30	27.23
Pct Household income $1000–$1999	**0.0146**	–9.28	0.00	0.1975	–2.13	0.12	0.7735	0.77	2.15
Pct Household income $2000 plus	**0.0092**	2.50	12.18	0.4278	–0.46	0.63	**0.0007**	–3.45	0.03
Pct Employed	**0.0410**	3.39	29.64	0.0920	–1.74	0.18	**0.0386**	–2.49	0.08
Pct Not in labour force	0.8129	–0.27	0.76	**0.0039**	2.58	13.19	**0.0015**	2.87	17.64
Pct Unemployed	0.7113	–4.85	0.01	**0.0120**	20.32	666199677.74	**0.0004**	37.30	15874651711250800.00
Pct Youth unemployed 15–24	0.2453	–4.45	0.01	0.0790	4.17	64.76	**0.0020**	9.24	10347.50
Pct Caring for children	0.0594	3.58	35.87	0.0528	–3.25	0.04	0.1488	–3.06	0.05
Pct Volunteer	0.4705	1.50	4.48	0.6721	–0.53	0.59	0.3722	–1.34	0.26
Pct Caring Disability	0.7323	–2.21	0.11	**0.0148**	10.96	57543.70	**0.0008**	16.90	21957075.68
Pct Married	0.0780	2.97	19.42	0.8620	–0.18	0.83	0.3124	–1.45	0.23

Pct Divorced	0.5435	–2.25	0.11	**0.0178**	5.48	240.88	**0.0023**	8.23	3752.96
Pct Families single parent	0.0611	–4.68	0.01	0.1739	1.83	6.26	**0.0007**	6.25	518.12
Pct Families step blended	**0.0377**	–3.22	0.04	0.1753	–1.88	0.15	0.2464	–1.22	0.29
Pct Families with no child/ren	0.9519	0.05	1.06	**0.0054**	1.66	5.28	**0.0275**	1.50	4.46
Ratio Population to household	0.1010	4.92	136.74	**0.0015**	5.07	159.84	**0.0026**	6.09	441.38
Pct Households with families	0.6351	–1.45	0.23	**0.0098**	–3.86	0.02	**0.0006**	–5.16	0.01
Pct Population moved 1 year ago	**0.0322**	2.52	12.38	0.6931	–0.30	0.74	0.2371	–0.98	0.37
Pct Population moved 5 year ago	**0.0055**	1.13	3.10	0.6959	–0.12	0.89	0.1849	–0.48	0.62
Pct Religious	0.1881	–1.37	0.25	**0.0169**	–1.36	0.26	0.0411	–1.61	0.20
Pct Religious Christian	**0.0082**	–8.01	0.00	0.1709	–2.01	0.1343	0.3621	–1.60	0.2015

Identifying case study communities

The community-level variables (refer to Appendix 1) consist of 35 separate items derived from the 2016 Census (ABS, 2017). Table 4 shows the eigenvalues of the correlation matrix extracted via PCA. Each eigenvalue is listed in decreasing order along with the proportion and cumulative proportion of the total variance explained by that factor. The variables are automatically standardised to have variance 1, thus the total variance is 35.0. For example, the first factor has eigenvalue 12.6 and explains $12.6/35.0 \approx 36$ per cent of the total variance, the second factor has eigenvalue 6.0 and explains a further 17 per cent of the total variance, and so on.

Table 4. Principal component analysis

	Eigenvalue	Proportion	Cumulative proportion		Eigenvalue	Proportion	Cumulative proportion
1	12.6	36%	36%	**19**	0.1	0.2%	99%
2	6.0	17%	53%	**20**	0.1	0.2%	99%
3	4.7	13%	67%	**21**	0.0	0.1%	100%
4	2.4	6.9%	73%	**22**	0.0	0.1%	100%
5	2.2	6.3%	80%	**23**	0.0	0.1%	100%
6	1.6	4.6%	84%	**24**	0.0	0.1%	100%
7	1.2	3.4%	88%	**25**	0.0	0.1%	100%
8	1.0	2.9%	91%	**26**	0.0	0.0%	100%
9	0.6	1.8%	92%	**27**	0.0	0.0%	100%
10	0.6	1.6%	94%	**28**	0.0	0.0%	100%
11	0.4	1.2%	95%	**29**	0.0	0.0%	100%
12	0.4	1.2%	96%	**30**	0.0	0.0%	100%
13	0.2	0.7%	97%	**31**	0.0	0.0%	100%
14	0.2	0.5%	98%	**32**	0.0	0.0%	100%
15	0.1	0.4%	98%	**33**	0.0	0.0%	100%
16	0.1	0.4%	98%	**34**	0.0	0.0%	100%
17	0.1	0.3%	99%	**35**	0.0	0.0%	100%
18	0.1	0.3%	99%				

Using the ‘eigenvalues greater than 1’ criteria we should consider at most the first seven factors. We decided to retain only five factors for the following additional reasons: cumulatively, the first five factors explain 80 per cent of the total variance which is acceptably high; and inspection of the Scree plot suggests that a five-factor solution is suitable (Figure 1) since the descent of the curve begins to drop off after five points.

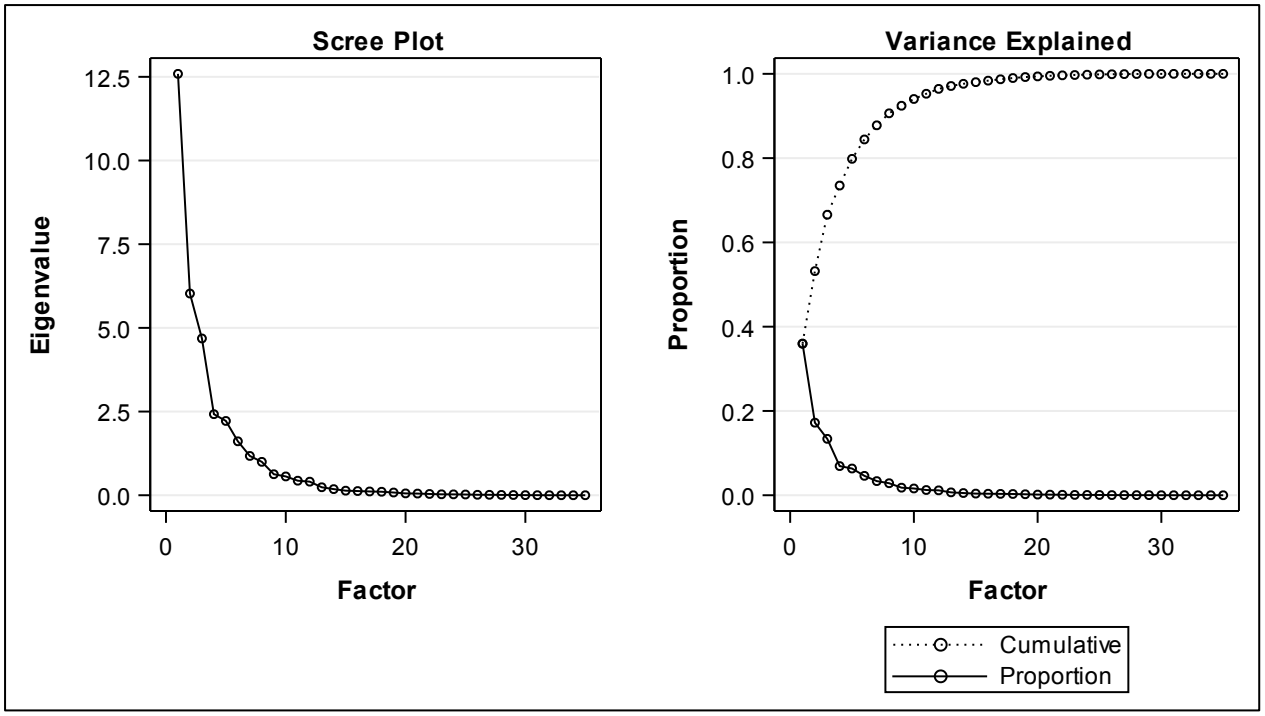


Figure 1. Scree plot of the eigenvalue analysis

Table 5 shows the coefficient patterns for the first five factors, initial and rotated via the orthogonal rotation method varimax. We compared this to the factor solution from an oblique rotation method with similar results. Highlighted values are coefficients that are higher in absolute value than 0.6 for one factor, provided that the corresponding coefficients for that variable are lower in absolute value than 0.5 for all other factors. (The exception here is the per cent Indigenous item which we have included since it has a borderline factor loading 0.57 and *a priori* we already knew we wanted to identify an LGA with a high proportion of Indigenous Australians in recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders as a targeted equity group).

The highlighted coefficients for the first two factors have particularly high values. In addition, the factor loadings for factors 6–8 were not high, therefore we were satisfied in our choice to retain only the first five factors. We do note that a two, three, or four factor solution is plausible as well.

The Communality estimates (shown in the last column of Table 5) for the 35 variables are all moderate-to-high, apart from two variables which did not load strongly on to any of the factors and could therefore have been deleted. This indicates that the set of five retained factors explain much of the variation in the original set of 35 variables. Table 6 provides a description of the variables included in each of the five factors.

Table 5. Principal component analysis coefficient patterns

Derived item	Factor1	Factor2	Factor3	Factor4	Factor5	Factor1	Factor2	Factor3	Factor4	Factor5	Final Communality estimates
Pct 20–24 in education	0.84	0.31	0.00	-0.05	0.29	0.89	0.08	0.13	-0.20	0.17	0.89
Pct Parents not born in Australia	0.92	0.19	0.15	-0.06	0.17	0.94	-0.10	0.12	-0.15	0.03	0.94
Pct Not born in Australia	0.91	0.16	0.20	-0.01	0.14	0.93	-0.16	0.14	-0.09	0.02	0.92
Pct Other language at home	0.85	0.03	0.27	0.10	0.14	0.86	-0.26	0.06	0.04	0.04	0.82
Pct Non English speaking	0.71	0.03	0.16	0.30	0.21	0.72	-0.23	0.03	0.12	0.26	0.66
Pct Over 20s university qualification	0.92	0.11	0.17	-0.22	0.08	0.91	-0.14	0.09	-0.24	-0.14	0.94
Pct Completed Yr12	0.89	0.07	0.07	-0.19	0.07	0.86	-0.16	0.05	-0.29	-0.07	0.85
Pct Household income under $999	-0.93	0.21	0.15	-0.03	0.00	-0.74	0.46	0.12	0.36	-0.16	0.93
Pct Household income $1000–$1999	-0.53	0.01	-0.25	0.57	-0.32	-0.69	-0.20	0.22	0.16	0.43	0.77
Pct Household income $2000 plus	0.92	-0.18	-0.07	-0.12	0.09	0.80	-0.33	-0.16	-0.36	0.03	0.91
Pct Religious Christian	-0.84	-0.06	-0.36	-0.03	-0.17	-0.90	0.21	-0.07	-0.08	0.05	0.86
Pct Persons aged 20–34	0.55	-0.32	0.55	0.33	-0.25	0.47	-0.72	0.08	0.36	-0.14	0.89
Pct Persons aged over 65	-0.36	0.79	-0.22	-0.30	0.11	-0.19	0.79	0.44	-0.21	0.02	0.90
Pct Employed	0.71	-0.42	-0.26	0.10	-0.40	0.34	-0.75	-0.07	-0.45	0.10	0.91
Pct Not in labour force	-0.68	0.47	0.16	-0.14	0.40	-0.33	0.80	0.10	0.35	-0.07	0.89
Pct Caring disability	-0.43	0.77	-0.15	0.17	0.18	-0.25	0.66	0.48	0.12	0.35	0.86
Pct Divorced	-0.47	0.49	-0.01	-0.24	0.41	-0.17	0.80	0.07	0.11	-0.02	0.69
Pct Persons aged 0–19	-0.16	-0.85	-0.33	0.02	0.31	-0.24	-0.23	-0.90	-0.06	0.15	0.95
Pct Persons aged 35–64	0.12	0.68	0.19	0.01	-0.40	0.11	0.09	0.80	-0.03	-0.11	0.67
Pct Under 19 in education	0.29	0.86	-0.04	0.18	-0.13	0.32	0.26	0.79	-0.10	0.27	0.87
Ratio Population to household	0.05	0.86	0.26	-0.01	-0.37	0.11	0.24	0.92	0.03	-0.14	0.94
Pct Religious	-0.10	0.50	-0.10	0.31	-0.47	-0.23	-0.07	0.70	-0.05	0.21	0.59
Pct Indigenous	-0.46	-0.39	0.59	0.10	-0.29	-0.41	-0.33	-0.06	0.57	-0.45	0.80
Pct Unemployed	-0.51	-0.15	0.72	0.23	0.19	-0.22	0.06	-0.10	0.87	-0.26	0.89
Pct Youth unemployed 15–24	-0.56	0.26	0.52	0.38	0.17	-0.28	0.26	0.23	0.79	0.02	0.82
Pct Volunteer	-0.06	0.01	-0.54	-0.48	-0.53	-0.35	-0.07	0.13	-0.78	-0.21	0.80
Pct Families single parent	-0.70	0.00	0.66	0.04	0.09	-0.41	0.23	0.02	0.75	-0.38	0.94
Pct Over 20s TAFE qualification	-0.36	0.31	-0.54	0.43	0.32	-0.33	0.38	0.03	0.00	0.74	0.80
Pct Caring for children	0.38	0.10	-0.51	0.53	0.09	0.21	-0.18	0.07	-0.21	0.76	0.71
Pct Households with families	0.21	0.03	-0.58	0.53	0.23	0.08	-0.07	-0.08	-0.17	0.82	0.72
Pct Married	0.36	0.29	-0.76	-0.03	0.05	0.17	0.15	0.09	-0.69	0.51	0.80
Pct Families step blended	-0.27	0.06	-0.20	-0.24	-0.11	-0.30	0.17	0.01	-0.23	-0.11	0.18
Pct Families with no child/ren	-0.08	0.30	0.15	-0.40	0.08	0.07	0.39	0.13	-0.05	-0.32	0.28
Pct Population moved 1 year ago	0.64	0.40	0.39	0.21	-0.12	0.66	-0.18	0.52	0.15	0.01	0.77
Pct Population moved 5 years ago	0.71	0.48	0.15	0.03	-0.09	0.70	-0.06	0.51	-0.13	0.04	0.78

Table 6. Interpretation of factors

Factor	Community-level variables
Factor 1 – High SES/New Australians	Proportion of LGA residents who: · were not born in Australia · have parents who were not born in Australia · are from a non-English speaking background · speak another language at home · indicated they were religious, but not Christian. Proportion of LGA residents aged 15 and over who: · have a university qualification. Proportion of LGA residents aged 20 and over who: · have completed Year 12. Proportion of LGA residents aged 20-–24 who were attending an educational institution. Proportion of LGA households that: · were in the high income category ($2000+ per week) · were not in the low or middle income category.
Factor 2 – Retirees/older people	Proportion of LGA residents who were: · aged 65 and over · not aged 20–34 · not employed · not in the labour force · caring for someone with a disability · divorced or separated.
Factor 3 – Middle aged	The proportion of LGA residents who were: · not aged under 19 · aged 35–64 · religious. The proportion of LGA residents under 19 who were attending an educational institution. The ratio of LGA residents to households.
Factor 4 – Disadvantaged youth/Indigenous	The proportion of LGA residents who: · are Indigenous · are unemployed · are not volunteering. The proportion of LGA residents aged 15–24 who are unemployed. The proportion of LGA families that are single parent families.
Factor 5 – Families with children	The proportion of LGA residents who care for children. The proportion of LGA residents whose highest qualification is TAFE. The proportion of households occupied by families.

Using these five factors, we identified a range of community "types" for further analysis, corresponding to the communities within our dataset on students' aspirations. Each community "type" relates to a number of the community-level variables within each factor, while also reflecting the overarching equity target groups within Australian higher education policy. We include communities of relative advantage and communities in a range of geographic locations for comparative purposes. The community "types" are detailed in Table 7, below.

Table 7. Identification of case study communities

Factor	Community	Community 'type'
Factor 1	Damperia	Higher SES Anglo-Australians Major City
Factor 1	Teasel	Higher SES New Australians/NESB Major City
Factor 2	Excelsa	Lower SES Retiree community Major City
Factor 2	Pimlea	Lower SES High proportion of residents not in the labour force Inner Regional
Factor 3	Ironbark	Mid SES New Australians/NESB Middle-aged community Outer Regional
Factor 4	Olearia	Lower SES High proportion of Indigenous Australians High levels of unemployment Remote
Factor 4	Muellerina	Lower SES High proportion of Indigenous Australians Inner Regional
Factor 5	Oldfieldii	Mid SES High proportion of residents who care for children TAFE most common educational pathway Outer Regional

Introduction to the case studies

Case studies in the eight selected communities were undertaken in order to better understand how aspirations are formed within, and shaped by, local contexts. For each of the cases, we provide an infographic illustrating key community-level data, together with relevant survey data from our previous studies detailing the educational and occupational aspirations of students. To help interpret each infographic, a brief overview of the data is provided in Table 8, below.

Table 8. Infographic overview

Infographic category	Description
Australian Statistical Geography Standard (ASGS) Locality	Categorises each community as either a major city, inner regional, outer regional, remote, or very remote location.
Proportion of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander People	The proportion of residents in a community who self-identified as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander in the 2016 Census (rounded to protect the anonymity of the community).
Proportion of households where a non-English language is spoken	The proportion of households in a community where a non-English language is spoken, as reported in the 2016 Census (rounded to protect the anonymity of the community).
Top industries	Top industries of employment within a community, as reported in the 2016 Census. Grouped according to the Australian and New Zealand Standard Industrial Classification (ANZSIC).
Educational infrastructure	Accessibility of universities and Vocational Education and Training (VET) providers.
Unemployment rate	Labour force statistics for a community, as reported in the 2016 Census, compared to the state average.
Educational aspirations among young people (Years 3–12)	Survey data from the *Aspirations Longitudinal Study* or *Locating Aspirations Study*, indicating the highest level of education young people plan to complete.
Educational aspirations compared to community characteristics	Survey data from the *Aspirations Longitudinal Study* or *Locating Aspirations Study*, mapped against the highest level of educational attainment within a community, as reported in the 2016 Census.
Top 5 occupational aspirations among young people (Years 3–12)	Survey data from the *Aspirations Longitudinal Study* or *Locating Aspirations Study*, indicating the post-school occupational aspirations of young people according to the Australian and New Zealand Standard Classification of Occupations (ANZSCO).
Occupational aspirations compared to community characteristics	Survey data from the *Aspirations Longitudinal Study* or *Locating Aspirations Study*, mapped against existing occupations for all employed people aged 15 years and over within a community, as reported in the 2016 Census. Occupations are reported in relation to the following ABS categories: managers, professionals, technicians and trades workers, community and personal service workers, clerical and administrative workers, sales workers, machinery operators and drivers, and labourers.

There is considerable diversity across the eight case study communities. In relation to geographic locality as reported by the ASGS, three communities are located in major cities, two in inner regional areas, two in outer regional areas, and one in a remote area. The proportion of residents who self-identity as Indigenous ranges from less than 1 per cent to approximately 25 per cent, while the proportion of households where a non-English language is spoken ranges from less than 5 per cent to approximately 55 per cent. The top industries of employment and access to higher education providers generally reflect the geographic locale of each community, as well as broader SES patterns. However, the unemployment rate differs within and across each locality type, from well above the state average, to well below average.

The infographics summarise a number of important broad findings:

- In all communities, the proportion of young people who aspire to university is higher than the proportion of residents who have a university-level qualification.
- Females are more likely to express interest in university than males. In seven communities, the proportion of females who aspire to university is higher than the proportion of males. The one community that differs is the urban community of Damperia, where slightly more males aspire to university than females.
- Males are more likely to express interest in TAFE than females. In six communities, the proportion of males who aspire to TAFE is higher than the proportion of females. The two communities where more females aspire to TAFE are the remote community of Olearia and the inner regional community of Pimlea.
- Two outer regional communities stand out for the high proportion of young people who aspire to high school as their highest level of education: Ironbark (approximately 20 per cent of young people) and Oldfieldii (approximately 27 per cent of young people).
- Occupational aspirations are highly gendered, and some occupations are popular regardless of the community in which young people live. Commonly, females aspire to be teachers and veterinarians, while careers in the arts are also popular. In contrast, sports-related careers are popular among males, as well as policing, the defence force, and engineering.
- Students in higher SES urban communities aspire to more prestigious occupations, on average. Popular careers in the urban communities of Damperia and Teasel include medicine, law, and architecture.
- The proportion of young people who aspire to professional careers far exceeds the proportion of residents working in these careers across all communities.

Case study 1: Damperia

Major City
ASGS Locality

<1%
Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander People

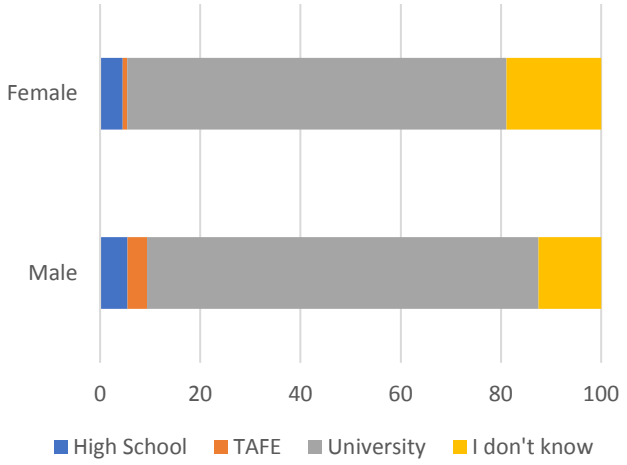
<30%
Households where a non-English language is spoken

Top industries: hospitals; finance; professional, scientific and technical services

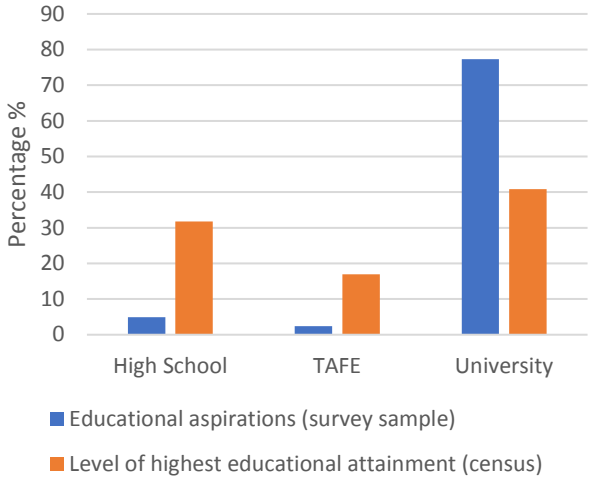
Educational infrastructure: access to at least six universities and numerous VET providers

Unemployment rate: well below the state average

Educational Aspirations among Young People (Years 3-12)



Educational Aspirations compared to Community Characteristics

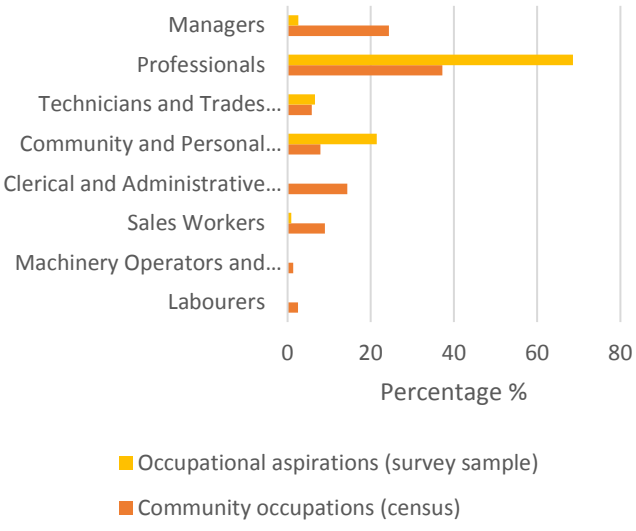


Top 5 Occupational Aspirations among Young People (Years 3-12)

Females
School teachers
Actors, dancers and other entertainers
Architects and landscape architects
Fashion, industrial and jewellery designers
Sportspersons

Males
Sportspersons
Other engineering professionals
Architects and landscape architects
Police
Air transport professionals

Occupational Aspirations compared to Community Characteristics



Community overview

Within the urban community of Damperia, university is already a familiar pathway for many young people. The combination of wealth, privilege, and access to university role models has created a culture of high expectations, so much so that post-school decision-making usually centres on *which* university to go to. Indeed, these students have many universities available in close proximity to the community, some of which are the most prestigious institutions in the country. Reinforced by the combination of home, school and community, going to university is a normalised and anticipated part of life.

Damperia: The power of privilege

Damperia is characterised by wealth and prosperity, with the median weekly income for families being almost twice the Australian average.

While the community, as a whole, could be described as representing the upper echelons of the social hierarchy, members of the community describe themselves as fairly ”standard” or “middle-class”:

> *We’re pretty well your standard middle-class Australia, so we have a small amount of Housing Commission homes, but everybody else lives in a single-dwelling property, either a house on a block, or there are some townhouses around that they come from … Most [children] are from two income families. Mum might be working part-time, and I would say the majority of them have got some sort of training or tertiary level education. Except for our Housing Commission. We have a few Indigenous students in the school, but that’s about our basic — we’re basically little middle-class Australia, with hardworking people. (Jen, teacher)*

Despite being located in the dynamic hub of a major city, the community has undergone very little change, helping to preserve this identity over time:

> *There have been no significant cultural changes. The Council is very focused on maintaining Goodenia [neighbouring suburb] and Damperia as a community-based suburb, so they’re very careful about development in the area, and overpopulation, for example, and very careful about maintaining community spaces where people can get together. (Greg, community member)*

> *So in terms of change, [it’s] only in the growth; more people, but no, still the same really nice feeling about Damperia. I think it’s had a really good reputation for a long time. (Jen, teacher)*

While the population of Damperia has grown in recent years, the same kinds of people are entering the area. The status and reputation of the community are strategically maintained by the local Council, with a significant concern being to suppress excessive development so that the “nice feeling” about Damperia prevails.

Living in a bubble

The privilege of the majority of community members in Damperia is evident in both their opportunities and constraints. Young people lead a middle-class lifestyle but one that is also sheltered from the wider world:

> *I always say we live in a bubble here, and I joke about it to other people, but we do. We live in an incredibly well-off part of the world, and Sydney. It’s a beautiful*

suburb, a great community. So, there's opportunities here for the kids, provided we don't have blinkers on and we keep our kids exposed. I don't know what to say. I mean, the kids here travel. There's such a variety of parents working in different jobs. I don't know. There's exposure to sport, arts, music. (Greg, community member)

Notwithstanding these opportunities, teachers at the local primary school are acutely aware of the close relationship between the rewards and pitfalls of leading a privileged life:

You want them to understand how lucky they are from the people that live 10 minutes down the road, because it is only 10 minutes down the road. It's an entirely different world and you don't know if those sorts of boundaries ever cross over. (Fran, teacher)

Fran conveys a sense that students in the community are often unaware of their relative privilege, noting a symbolic boundary that separates them from other worlds.

Reproducing privilege: From expectation to aspiration

Living in the Damperia bubble, the community has developed a culture of high expectations:

People have got high mortgages, high expectations, but not too over the top. … The expectation is that I would imagine with the majority of the population here that you're going to go on and do something, because we do something. I expected my three kids to go to university, and they went to university. I talked to them about that from when they were little, and I'd imagine that's what they're talking about, here. (Jen, teacher)

This expectation from parents and the community has then filtered into conversations that students have at school with their peers:

Most playground conversations are about which school they're going to, and there's no discussion about apprenticeships or other community paths. It's all university-focused for most kids, I would think. (Greg, community member)

Going to university is therefore normalised and anticipated to the extent that young people focus on which university to go to, rather than if they will go:

I'd like to go to university, yeah. Either Telopea [University] or Waratah [University]. (Jeremy, Year 6 student)

I'm thinking of Plumosa [University] … With my Mum, sometimes we talk about which university I should go to. My Mum went to Plumosa, and she did teaching for, I think, five years or something and she said it was a good one because, you know, it's local and it's easy to get to. That's what my Mum said, so yeah. (Shyama, Year 6 student)

The nomination of institutions in close proximity to Damperia is a clear demonstration of the opportunities available to these students. Even students in primary school already have a clear map of the possibilities available to them, including which institutions are "easy to get to" because they are not only familiar but they are "local". For Shyama, this process of decision-making has been verbalised within her family, resulting in a strong desire to follow in the footsteps of her mother by going to Plumosa University.

The familiar becomes a necessity

This level of familiarity is reinforced through the school, including the use of nearby university campuses as a resource for school excursions:

> *Last year I took Year 5 and 6 to Telopea University and we went to the [museum] and they were absolutely blown away with the size and scale and the magnificence of it, and as far as they were concerned it was the closest thing to Hogwarts they will ever get! So, you know, this is where you do medicine, this is where you do physics, chemistry. Law is down there, here's the library, and that's only part of it. And they were very excited. (Jasmine, teacher)*

With such a strong focus on higher education within the home, school, and community, any other pathway is perceived as being a bad return on investment:

> *[Parents] will expect their children to go on [to university]. They would be happy for them to have a trade, they would be happy. You know, I'll never forget this family … Two boys at one private school, two girls in another private school, and I ran into the Dad the other day, and I said, "How's Robert going?" "Oh, he's training to be a carpenter." And I think, "All that money. All that money, you could have saved." But anyway, I didn't. I bit my lip and went, "That's great, because he'll be a great carpenter." (Jen, teacher)*

High community expectations constitute the main challenge for young people in Damperia to get to university, who can face a significant psychological burden at a very young age:

> *I see now a lot more anxious children coming through. When you've got an eight-year-old that sits down and tells you that they suffer from anxiety, it can be very worrying. And there are times when there are children that live in sick bay, and we try to work out what the problem is, and remediate that the best way we can. So, I would imagine that if the children had high anxiety, if they have fear of failure, there's those that don't participate because they're afraid of making a mistake. So, I would think that mental health issues would be a challenge for kids going to university … I just think their families will be supportive, but anxiety is going to be the big cripple for them. (Jen, teacher)*

Fear of failure is key, as young people in Damperia do not want to be a disappointment. On the one hand, the high expectations within the community drive students towards the familiar post-school pathway of university. On the other hand, these expectations can generate pressure as students contemplate their futures.

Case Study 2: Teasel

Major City
ASGS Locality

<1%
Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people

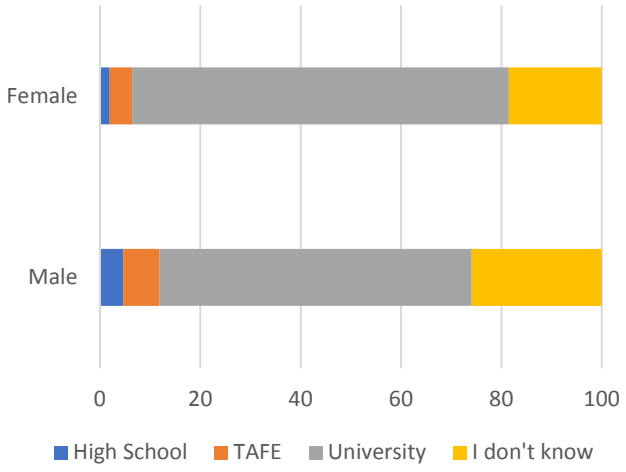
<55%
Households where a non-English language is spoken

Top industries: computer system design and related services; hospitals; food and beverage services

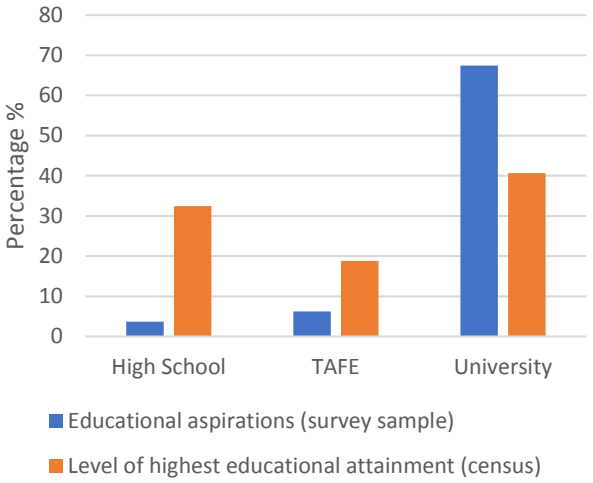
Educational infrastructure: access to at least six universities and numerous VET providers

Unemployment rate: on par with the state average

Educational Aspirations among Young People (Years 3-12)



Educational Aspirations compared to Community Characteristics

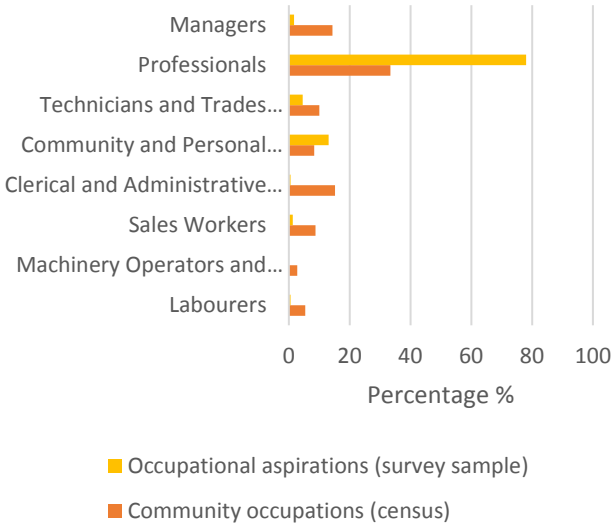


Top 5 Occupational Aspirations among Young People (Years 3-12)

Females
School teachers
Generalist medical practitioners
Judicial and other legal professionals
Authors, and book and script editors
Veterinarians

Males
Sportspersons
Other natural and physical science professionals
School teachers
Other engineering professionals
Generalist medical practitioners

Occupational Aspirations compared to Community Characteristics



Community overview

Teasel is a community that has undergone substantial change in recent decades, resulting in a dramatic shift to the socio-demographic profile of the area. With a high proportion of residents from first- and second-generation migrant backgrounds, the area has become a global city. While there is now immense diversity within the community, many young people share an aspiration for a university education and a prestigious career. Such aspirations stem from the culture of high expectations inculcated within the community. Indeed, higher education is almost inevitable, with competition, private tutoring, and access to numerous universities in close proximity all dominant features of the community.

Teasel: A suburb becomes a global city

Teasel is a bustling inner-city area that has undergone physical and social change. In particular, an astounding rate of development has substantially increased population density:

> *Teasel's changed enormously. The whole area has changed enormously due to massive over-development in the last 18 years. [My children] both went to the local public school, which went from a 350-student school to a nearly 500-student school in the time [they] were there. That was due to the sell-off of Teasel's [government asset], and 800-odd dwellings put in, which doubled the size of our suburb. (Mary, parent)*

There has also been an unprecedented shift in the kinds of people living in the area.

> *The Teasel community, I think, has gone through significant demographic change. Previously being very WASPish [White Anglo-Saxon Protestants]. But now, with the advent of high-rise apartments, which are really growing dramatically, the demographics have changed dramatically. I've actually seen the data and I think it's about 50 per cent Asian-background now in the area. And our school has a very high percentage of students from non-English-speaking backgrounds, largely Chinese, Korean, Indian, Armenian, which is a nice mix. And a sprinkling of many others cultures, Lebanese as well. (Melanie, teacher)*

With such a dramatic change—from a white, middle-class community to one that is increasingly ethnically heterogeneous—some traditional residents of the area have not responded positively:

> *I think there are a lot of people there who are from the Anglo, the WASPish background, the quarter-acre block, who have inherited their parents' houses, and I think they are going through shock, a little bit the way Angela Merkel's Germany is going through shock, you know? Sometimes the pace is faster than they can handle … And what happened in the Eastern suburbs, which was largely recorded in the Sydney Morning Herald as "white flight", I think there are elements of that occurring in the region now. (Melanie, teacher)*

For the remainder of the population, however, the increasing ethnic diversity has created a welcoming atmosphere:

> *I think, just for kids in general just to see yes, there are differences, but at the same time you can all still belong to the same place. (Lia, community member)*

It's very accepting. Like no matter where or what country or what part of Australia you're from you can feel very accepted here because of the diversity of races. (Henry, Year 9 student)

The key sentiment in Teasel is that while we might come from a variety of backgrounds, we accept you for who you are and, collectively, this makes Teasel special and unique.

Substantial diversity, but the same aspirations

While there is substantial diversity within the community, a unifying feature is its culture of high expectations:

All of the Asian kids would be forced to go to, expected to go to university, regardless of which one, they'd be expected to do that. (Mary, parent)

Some parents from overseas who did not have all the opportunities or the advantages, when they arrive here, they want to get the most out of everything for their children. They want the very best because they might have missed out on things in their own country. (Patricia, teacher)

This culture of high expectations is clearly manifest in the aspirations of young people in the Teasel community:

To do something in science firstly I would have to go to uni obviously, pay attention in my science classes. And yeah, so go to uni, maybe do a medicine degree, and I'd have to do a UMAT [Undergraduate Medicine and Health Sciences Admission Test] as well if I wanted to do medicine. (Aakar, Year 9 student, NESB)

When I was younger I wanted to be a teacher, then I wanted to be other things. But now I think I might want to be something to do with finance and maybe trade between Indonesia and Australia because we're learning Indonesian in classes and I quite enjoy it. (Sunshine, Year 7 student, NESB)

While students aspire to a range of occupations such as medicine, finance, and international trade, these are all relatively prestigious professions that are likely to be supported and encouraged by parents in the Teasel community.

The pressures of upward mobility

Even from a young age, students know that they are immersed in a culture of high expectations.

Well there's a fact that your parents expect much more of you than anyone else would usually do which means it puts a lot of stress on you that you must do your best. (Clint, Year 6 student)

Consequently, some residents report significant mental health issues among young people:

One of the biggest barriers is their parents, trying to live their dreams through their children and creating terrible anxiety. (Melanie, teacher)

There was one incident that happened that my daughter, as I said was in the selective stream, one of the kids in her class came second in English. She was from an Indian sub-continental family. Came second in the year in English in the class. It was Year 8 I think. She cried because she was going to get punished for not coming top. And the punishment at home, and this is what I was referring to

before as child abuse, that child had to sleep outside for coming second and not top in the class. (Mary, parent)

With the risk of such dire consequences, young people have access to support systems through their school and community. Lia is a social worker who works extensively with young people to support their mental health:

Just in the position I'm in, yeah, I get to see past the, I guess the image or the façade that people try and put up … So, it's just offering support really. It's like that saying, you can lead a horse to water but you can't force it to drink. Yeah just being there beside them. Walking through with them. Like, walking with them really. And just listening. I find that just listening to people can be [important] because some days people just want to be heard. (Lia, community member)

On the surface, young people might pretend to be alright, but support people like Lia are able to 'see past the façade'. Lia's strategy centres on building positive relationships, listening, and providing a safe space in which young people can voice their concerns.

University as an inescapable future

At present, however, it can be hard for young people in Teasel to escape these expectations given their lifestyle of private tutoring and competition:

Quite a large number of our students go to tutoring as well. In saying that, there are some parents who think that tutoring is more important than school which is interesting. So, they put more time into the work that they're doing there, but that's not the message that we send. (Joanne, teacher)

Indeed, the lure of higher education is spurred on as students start becoming familiar with university from an early age:

Jessica used to go to Plumosa [University] library to study on a Tuesday afternoon. They'd have sport on a Tuesday from 12:10. So all the Year 11s and 12s aren't forced to do a sport … and Jessica used to spend the afternoon over there. She got a good exposure just by going to the university. (Mary, parent)

In addition, young people from Teasel have a great deal of choice in terms of where they go to university. Students have at least five universities within relatively easy commuting distance that are recognised as "good" universities:

They've all got good names. And secondly, they can stay living with Mum and Dad, so you don't have that extra cost and commute times. … So, I think people try and do that. Also, the courses that they're going to do. Jessica's friend, who's becoming a paramedic, he's at [one nearby university]. He said he takes an hour and a half commute to his uni, but there's no other paramedic course in Sydney. (Mary, parent)

Mary summarises two related benefits of living in Teasel for young people who want to go to university: a smorgasbord of universities in close proximity with good reputations and status; and, no need to relocate, which keeps costs down as students can continue to live at home with their parents. As such, young people who aspire to university are able to focus on selecting their institution based on the course they seek to study.

Case Study 3: Excelsa

Major City
ASGS Locality

<5%
Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander People

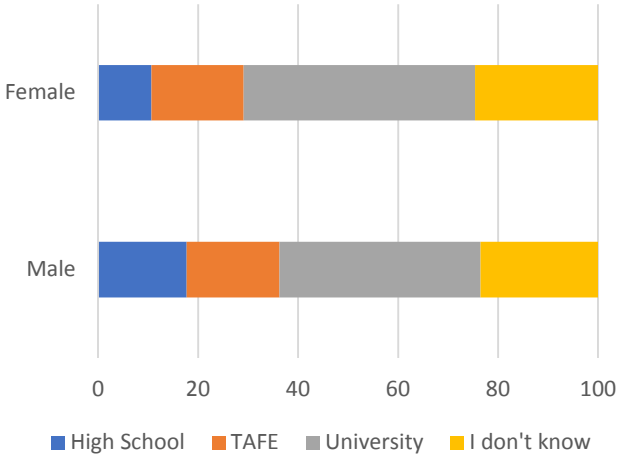
<10%
Households where a non English language is spoken

Top industries: hospitals; residential care services; food retailing

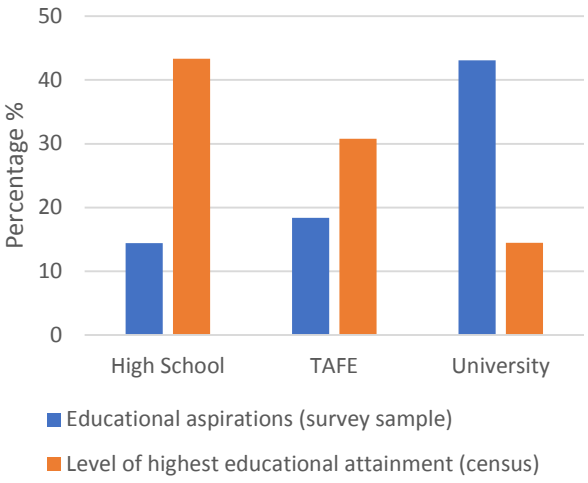
Educational infrastructure: one university and at least one state VET provider (TAFE) in the community

Unemployment rate: above the state average

Educational Aspirations among Young People (Years 3-12)



Educational Aspirations compared to Community Characteristics

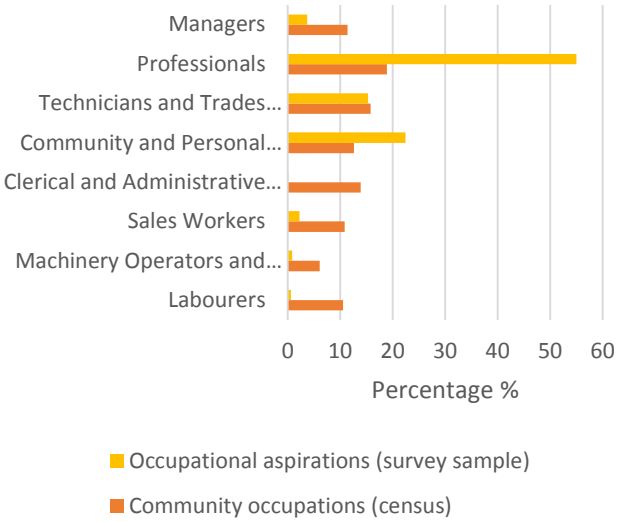


Top 5 Occupational Aspirations among Young People (Years 3-12)

Females
Veterinarians
School teachers
Actors, dancers and other entertainers
Animal attendants and trainers
Private tutors and teachers

Males
Sportspersons
Police
Defence force members – other ranks
Carpenters and joiners
Other engineering professionals

Occupational Aspirations compared to Community Characteristics



Community overview

Excelsa is a community in the early stages of transition. Historically a working-class community, university has not been the common post-school pathway taken by residents. However, this trend is changing. The local university has opened up higher education to local residents; more than half of commencing students at this campus are the first in their families to enter university. In addition, access to people within the community who have firsthand experience with university has started to provide an important 'bridge' informing the aspirations of young people. However, Excelsa urgently needs to be supported by infrastructure; a dire lack of professional roles and issues with public transport are key concerns that continue to impact student aspirations.

Excelsa: Waiting in the wings

Excelsa is located on the NSW coastal fringe. Historically, it has been demographically homogeneous, with very little socioeconomic diversity. In more recent years, changes to the community have led to small pockets of wealth in an otherwise blue-collar community:

> *It would be typically low socioeconomic in terms of its profile and demography. There's some patchy richness. There's some high net worth individuals who enjoy the beautiful environment and the lifestyle of Excelsa. I think it's predominantly working class. (Adam, university employee)*

Local employment options align with this blue-collar identity. Trade-related jobs and semi-skilled work dominate the employment landscape, along with unemployment:

> *One of your major employers will be things like [food processers and manufacturers]. Also, some of the joinery places, as in the joinery kitchen places, so you've got those sorts of things. But there's not massive numbers compared to the population shall we say. So that creates some problems there. (Kim, teacher)*

At present, then, a key challenge for professionals living in Excelsa is the need to commit a substantial portion of time commuting to the closest cities for work:

> *A lot of the intellectual capital of Excelsa gets on a train at 6 am in the morning and goes to Telopea or gets on a train at 6:05 and goes to Lillipilli. So, one of the challenges I guess we have, and industry and business has, is how do we actually retain that intellectual fire power, if that's what it is, so Excelsa can continue to grow and develop and exploit business opportunities in Excelsa? (Adam, university employee)*

Being so close to other cities manifests as a conundrum — it opens up employment opportunities that the community is not able to provide at present but, it is challenging to hold on to people to establish a similar presence locally.

Aspiration and embedded history

Being a predominantly working-class area with high levels of unemployment, higher education is not a customary post-school pathway taken by residents:

> *For a lot of them, it's breaking the welfare cycle where it's been a generational thing that they grow up and they just go on welfare; as their parents have done,*

as their parents' parents have done. So, it's a matter of breaking that cycle and making sure that they can see that there is something out there which they can aspire to. (Ronald, teacher)

With such a long history of intergenerational welfare dependency, some young people in Excelsa find it hard to imagine a higher education pathway. Indeed, there is a stark contrast between the few young people who do have a family history of higher education and those who don't:

With Mum being so high up in university, finishing a PhD and all that and getting accepted, I think they'd be quite upset if I didn't go … It's a set plan and I've had a lot of ways to — I know a lot of people that work at universities and my main thing is just trying to keep structured and staying well in school. (Ellin, Year 9 student)

In comparison, some of the young people from working-class backgrounds hold aspirations for university, but face a lack of exposure to university within their families *and* community:

Nobody I know in my family has gone to university or TAFE. My aunty might have because she does computer work and she gets paid lots of money. (Mel, Year 6 student)

Well as not very good as that sounds, I only know a few people that have ever talked about going to university … I don't know, some people more need to go to TAFE and stuff, but not many of them — I have friends that have thought about it but not many people talk about that. (Krystal, Year 6 student)

Many students, like Mel and Krystal, face silences in relation to higher education. The lack of exposure to university is particularly evident for Krystal, who is concerned to admit that hardly anyone in her life talks about university.

Actively disrupting history: The importance of exposure to higher education

For some students, such silences are interrupted when they are able to draw on other connections within their community as a tangible link to higher education:

I do gymnastics and some of my coaches have been to uni. One's studying podiatry I think — to be a podiatrist, and another wants to be a teacher. So, I know they're doing it now by studying hard and stuff. (Flora, Year 6 student)

In addition, schools in the area are making a concerted effort to implement a range of initiatives to expose students to university as early as possible:

The younger students, from [as] early as Year 8 have a pretty good idea because they visit universities, and they sit in weekly with university students who tutor them. They even do a few field trips there. And, you know, as recent as a couple of weeks ago there were students in Year 8 looking through UAC [Universities Admission Centre] guides to look at the possible courses that actually exist. (Brad, teacher)

While university is a relatively new pathway for most families, it is important that there are options available to attend university in close proximity to home. In recent decades, a university campus has been established within the community, but some families still prefer other institutions:

We have a very proud record, I think. I think this year in our commencing cohort we have 55 per cent first-in-family to come to the university. […] But] if Mum and

Dad went to University of Telopea, Johnny's going to go to University of Telopea aren't you Johnny? If Dad's a plumber they'll probably move into something more hands on. That's not surprising, but the point about some of these parents is that they're not thinking about the [local university]. (Adam, university employee)

Young people with a family history of university tend to choose more prestigious institutions outside of Excelsa. Nonetheless, the local university provides a critical space for newcomers to higher education. In particular, having access to this campus has sparked a notable trend of parents beginning to pursue higher education later in life, as mature age entrants:

Well, my Mum just finished uni a couple of year ago because she only decided she wanted to be a teacher just recently … So, yeah, it sounds like a lot of work. Go there frequently. Yeah, it seems worthwhile. (Dave, Year 6 student)

University may not have been possible, or viewed as a possibility, for Dave's mother when she was younger. Parents such as these play a critical role in nurturing aspirations within families, demonstrating that anyone can have a go and pursue a university degree.

Trying to change, while infrastructure lags behind

Despite this shift and the moves to encourage more young people to aspire to higher education in Excelsa, longstanding issues with public transport make the local university physically inaccessible for some residents:

Excelsa suffers from very, very poor public transport … It's as simple as in the absence of having a decent transport system that is more than a bus every two hours that goes on a defined route that captures part of Excelsa. It is very difficult for a lot of people who might otherwise come to university. I actually do see it as a category one issue. (Adam, university employee)

Unfortunately, poor public transport is accompanied by poor infrastructure. An absence of facilities and assets might have driven the current commuter workforce; however it has also created a perception that there aren't many prospects for young people:

If you are wanting to go to university and getting a job after that, I think that the kids really have to accept the fact that they are probably going to have to move. (Sharon, parent)

Talent is everywhere, but opportunity isn't. And what I see in Excelsa is not a lack of talent, it's a lack of planned coherent opportunity, and the investment that that requires. (Adam, university employee)

While Excelsa has a university and is physically close to other major cities, it doesn't yet have accompanying investment. These challenges deepen social inequalities. As such, young people who aspire to university must understand that moving might be their only option to find suitable work, continuing to perpetuate the loss of intellectual capital that is already a concern among residents.

Case Study 4: Pimlea

Inner Regional
ASGS Locality

<5%
Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people

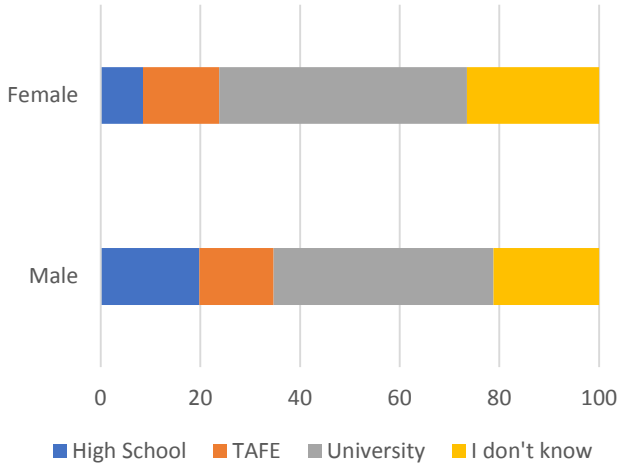
<10%
Households where a non-English language is spoken

Top industries: hospitals; food and beverage services; social assistance services

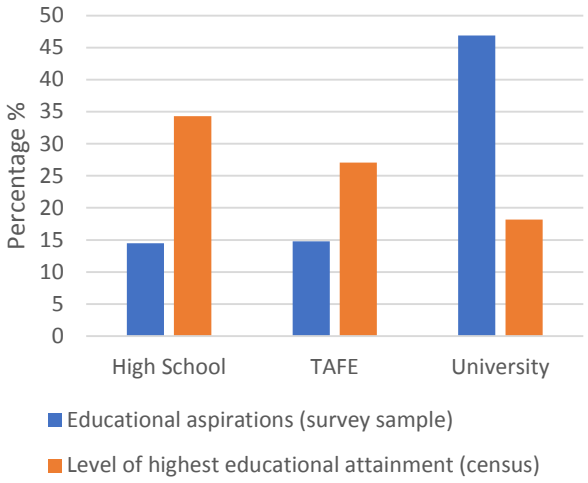
Educational infrastructure: closest university and state VET provider (TAFE) 45 minutes' away by car

Unemployment rate: well above the state average

Educational Aspirations among Young People (Years 3-12)



Educational Aspirations compared to Community Characteristics

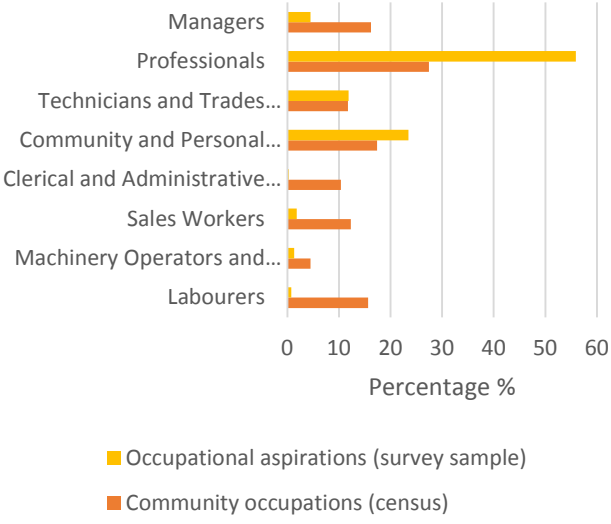


Top 5 Occupational Aspirations among Young People (Years 3-12)

Females
School teachers
Veterinarians
Primary school teachers
Animal attendants and trainers
Beauty therapists

Males
Sportspersons
Police
Other engineering professionals
Construction managers
Motor mechanics

Occupational Aspirations compared to Community Characteristics



Community overview

The town of Pimlea faces a range of challenges, including high levels of drug use and unemployment, coupled with limited employment opportunities for professionals. The main industry of dairy farming has declined significantly in recent years, with current emphases on hospitality and a small but steady tourism industry. While situated relatively close to a local university, limited infrastructure, particularly public transport, means that students have few opportunities for employment or accessing higher education while still living in Pimlea. As a result, young people in this community either embrace life in Pimlea or plan on leaving to pursue options that are further afield.

Pimlea: Seeking an alternative lifestyle

Pimlea is a small inner regional town with a large proportion of individuals and families who have moved to the region seeking alternative lifestyles. Jason, whose family has resided in Pimlea for three generations, has seen significant changes unfold, many of which came about when "hippies", or those who held different views to the more conservative local perspectives of the farming community, moved to the area:

> *Well, we grew up … and that was when the alternate, all the hippies moved to town then. And they probably revived a struggling dairy town … There's some great people, we've become family friends with a lot of these people with alternate views, because we just blended in a little bit. (Jason, community member)*

Diverse groups within Pimlea and the alternative lifestyles offered by those groups are seen as genuine, unpretentious, and a positive environment for young people. Many community members are proud of the uniqueness of the area in which they live. However, these views tend to be largely obscured by dominant representations of the community by outsiders, particularly in relation to the availability of drugs in the community. Many of the students we spoke to also referred to the blatant dealing and pervasiveness of drugs in the community as something of a norm, "You can't walk down the street without being offered drugs. That's a sensible answer. You actually can't anymore" (Richie, Year 10 student). The drug trade is largely aimed at those who do not reside in the community, thus contributing to the negative perceptions among community outsiders about the use of drugs. These characteristics of Pimlea are difficult to shift, given enduring assumptions about the town.

Resistance to governmentality

Mirroring the diversity within the community, attitudes toward formal education and schooling vary considerably among different groups. Linda, a teacher at the local school, suggests that attitudes towards education reflect the diverse backgrounds of those who live in the community:

> *It's such a diverse community and I mean we do have parts of the community who highly, highly value education and see that as really important and do look to higher education as a path for success in life. Generally, there is a small part of the community who I think are very anti-authoritarian and that includes their opinion of formal school education and the whole school system. (Linda, teacher)*

The "anti-authoritarian" views described by Linda, together with alternative lifestyles and "new age thinking" (Jason, community member) in the community, underpins alternative views on education and schooling. Bradley explains:

> *It's just a school isn't it? It's a government school and it's like the first stage of institutionalisation for our children. This is the life they've got to look forward to, you spend your life in a centralised institutionalised, regulated existence isn't it? … Like, I think there have to be more options for people to have the meaningful empowering expansive future without having to go through higher education as well. I think there should be other ways. And there are also other ways of empowering less privileged members of society and families as well so they also have choices other than just like filtering them all through this kind of educational institutionalisation process as well. (Bradley, parent)*

Alternative views about the value of education and an underlying critique of government institutions are prevalent in the school. Speaking about careers education, one teacher reported that his students want to "be known as a person, not as a container with their criteria" (Christopher, teacher). This point is reinforced by Michael who said:

> *I've taught the same subject as well and creating resumes and things like that. There's been a lot of resistance from the kids saying, you know, "you're trying to feed me into a job". Sort of this governmentality thing of, you know, the government wants me to work and you're working for them and you want me to work in that system. They really reject that and quite actively are against it at times. (Michael, teacher)*

Unviable futures: Unemployment and aspiration

Despite these views on education, the students we spoke to reported a wide range of aspirations, including for example: veterinarian, zoo keeper, English language translator (Roma, Year 10 student); environmental law (Casey, Year 8 student); photography or science (Trent, Year 10 student).

For other students, their post-school aspirations were particularly influenced by Pimlea's creative arts culture:

> *Yes, Verticordia [University] in Melbourne, where, from what I understand, there are a lot more sort of creative courses and a lot of our students seem to be quite attracted to those fields … The community, I think, values the arts possibly more than some other communities. Yes, I think that's why. It's been very encouraged in the school because of that, because the community has had a demand for it and it's been really well supported. (Linda, teacher)*

The arts are a key component of both the Pimlea community and local school. However, employment demand in this field, like many other areas of work, is limited within the area:

> *There isn't a lot of employment in town. The local businesses are very supportive of the community and particularly the school and the local supermarket, the bakery, most of the cafés, go out of their way to employ our young people. But otherwise there's very little, any sort of permanent or substantial sort of employment in town. (Linda, teacher)*

For many students, achieving career goals or attending university usually means that they will need to leave Pimlea. The notion of moving away from Pimlea for further study or to pursue careers is revealed in the way students spoke about their plans for the future:

> *I know I want to have a gap year but I also want to become a general practitioner doctor and I know that involves a lot of schoolwork so I reckon it wouldn't be such a bad idea to go straight to uni so it's still all in my head … [I want to work] somewhere where I can get a good job. So it's really just where the job takes*

me, I guess. I'd like to keep within New South Wales. That's closer to my home. I wouldn't want to go too far out. (Damian, Year 8 student)

Moving further afield and the stigma of Pimlea

Although there is a university campus just over 30 kilometres from Pimlea, students who decide to study at university usually move further afield. There are distinct community influences in this regard:

> *Interestingly … they might not go to the [local] university. I can't really think of almost any that have chosen to go to the [local] university. If they're going to university, it's like they just want to get out, want to get away. (Linda, teacher)*

Studying at the local university is an option that students are aware of, and yet universities further afield, while likely to bring challenges associated with relocating, are often more attractive for students who "just want to get out". The idea of creating a life outside of the community was reiterated by Camden, a Year 10 student who intends to go to TAFE and become a chef after he finishes school:

> *I think it's the most boring place and I can't wait until I get out of here … The day I leave I'll be very happy and I won't come back … I don't know, I think it's just more there's nothing to do and it's like full of druggy stoners. (Camden, Year 10 student)*

The need to escape his community might be seen as a search for independence and excitement beyond the borders of a town that has little in the way of facilities for young people. For other students a strong connection to the community holds them in place:

> *A lot of them are linked to Pimlea and don't want to not be linked. They're happy with that link and they don't want to be anywhere else; even for work experience. They don't want to travel to [another town] for work experience where a lot of the different opportunities are. (Alex, teacher)*

The reluctance to travel contributes to the challenges young people experience in finding work or pursuing further study. Access to public transport is limited:

> *There's also no public transport — well there is but very, very limited, just one bus service into [one town] or up to [another town] and even that's harder to get to. So, it definitely impacts on what students do. I mean if they're planning on getting a job in [a nearby town] they usually end up moving too. (Linda, teacher)*

The lack of public transport means that, for students living in Pimlea, thinking about their educational and occupational aspirations involves more than identifying something they wish to pursue. It also requires them to think about where they are willing to live.

Case Study 5: Ironbark

Outer Regional
ASGS Locality

<5%
Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people

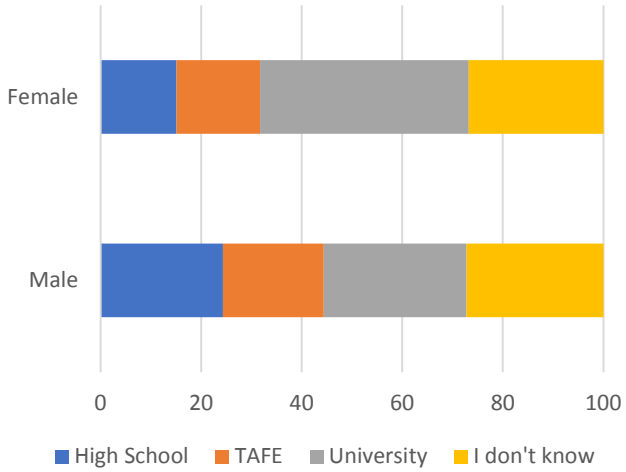
<25%
Households where a non English language is spoken

Top industries: food product manufacturing; beverage and tobbaco product manufacturing

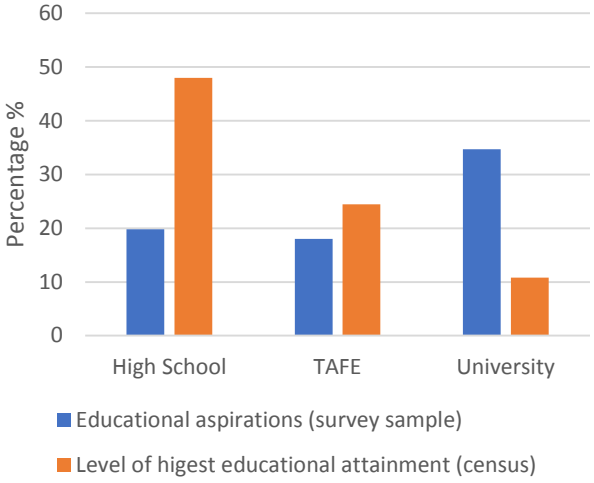
Educational infrastructure: closest university more than 2 hours away by car; at least one state VET provider (TAFE) in the community

Unemployment rate: below the state average

Educational Aspirations among Young People (Years 3-12)



Educational Aspirations compared to Community Characteristics

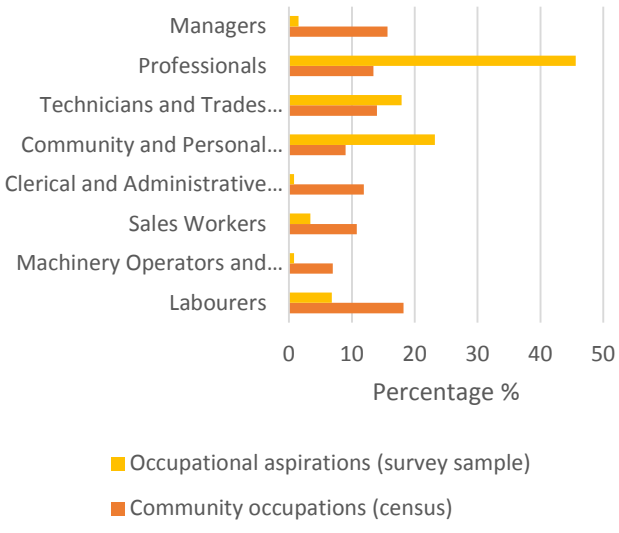


Top 5 Occupational Aspirations among Young People (Years 3-12)

Females
School teachers
Registered nurses
Hairdressers
Beauty therapists
Photographers

Males
Sportspersons
Motor mechanics
Other engineering professionals
Building and plumbing labourers
Other natural and physical science professionals

Occupational Aspirations compared to Community Characteristics



Community overview

Within the community of Ironbark, the relative prosperity generated by the local agricultural industry presents an attractive option for many young people. Heavily reliant on water, which could potentially decline at any time, this prosperity stands in stark contrast to the drought experienced in many other regional communities in Australia. The lure of quick money is strong for many families, some of whom remove their children from school to work during harvesting. At present, securing at least a TAFE qualification is an important focus in the community, while having to relocate to pursue university away from the safety of family is a considerable affective and practical challenge to higher education aspirations.

Ironbark: Prosperity underpinned by agriculture

Located in Western NSW with a population of more than 20,000 residents, the outer regional township of Ironbark forms a major regional centre for many smaller communities in the surrounding area. This agricultural community is described by community members as "ethnically diverse":

> *Ironbark's very multicultural today and I think, in my last role at Council, they said there were 70 different speaking languages here which just shows how multicultural it is after hearing those kinds of stats. But it's been documented that in the early days a lot of [Europeans] were here and immigrated just to help with the establishment of the [irrigation system] which meant all those canals that basically turned a semi-arid area into this kind of oasis which allowed farming and all that kind of stuff to occur. (Darren, Indigenous community member)*

Buoyed by the fruits of these irrigated farmlands, community members spoke of the prosperity associated with the diversification of crops, but were also aware that their situation is somewhat precarious:

> *And then that's the great, I suppose, value of a place that's rich in agriculture is that—and this probably highlights the diversity of farmers now—they don't just plant the same crop year after year. And most of them will have two crops because they can water it. They're not relying on rain. They can actually water their crops through irrigation, which is a huge advantage. […But] without water, these places would die, and I mean they would shrivel up and die because we can't have the agriculture that we currently have. (Jim, teacher)*

Despite the relative prosperity associated with agriculture, there are large socioeconomic differences in the township. Staff members at one of the local schools refer to the divide in the community in terms of access to economic resources and the status associated with the various types of work available:

> *Well that's the thing about Ironbark, we have both a very high end and a very low end … But most of the kids that come from the families that are more at the higher socioeconomic status, they go to the boarding schools or they go to the Catholic school. The kids who come to us are more of the people who work for the wineries, and work for the farmers, and who work in town as part of the community. So, it's a different kind of town, and there's big divides between where people work and how they work. (Ursula, teacher)*

Indeed, the community is founded on the ethos of a 'self-made' worker — of a market-driven meritocracy that rewards individual effort and hard work. Community members suggest that there is work to be found in the community, if work is what one wants:

> *Anyone who's not employed in Ironbark has chosen not to be employed. Once again, unlike many country towns, we have an abundance of work. If you're not working here, you've chosen not to work, because you could walk into 20 places today and get a job. (Jim, teacher)*

A seasonal approach to education

Due to the reliance on agriculture and seasonal growing patterns, community members in Ironbark describe a "seasonal approach to schooling" for students from families who rely on the ready money that can be made during harvesting:

> *So, we'll have kids go missing at certain harvest times. At the moment they're just about to start picking pumpkins, which you can do to a certain extent with machines, but you still need people walking behind, pick up the ones that fall to the ground … We'll have kids who will miss school or who'll come in late. A lot of the harvesting, particularly in summer is done early in the morning, starting in dark, and then they will come in late sometimes or the parent's not there to bring them into school or give them breakfast, those sorts of things. (Jim, teacher)*

During picking season, education can take second place to the necessities of agricultural life, especially for families whose incomes are reliant on a successful harvest. In a community influenced by relative prosperity, tensions are therefore manifest between formal education and the pull of local work, creating distinct attitudes towards education:

> *Especially when we've got a very broad range of socioeconomic – we've got quite a low socioeconomic base for a lot of our kids. So, they come from poor, working class [families], or they come from families where they don't really value higher education … So, we have a lot of kids who are being pushed to do well because they come from families that don't have a lot, and you have other ones who are being pushed to get into the workforce instead. So, there's a big contrast there with how different people value [education]. (Ursula, teacher)*

Given the prosperity of Ironbark, in combination with the access to low-skilled jobs and the pressure to start earning money early, local schools are attempting to ensure that students gain at least a trade qualification, rather than no post-school qualification at all:

> *A lot do go straight into work, and not necessarily trades. We're certainly trying to build up a base for employers who can provide trades for our kids, whether it be before they finish Year 12 or after they finish Year 12. To provide, I guess, that potential for better stability later on down the track and have a qualification, rather than being a labourer. (Jim, teacher)*

Aspirations for university: Weighing up the options

Despite pressure to start work early and contribute to family finances, the young people we spoke to in Ironbark were keen to pursue a range of post-secondary pathways. A number of the students presented multiple options as "something to fall back on", including following university or trade pathways:

> *Well, I want to do something that has sport, but I also want to go to uni … If my sporting career doesn't go out how I plan it to go out, then I would have something to fall back on, which is university. (Juniper, Year 8 student)*

However, limited access to a university campus means that for students to attend university, they must leave town. As a result, university participation rates are lower than average:

> *Our university rate is relatively low, certainly below average. There's no university in town, so everyone who goes to university from Ironbark leaves town. (Jim, teacher)*

As such, many students negotiate and weigh up their options in relation to staying in Ironbark and options available to them further afield. Heiko, for example, plans on studying at TAFE *and* university and, in weighing up plans for the future, his sense of community remains central:

> *Like there's the music side of me and then I'm also a hospitality student, so that's why I'm doing a VET [Vocational Education and Training] course for that. There's also a lot of things that I want to do to help this town as well. I've seen, growing up here, seeing all sides of this town and, like, what I want to do to help the youth out and bring in different programs. I want to go to uni to study business and build a business up and through that business hopefully I can give something back to this town … My mind is more going to university. Still I would love to do the VET course. My mind is bracing on the university because I want to be the first in my family to go to a university and graduate and get all that, and stuff like that. (Heiko, Year 11 student)*

Why would you go to university?

The utility of a university education is in question when young people from Ironbark leave school and look for career opportunities. For all but a small minority who head to university, career goals are circumscribed by the wealth of local opportunities:

> *My brother … was offered a school-based traineeship as an electrician … So, he did that for the two years, then they offered him an apprenticeship. Now he's earning more money than me … So, when you've got opportunities like that, as if you're not going to take it. Why would you go to uni when you can study here at TAFE, earn big money, especially during vintage season? They can earn up to two grand a week. Why would you go to uni, do you know what I mean? (Kathleen, teacher)*

While schools in Ironbark do their best to inspire student aspirations for university, an interview with two Year 11 students highlights the potential forces that pull them away from this pathway. For instance, one student Scott aspires to higher education, however his view that "wineries offer a lot of jobs, lots of kids tend to end up there" sounds somewhat fatalistic. Josh, another university aspirant explains, "Some of our friends just want to stay and get a trade or something, they don't think uni is cut out for them". These students recognise the immediate employment opportunities available in the local area and cast doubt on their suitability for university. This uncertainty about whether "uni is cut out for them" is unsurprising given how removed higher education is from their current worldview. Staying in Ironbark to 'get a trade or something' offers a much more familiar pathway.

Case Study 6: Olearia

Remote
ASGS Locality

<25%
Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people

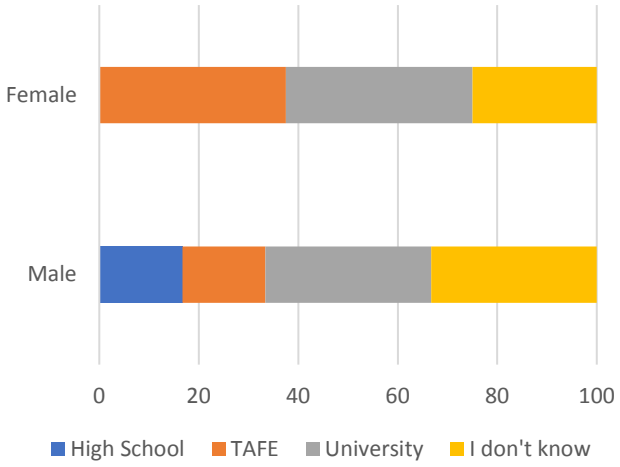
<10%
Households where a non English language is spoken

Top industries: agriculture; preschool and school education

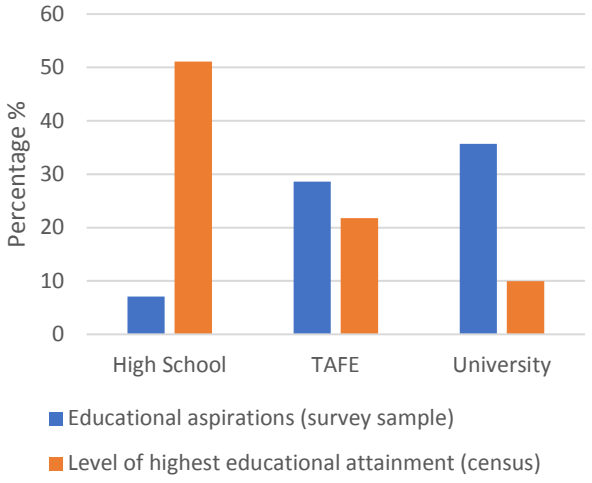
Educational infrastructure: closest university more than 6 hours away by car; state VET provider (TAFE) 2 hours' drive away by car

Unemployment rate: on par with the state average

Educational Aspirations among Young People (Years 3-12)[a]



Educational Aspirations compared to Community Characteristics

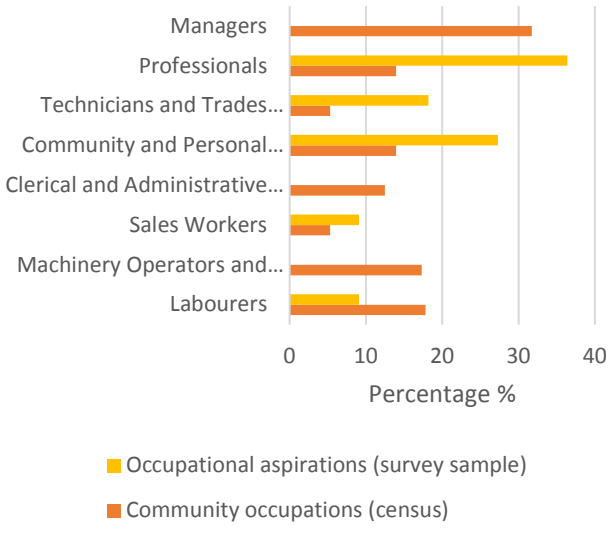


Top 5 Occupational Aspirations among Young People (Years 3-12)

Females
Veterinarians
Early childhood teachers
Chefs
Police
Sportspersons

Males
Other natural and physical science professionals
Medical imaging professionals
Motor mechanics
Police
Mixed crop and livestock farm workers

Occupational Aspirations compared to Community Characteristics



[a]Due to the small sample size, there were no female students who indicated aspirations for a high school education in Olearia.

Community overview

Within the community of Olearia, there is encouragement for young people to go onto further study, whether in the form of university, TAFE or traineeships. However, the lack of professional role models and enormous structural challenges mean that young people have very limited understandings of post-school work or study options. Reduced access to services, resources, and exposure to the wider world limit students' imagination about study and work in concrete ways. For those who do dream of jobs and further study, the challenges of leaving Olearia are paramount. There is no easy way to access either further study or even basic, post-school pathways.

Olearia: Excruciating drought and decline

Olearia is a remote community located within a historically rich agricultural district that produces wheat, cotton and wool, and includes significant areas of large-scale grazing of cattle and sheep. Community members participating in this study were quick to highlight the best features of their community life as a tight-knit family-focused culture:

> *[Our town is] probably not that great if they're on the outside looking in … But once you're in here it's a different atmosphere. It's a nice close little town ... The aeroplane mob, the spray mob, when we're in a flood and everyone's stranded he won't charge. He'll drop our groceries and medication and he'll come and pick you up. He's our personal [State Emergency Service] … That's what they're like. That's what everyone's like. They'll give you the shirt [off their backs]. (Catherine, parent)*

This warmth is juxtaposed with a recognition that Olearia has its challenges. In general, the town is characterised by disadvantage and the townsfolk clearly recognise this position:

> *The community itself is low socioeconomic of the highest order … That's pretty much our community. Quite poor, and as result that impacts on our school as well. (Julie, teacher)*

The population of Olearia has declined significantly over the past two decades, closely linked to limitations in locally available social and economic resources. Hardship has been compounded by poor, back-to-back growing seasons as a result of an "excruciating" drought (Lucille, teacher) that has lasted more than 18 months, set against a backdrop of a series of successive droughts since 2000 (also known as the Millennium Drought[5]). Additionally, the increasing use of short-term backpacker labour, rather than local seasonal workers, has reduced opportunities for locals:

> *It's not very — the people who own the businesses, they like to get in backpackers because they pay them less money, so really the townspeople don't really have a chance at getting a job around our community as such. (Jasmine, Aboriginal Education Officer)*

[5] For more information on the Millennium Drought see http://www.bom.gov.au/climate/updates/articles/a010-southern-rainfall-decline.shtml

A drought of opportunities

The array of changes for this community, including broader regional decline, drought, and the increased availability of backpacker labour, has resulted in a tangible decline in the capacity of young people to access work:

> *Most work here is maybe going and working in the kitchen at the pub and that's it. The only other work is farm work. So, there's no work here for the kids, not like when we were growing up. When there was more work, it was heaps better. At the moment you've got the butcher and there's just the butcher. There's not much, really not enough. (Catherine, parent)*

Farm consolidation, as a result of successive years of drought, has also reduced farming middle-management. In turn, this has meant fewer role models in the town to help expand students' aspirations:

> *We were a much more prosperous town, we had a lot more middle-class White families, a lot more middle management, a lot of university people on properties who had degrees, who were educated and therefore valued education. Smaller properties, they've been sold to larger companies. Larger companies tend to employ backpackers or casual workers, or contractors so our demographics have changed noticeably … So the highest role models or the most academic or educational role models have gone … There's no role models, you know, there's nothing out there to say "if you work really hard at school, this is where you'll be". (Lucille, teacher)*

Indigenous people living on their traditional lands face a more insidious and culturally-entrenched problem. According to some members of the community, local businesses do not like to employ Indigenous adults or young people:

> *It's not very good. Well as an Aboriginal person, there's not many opportunities for young Aboriginal kids in our community. Because I don't know, they just don't — the school is the only place that really employs Aboriginal people to be honest. (Ehsa, parent)*

Limited opportunity, fading aspirations

When asked what they wanted to do after school, primary students were able to nominate specific careers and understood that university study was required to achieve these aspirations:

> *Go to university … Become a doctor … that helps with people that have like broken arms and they're sick. (Shakil, Year 3 student, Indigenous)*

In contrast, high school students did not often have a clear vision for their post-school life, potentially aware of the challenges in accessing post-secondary education or careers in town. Lora, a Year 12 student, described how her aspirations for university had changed over time, as she became increasingly aware of the barriers that she faced:

> *I used to say I'd want to go to uni, when I was younger. But, as I got older … everything changed, and it just got too hard. (Lora, Year 12 student, Indigenous)*

Like many other remote communities, Olearia faces complex challenges including remoteness and low population density. These combined structural influences mean there is no critical mass of students in the senior years of high school:

Not many go through to Year 12, see? Not many at all make it all the way through, not many really go out to succeed from here. But there's not a lot for them to help them succeed either. Year 11 and 12 — it's just basic here. To do any of the bigger, better stuff you've got to have a lot of willpower because you don't really get a teacher with it so you've got to be able to sit [by yourself] … If you wanted to go on to university you sit there and do your own work, because you're not with the other kids that are just doing Year 11 and 12. (Catherine, parent).

Another challenge for those in Olearia is the physical boundary of the levee bank. Like many towns located on or near a major river, the flood levee provides a physical barrier protecting the township from flood. However in Olearia, this levee also acts as a psychological barrier:

My kids … have that physical and psychological barrier of that levee bank … This town is so isolated and forgotten. (Julie, teacher)

Push, pull and static

A uniform narrative exists about the barriers and challenges faced by young people for either post-school study or work pathways. First and foremost is the difficulty of leaving this close-knit community:

One, they don't feel comfortable going. Two, there's no one holding their hand over there. Like, it's a comfort thing. And [it's] the same with going to TAFE or uni — it's just that initial week of, "Oh my god, this place is scary." "It's alright — you're going to get over it" … The Indigenous programs now that they have at universities are brilliant — so that's overcoming that. But then there's the non-Indigenous kids that are here too, that are still just as scared. So yeah, it's just hard. (Wynona, teacher)

In addition to the pull of home, substantial financial barriers confront young people who move away for study or work. Even for parents who are relatively well-paid, supporting living-away students is an expensive prospect. When considering ways to encourage young people to enrol in and complete university, teachers and Indigenous community members indicated that having more university representatives visit the town would open the eyes of young people to possibilities for their futures. They would like TAFE to consider delivering courses for young people in the town, rather than making young people travel to the nearest town, which can be more than a day's trip, requiring an overnight stay. With an even wider vision, one parent saw provision of early interventions as essential because currently no services are available in the town to assess the children during vital early stages of schooling, particularly in relation to eye sight, hearing, speech, and behaviour. These fundamental needs must be adequately met before young people can even begin to feel like they are in an advantageous position to pursue their post-school aspirations.

Case Study 7: Muellerina

Inner Regional
ASGS Locality

<15%
Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people

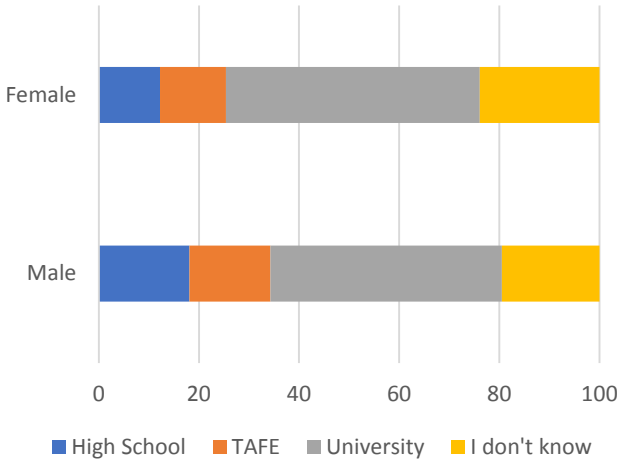
<5%
Households where a non English language is spoken

Top industries: residential care services; food retailing; preschool and school education

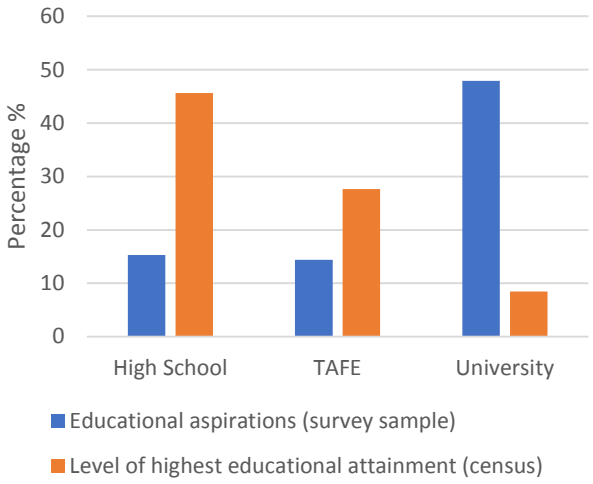
Educational infrastructure: closest university more than 1 hour away by car; at least one state VET provider (TAFE) in the community

Unemployment rate: above the state average

Educational Aspirations among Young People (Years 3-12)



Educational Aspirations compared to Community Characteristics

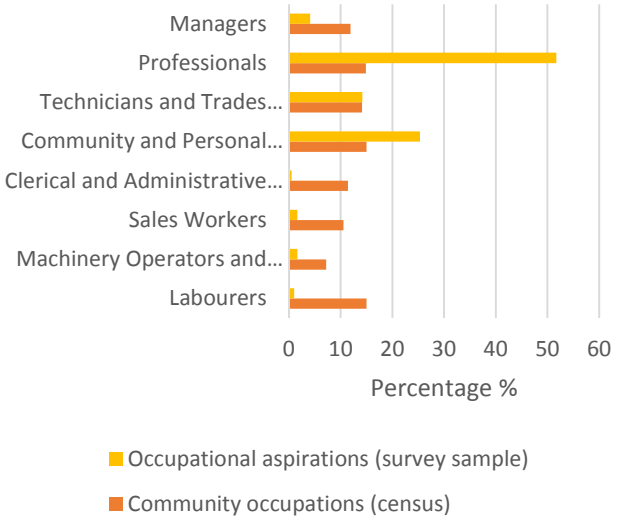


Top 5 Occupational Aspirations among Young People (Years 3-12)

Females
School teachers
Veterinarians
Hairdressers
Registered nurses
Actors, dancers and other entertainers

Males
Sportspersons
Police
Defence force members – other ranks
Veterinarians
Motor mechanics

Occupational Aspirations compared to Community Characteristics



Community overview

Even among people who love living there, Muellerina is frequently characterised as deeply troubled by division. Conflicts between specific communities in the local area have exerted, and continue to exert, an enduring and material impact on both the country and surfside towns which together comprise the broader community of Muellerina. Limited local employment, intergenerational unemployment, and challenges to accessing higher education have severely curbed the aspirations and opportunities of many young people living in the area.

Muellerina: A community divided

Muellerina LGA comprises the regional community of Muellerina and the coastal community of Caladenia. Many families have relocated to the area, especially to the smaller community of Caladenia, in an effort to move away from the hustle and bustle of major cities. These parents have retained high ambitions for their children's education:

> *They have very high expectations for our kids. Our kids do achieve really well, but there is an expectation that we're going to be onto that. [There's also] a very large push towards holistic education and environmental education in this area … A very large push to make sure that it's not just about reading and writing and literacy and numeracy. (Andrew, teacher, Caladenia)*

The feeling that residents of Caladenia are "living the dream", is very strong. Ellie, a parent, sees "community" as a key influence on children's achievements in life:

> *Sometimes the community that the child comes from really determines how that child will succeed or not succeed. Caladenia has got a really strong community because of the parents, and the background of the parents. The kids here generally will be okay, generally will find jobs, or find careers, or go to university and do all these great things because it is a more affluent area compared to Muellerina. (Ellie, parent, Caladenia)*

However, residents of Caladenia only have access to a primary school. After Year 6, students must travel to Muellerina in order to attend high school. While Muellerina is geographically close, Caladenia residents view the community as quite different from their own:

> *Caladenia is a very unusual part of Muellerina because the kids out here are very protected by a very protected community … When they hit high school, the shock is enormous. They are in this little tiny school and there's 25 kids in their grade and they go into high school and there all these other kids and there's things happening that they haven't seen out here … I think our kids find it quite difficult. (Andrew, teacher, Caladenia)*

A great town with a bad reputation

The township of Muellerina comprises multiple "communities" itself and, as a consequence, is struggling on many fronts. Most residents would agree that the town of Muellerina has a "difficult" reputation:

> *I know we do have a bad rep with, it might be domestic violence or theft or anything like that and people just say it. It's out in the open … Whereas other*

communities, they hide it … We talk about it so we can try and fix it. (Courtney, parent, Muellerina)

Residents from Caladenia, who expressed concern about students starting secondary school in Muellerina, are reported to be “stuck up” (Dustin, Year 10 student, Muellerina). His school mate Dayna supports this assessment, demonstrating a clear sense of pride in her home town:

We have a lot of respect … I mean, we have really nice people here but that's with every town. You have nice people and you have not so nice people. But like Dustin said, the beach areas tend to have stuck-up people. But in Muellerina we're a better community. (Dayna, Year 10, Muellerina)

In addition, having lived in the town for more than two and a half years, Andrew observes that there is an obvious division between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people within the community:

There’s, without a doubt, a cultural divide in the town that you don’t see in a big city. Essentially in Muellerina, there are two: dark or white. (Andrew, parent, Muellerina)

The Aboriginal community in Muellerina includes many people who were part of the Stolen Generations and continue to live with the trauma of being removed from their homes and families. This history of discriminatory and punitive practices is still a source of vivid, painful memories for many Indigenous people in the town:

Our Indigenous grandparents weren't allowed at any school, some of the younger ones were allowed but they had to sit in the corner or they weren't allowed in the same room … If they did something wrong the punishments were quite severe. And so those stories were told to their children and so people my age, they're having kids and they've still got those ingrained things because that's what they were taught, “Education’s not the way to go, you don't need to go to school, and you can survive just as good”. “You can get the dole” … I can't sort of compare it to other areas, but with the Stolen Generation, we had a lot of parents were stolen when they were children especially if they went to school, they were taking them from the school … So, there's lots of things in the community that make education hard to [provide]. (Courtney, parent, Muellerina)

Racism and discrimination are regularly described in Aboriginal community members’ accounts of what it is like to live in this town:

We still get followed around at shops and we could be the only one in shops. I’ve been asked in shops not to use their change rooms. You’re always the last one served even though you’re the first one there. Employment — you can guarantee you could have the best reference and everything and you still won’t get it. You walk around the shops and there’s not many Aboriginal people working in any of the shops locally and a lot of the kids have finished their Year 12, a lot have done extra training and they still don’t get [jobs] … Education doesn’t get you a job in Muellerina, it’s who you know. (Tammy, Aboriginal Education Officer, Muellerina)

Another challenge to employment prospects for young people within Muellerina is the decline of local industry over recent years:

It's probably changed over the time that I’ve been here, from a child until now. I actually came to this school as well, myself … The community is quite

disadvantaged now. A lot of high unemployment … Even if you look down the main street, every shop was filled with businesses. There's only a few left … This town is sort of dying. (Abbey, teacher, Muellerina)

Townspeople of Muellerina are also very aware of how decline in local industry narrows the options for their youth. Community members reported limited prospects for school leavers who choose to stay and seek employment in the area:

They just keep going, they get the training, they get the certificates, but all the certificates don't lead to employment for our people, there's none, there is no employment opportunities unless they leave town … So, there's nothing here for our kids full stop. I've got two grandkids attending this school here today … I've got no hope for them, the workforce, what are they going to do when they get older? Are they going to become part of the pensioners? (Caleb, community member, Muellerina)

(Im)possible futures: How can you aspire, when you can't be what you can't see?

Broadly, primary school students from Muellerina share similar career aspirations with others throughout Australia. A substantial proportion of students reported aspirations for professional roles and to obtain a university degree.

I would like to have a degree in science, particularly one to do with physics … Originally, I was into astronomy for a while and I thought I just wanted to know a bit more in depth about that concept and so we searched it and then I found astrophysics and going into depth about what that's about, I came to the idea that maybe that's what I should go for. (Zachary, Year 11 student, Indigenous, Muellerina)

However, community members offered some confronting insights into some of the barriers that students from Muellerina face in achieving their aspirations:

For students that are poorer, their attendance will be lower. That will reflect a whole lot of factors that cause a student to stay away from school on a particular day. I don't mean truancy, but I mean needing to be away. They'll have poorer housing and their health will be lower, so they get sicker. Members of their family will be sicker, the families will be larger, the houses will be more crowded … For many of those students who have poor attendance at school, they also have poor participation. Those same students will have poor attention, they won't finish their education. They'll drop out and be lost in the system and they'll then survive as poor, or they'll move into the black economy, the dark economy and they'll work in crime, prostitution, drugs. That will be part of their life in order for them to survive … That's not the majority of students, but it's a lot of our poorest, most disadvantaged. (Dave, teacher, Muellerina)

Teachers from Muellerina frequently linked the comparatively narrow view of the world held by students in the area with their capacity to aspire to a different life, let alone one that engaged with the possibility of higher education:

I think [the biggest challenge for kids in this community in terms of achieving education or career goals is] probably to see and believe that they can do it … I think it's hard when they can't see it. They can't see it around them … It's very hard to say that "You can go to university". What's that? They haven't heard about it. (Abbey, teacher, Muellerina)

Exposure: Seeing what's possible

Alongside the limited exposure to a variety of career aspirations, many students in Muellerina have limited exposure to higher education:

> *Parents care about their kids. They want them to succeed; they just don't necessarily know how to give them the role models or how to show them the right alternative pathways. So, they know school's important and they come in and support it but they don't know really. They're just doing the best they can … High schools have got to change that and as far as our role models here go, we've got one parent, out of all of our whole population, just one parent with a degree. (Gerard, teacher, Muellerina)*

It is important to return to the student perspective albeit briefly here, to balance this view. For example, Year 10 student Arianna's interactions with her father who has just completed university as a mature age student, motivate her on her own journey to be a midwife:

> *My Dad's currently, he just finished his uni degree in teaching, which he realised he wanted to do at 16 but never got around to it … So, he's pushing – well, not really pushing me but he's wanting me to succeed and not have to wait so long to realise what I wanted to do. So, they're really encouraging in that type of way. (Arianna, Year 10 student, Indigenous, Muellerina)*

The importance of role models is also illustrated by Courtney:

> *I think for high school kids, they can see, "If they can do it, why can't I?" They've got that positive role model to aspire to. Instead of hearing someone say "No, don't worry about it". It's like, "No go and do it. Yeah, you can do this". Giving them that bit of excitement of what you can do and showing you can do it. You don't have to just stay in Muellerina. (Courtney, parent, Muellerina)*

Closing the gap between dreams and reality

Despite the challenges in this community, there are many success stories in Muellerina:

> *You're not dealing with statistics, you're dealing with individual students and you do your very best, and I expect my staff to do their very best, with each student you've got … You know, you'll have successes. Often, the successes won't be apparent at the time, but they become apparent later. (Dave, teacher, Muellerina)*

Much of the support that nurtures aspirations comes from the school:

> *I think some kids really think seriously about both [uni and TAFE] … We've got a very active careers teacher and I think there's a lot of visits from various universities, talking to students and things like that. But quite often, because they don't know how to strive, they feel like it's beyond them to get there and it's not. It's not. It's just that they're intimidated by what it means, I think. (Tyrone, teacher, Muellerina)*

Despite a university presence in Muellerina high schools through university outreach activities, students still face considerable barriers in accessing higher education. Indeed, Abbey describes some of the practical limitations for families of students to access university:

> *To be able to fund—so, the majority of this town is low income—so to be able to come up with another $250 a week to fund accommodation for their child to*

> *travel away is another issue. Just say, if they paid $250 for their child, they still have to pay the average rent here, which is $350 a week. That's $600 out of their pay, and the average pay is, what, $700 … I think kids can get the marks to get into university, but, getting them there and keeping them there [is an issue]. (Abbey, teacher Muellerina)*

In addition to financial succour, much hinges on helping students feel that university is 'not so scary' and 'that they're not alone' given one of the greatest threats to young people staying the course at university is their longing for home:

> *Being away from home. I think that would be the hardest thing. My friend's daughter went off to uni and she came home after three months. She couldn't cope. She was so homesick. She went back a year later and she did it … The next year there was quite a few people she knew that were going so she had a little bit of support and I think that's the hardest thing is finding a support network because you lose your home one, you need that one when you go away. (Courtney, parent, Muellerina)*

Case Study 8: Oldfieldii

Outer Regional
ASGS Locality

<10%
Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people

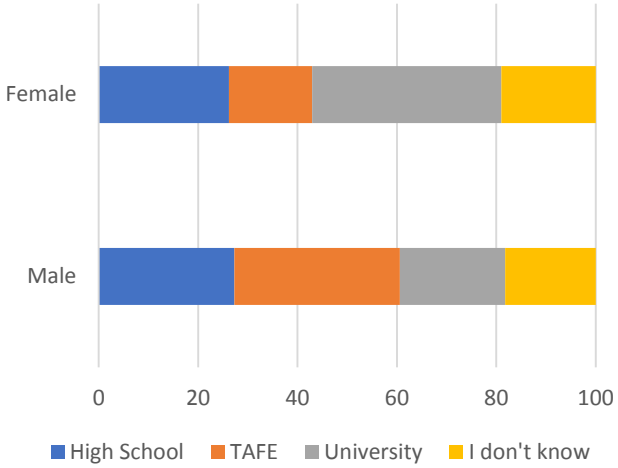
<5%
Households where a non English language is spoken

Top industries: agriculture; coal mining; public adminstration

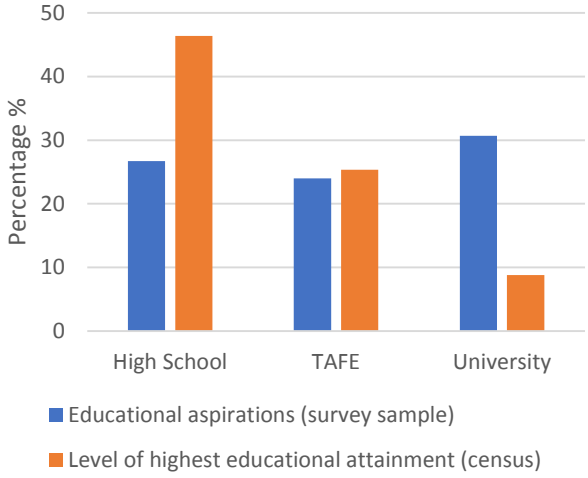
Educational infrastructure: closest university more than 2 hours drive by car; state VET provider (TAFE) 1 hour drive by car

Unemployment rate: below the state average

Educational Aspirations among Young People (Years 3-12)



Educational Aspirations compared to Community Characteristics

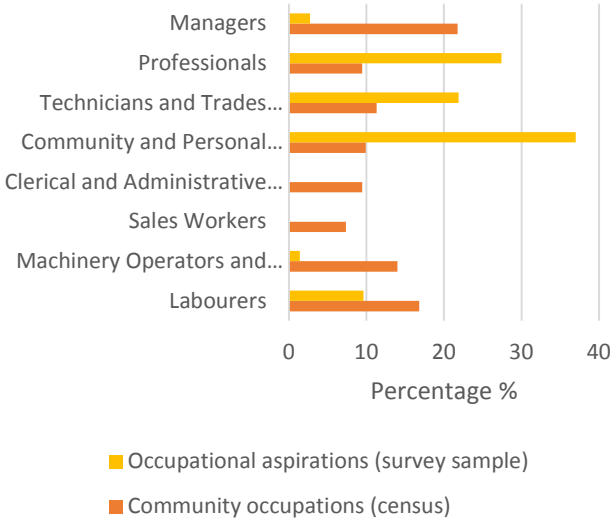


Top 5 Occupational Aspirations among Young People (Years 3-12)

Females
School teachers
Veterinarians
Child carers
Other natural and physical science professionals
Primary school teachers

Males
Motor mechanics
Defence force members – other ranks
Sportspersons
Psychologists
Police

Occupational Aspirations compared to Community Characteristics



Community overview

With agriculture and mining the dominant employment options within the community, higher education is a relatively new pathway for most residents of Oldfieldii. While agriculture is the historical foundation of the area, the lure of mining has overtaken agriculture and many locals have become dependent on 'the mines', especially in the context of severe drought. In both industries, young people often look to older relatives about how to obtain work, but substantial changes have occurred in the local employment market which means that this information can be outdated. In this small, regional community, there are few adults with a university qualification, and the unfamiliarity of the world beyond Oldfieldii looms large as young people consider, and weigh up, their futures.

Oldfieldii: The changing face of farming

Oldfieldii is a small, regional town characterised by agriculture and mining. In recent decades, the advent of technology, coupled with broader economic fluctuations, has resulted in radical changes to the agricultural landscape, and to the local employment market:

> *Instead of having one man who can do all of that, you have a machine now … It will automatically fill the thing in bulk. Well, all of it, at one time, was in bags. You had to lift them up manually. So, you had to have somebody there to do it. Another reason a lot of the labour part has been cut, economically, is because you can't survive on the prices that you had of yesteryear. And so consequently, we found that you can't do that, and have the number. Instead of having five people, now you'll have two. (Peter, community member)*

Climate change and drought are also omnipresent realities, triggering not only economic effects, but also considerable affective trauma linked with despair and futility:

> *It is just desperate around here. The kids would feel that. There's been quite a few suicides in the last couple of years, younger people, rural people … Last year alone, in the last 18 months, three local women committed suicide, all involved with the primary industries. (Michelle, parent)*

While Michelle powerfully conveys the vulnerability of regional and remote Australians to drought, there is also hope in the town. The impact of the drought is severe, however the townspeople are resilient and describe the innovative strategies they have implemented:

> *See, what's happening now, with the changes in technology, we are now growing more on less rain, or growing as much on less rain. Not because we're doing things that we did 50 years ago, because all the soil would be dried out — but because we changed the way in which we do it, and that's what we've got to continue to do. You've got to be an innovator. (Peter, community member)*

As Peter reflects on the present and future, he believes ingenuity is key to imagining solutions as new problems materialise.

Aspiration and adaptation?

Within this context, degrees in agriculture are a popular choice among young people who go to university, "a lot of them want to go into agriculture, so that's like [The University of] Baumea and that sort of thing; [The university in] Acmena is also popular" (Michelle, parent). Nonetheless, going to university is still an unfamiliar route within the town:

If Dad worked on a farm all his life and the son comes along and he wants to work on a farm all his life, the chances are he's just going to stay here. He won't go off to university and study agriculture. (Lola, teacher)

Similarly, the other main industry of employment in the town, mining, is understood by young people through ideas about the past:

Most of the kids picking up apprenticeships in the mines, they're completing their HSC [Higher School Certificate], getting good results in maths and English; whereas from our kids' perspective, their Dad or uncle or such might have gone to Year 10, picked up a trade, and had a trade pathway that way. The pathway for trades has changed. (Robert, teacher)

Indeed, the pull of the mines is intense for young people in Oldfieldii. Emil, a Year 12 student, describes how he recently shifted his aspirations towards mining:

We had a mine talk where the mines [mining corporations] came into the school and spoke to us about it … I was sort of set on going into farming but I like the more machinery side of things and mines is a lot of machinery. (Emil, Year 12 student)

Mining corporations have formed close relationships with the local school, promoting mining as a career option directly to students. However, the negative aspects of employment in the mines tend to be overlooked by young people:

The mines' employment fluctuates around the price of coal. So, it tends to be boom and bust. (Robert, teacher)

It's like a pipedream, "Oh, I'll just get a job in the mines". And it's that term, it really grates [on] me, "the mines". It's like they're going to save us. (Michelle, parent)

Given the stark contrast within the mining sector between periods of rapid expansion and severe contraction, jobs are plentiful at one stage in the cycle and more scarce at others. Counter to this reality, students tend to see this pathway as unproblematic. Michelle's reference to a "pipedream" emphasises that such an aspiration may, in fact, be a fantasy.

Imagined futures, restricted horizons

With agriculture and mining dominating employment options, professional roles are limited:

The problem then is when they come home, if they get a university degree, they really have to go somewhere else, because there are not the facilities here. (Peter, community member)

The upshot is that young people must compromise if they want to go to university and then return to work in the town:

I did my work experience at [the Base Hospital], and a lot of them told me if I wanted to move away, because I'd move to Lillipilli and go to university there, working in a bigger hospital I'd be able to do midwifery just as midwifery. But, if I want to come back here, I have to be a nurse as well … because there's not enough births here to just be a midwife … That helped me actually make the decision to be a primary teacher. (Heike, Year 11 student)

The scarcity of professional roles in the town has also meant that young people have little exposure to adults with a university qualification:

Who works in the town and would have a university [degree]? … There might be an engineer on the Council who would have an engineering degree, but that would only be one person. So, exposure to people [is limited], except for their teachers — but they don't see teachers as a person who has gone to university and studied or as a profession, they just teach. (Michelle, parent)

Michelle struggles to imagine who in the town would have even a degree. Engineering is mentioned as a possibility but, even then, likely to be represented by a single person. The one place where professional role models abound is the school, however, teachers tend not to be recognised by the students as people with firsthand experience in higher education.

Getting out or staying put

The school is, nonetheless, the key facilitator of access to higher education within the town:

Miss Taylor, she organises a lot of uni excursions, which is good. So, then we get an idea of what we want to do when we're older, and get to go and look at the real world when we leave school. (Alia, Year 9 student)

We take excursions to show our students universities and show that it's achievable and we have students who go to university come back, just to show — I think it's really important to show our children that it's not this scary unknown town three hours from here type thing, that it is achievable. You can get there. There's money to get there. (Lola, teacher)

The considerable emotional component of aspiring, and getting, to university come to the fore in these excerpts. Alia's reference to visiting the "real world" even suggests an invisible wall around the town, where reality exists. This symbolic wall creates obvious tension as young people form and pursue their aspirations:

Well, everyone thinks that once you're in Oldfieldii you can't get out of Oldfieldii. (Heike, Year 11 student)

It's obviously an isolated community which presents its own challenges in terms of public transport and I suppose in terms of school children, whether or not they believe intrinsically that they can get out of Oldfieldii. (Lola, teacher)

I encourage the kids to go and see the world, get trained, and then if they want to come back, come back. But go and see, explore what's outside of Oldfieldii first, and then make their decisions about where they're going to live and work, and the rest of it. Because it's about exposure to the opportunities that exist beyond the town limits. That's all they know. That limits them. (Robert, teacher)

Two mindsets dominate talk of aspirations — the challenges of "getting out" of town and the push to leave and explore the outside world. Distance, coupled with poor public transport, have established an invisible wall, as the practicalities of getting out make it physically and emotionally hard. With such a pervasive sense of feeling stuck, it takes particular drive and courage for young people to go to a place like university.

Discussion

The post-school aspirations of young people have typically been considered in relation to the interplay of individual, familial, and school effects. In this study, we have broadened this customary lens to shed light on how aspirations are also formed within, and shaped by, the communities in which young people live. While there has been an extensive body of literature examining the influence of community in relation to broader life chances and social outcomes–variously conceptualised through the notions of "community", "neighbourhood", and "place"–the salience of community in aspiration -formation has received little empirical attention. Based on our findings and the work of others (see, for example, Johnston et al., 2014; Kintrea et al., 2015; van Ham et al., 2012), we are acutely aware that the construct of "community" produces methodological challenges that make research in this area complicated, particularly for quantitative analyses. Nonetheless, combined with the diversity and richness of our case studies, the data reported here signal how a focus on 'community' can contribute to a detailed portrait of aspiration formation of a kind that has, to date, escaped close attention within Australian higher education equity policy and practice.

We identified the structural characteristics of communities linked with schools in our sample using the spatial proxy of LGA, as defined by the NSW Local Government Department. As was the case in other studies (Jensen & Harris, 2008; Jensen & Seltzer, 2000), this decision was necessary due to the availability of community-level information only from large datasets such as the Census. Using 35 community-level variables from the 2016 Australian Census, we found a number of factors that are positively related to university aspirations, after adjusting for Stage level only. The predominance of education, employment, and income are not unsurprising given previous research (Furlong et al., 1996; Jensen & Harris, 2008; Jensen & Seltzer, 2000). Specific predictors of higher education aspirations in Model 1 (Table 3) included: the proportion of adults in education, the proportion of adults who have a university qualification, the proportion of residents who have completed Year 12, the proportion of residents who are employed, and the proportion of households in the highest weekly income bracket ($2,000 plus). In addition, population characteristics such as a high proportion of first- and/or second-generation migrants in a community and coming from a NESB were positively related to university aspirations by community.

Our analyses also showed a close relationship between individuals, families, schools, and community characteristics. As van Ham et al. (2012) note, "measures of neighbourhood characteristics are not independent from the individuals living in neighbourhoods" (p. 6) and, in general, communities also mirror the composition of schools and vice versa (Johnston et al., 2014). Indeed, based on our analyses to date, it is interesting to note that the statistically significant community-level variables in Model 1 (Table 3) aligned closely with variables identified in previous research looking at individual, familial, and school effects on aspirations. Specifically, being of higher SES, having at least one parent/carer with a university-level qualification, possessing "high" cultural capital, coming from a relatively advantaged school, and being from a NESB have all been found to be significantly related to university aspirations in prior studies (Gore, Patfield, et al., 2017; Patfield, 2018). Given that people sort themselves into the communities in which they live, for various reasons such as housing affordability, lifestyle, and values (van Ham et al., 2012), it is easy to see why there is such a close relationship between individuals, families, and their communities. Moreover, it has been proposed that communities in Australia are often more homogeneous than in other countries, such as the US (Jensen & Seltzer, 2000).

While the logistic regression analyses only paint a broad portrait of aspirations, our community case studies provide a deeper understanding of aspiration-formation. By mapping community-level aspirations, which is rare in the existing literature (Lupton & Kintrea, 2011), our research therefore makes a number of important contributions. In relation to occupational aspirations, we identified that the careers that young people aspire to are highly gendered, regardless of the community in which they live, and that a number of

specific occupations are extremely popular. These occupations tend to be highly visible to young people through their communities and the media, such as teaching, sports, and policing. Students in the higher SES urban communities of Damperia and Teasel typically aspired to more prestigious occupations, in aggregate, thus illustrating more subtle differences in aspiration formation. Indeed, these differences are subsequently manifest in the over-representation of students from the most advantaged sociodemographic backgrounds enrolling in the most prestigious degrees and being admitted to the most prestigious universities (Bradley et al., 2008).

Our mapping of community-level aspirations across the eight communities also clearly showed that university was the most popular educational aspiration among young people. However, the proportion of students aspiring to higher education differed by community. Aspirations for university were extremely high in the urban communities of Damperia (77.3 per cent of students) and Teasel (67.4 per cent of students), but ranged between 30 and 50 per cent of students in the other six communities. Nonetheless, in communities such as Excelsa and Ironbark, the proportion of young people aspiring to university was more than double the percentage of residents who have a university degree – and in Muellerina, up to five times the percentage of residents. Indeed, in every one of the case studies, university aspirations among school students were higher than existing levels of attainment. These findings counter the simplistic narrative that young people living in disadvantaged communities have "low" aspirations (Lupton & Kintrea, 2011). In particular, our research reinforces the results of studies conducted in the UK illustrating that aspirations are actually 'high' in many disadvantaged communities (Kintrea et al., 2015; St. Clair et al., 2013), especially given the broader circumstances that can limit what they imagine for their futures – and which might eventually erode their aspirations as they age (Lupton & Kintrea, 2011). While evidently "high" overall, the effects of community on post-school aspirations were most noticeable in the qualitative component our case studies, which clearly demonstrated how aspirations are formed within, and shaped by, very different contexts. Using the case studies, we now turn our attention to teasing out the role of community in aspiration formation.

Community as collective socialisation

In each of the case studies, "community" acted as an important site of socialisation, in combination with the home and school. According to theories of collective socialisation, societal norms are established, cultivated, and then enforced, by adults within a community (Jensen & Harris, 2008; Leventhal & Brooks-Gunn, 2000). In turn, these norms form part of a young person's identity and sense of distinctiveness (Visser et al., 2015). For example, in Damperia, university has become habitual for young people who are surrounded by wealth and privilege — not just at the level of the family, but at the level of the community. Many adults possess a university-level qualification — substantially more than both the state and national averages – and shared expectations are transmitted verbally and unconsciously that young people should reproduce these accomplishments. Here, the close relationship between "family" and "community" is evident — these parents, on average, have relatively high levels of education, are likely to earn high wages, and consequently live in an affluent area (Johnston et al., 2014). With the vast majority of literature on community effects looking at aspiration formation solely within disadvantaged or "deprived" communities (see, for example, Sinclair et al., 2010; Stahl & Baars, 2016; Visser et al., 2015), the case study of Damperia thus illuminates how closely university is linked with the lived experience of middle-class identity and social advantage; almost like a rite of passage for young people who already have access to international travel and opportunities to visit prestigious university campuses.

In contrast, university is a relatively new pathway in Excelsa. In this working-class urban community, typical post-school pathways are trades or even unemployment, and very few adults possess a university-level qualification. While some young people aspire to the known and familiar, broader experiences gained from within the community have disrupted the

norm. Webb et al. (2015) call these kinds of experiences ‘critical events’ that provide a bridge to new possibilities. In Excelsa, such critical events include serendipitous encounters with university role models within the community more broadly, school-based initiatives, and having access to a university campus which has prompted a number of adults to pursue a degree later in life, thus beginning to establish a university-going culture among adults. While young people with a family history of higher education more easily saw university as an option, these critical events expanded the range of futures that other young people came to consider. Thus, while more established universities outside the community were desirable among students with family history of higher education, for newcomers to higher education, the localised option is key to their futures. Unfortunately, however, the infrastructure within the community to support this transition is lagging behind.

One case study shows a very different side to community norms: the regional town of Pimlea. Many families have chosen to live in this area for the alternative lifestyle it offers, which is both a way of life and a mindset. Such “new age” thinking has blended with the “traditional thinking” of the farming community that has lived in the area for generations, and residents are proud of the unique environment they can provide for young people. However, a complex array of influences on students’ identities stem from these societal norms. First, the alternative lifestyle has become entwined with the drug trade, and drugs have become an inescapable and omnipresent part of the town. As identified in other research (Visser et al., 2015), youth often form a critical understanding of their community, and in Pimlea, they must actively reject drugs when they walk down the street. It is not surprising that the community has developed a reputation for drug use among outsiders, so much so that young people who leave the town for further study and work carry the stigma attached to this reputation. Second, and more positively, the alternative lifestyle has created a thriving arts culture, which is a core value of both the school and broader community. In yet another predicament for young people in Pimlea, however, they are often inspired to pursue a career in the arts but then have to move away to follow their dreams. Indeed, many students do not enrol in the closest university less than an hour’s drive away, instead opting to go further afield where more options are available.

Community as an amalgam of place and time

Through investigating aspirations within the context of communities, our case studies also offer insight into how aspirations are not only fundamentally linked to the future but to place and time. In particular, the situated nature of aspirations comes to the fore when taking into account how young people grow up in a particular place which is always entangled with the past and present (Bright, 2011; Somerville, 2013). In the regional community of Muellerina, almost half of all students aspired to higher education, as well as to professional roles in teaching, veterinary science, nursing, and policing. However, stemming from a highly complex history linked with European colonisation (Senior & Chenhall, 2012), many Indigenous Australian families in the community experience intergenerational trauma, racism, and discrimination. In this way, the past intersects with the present (Bright, 2011), and attitudes towards education have been shaped by painful memories of exclusion for some residents. Older relatives transmit stories to young Indigenous people about their experiences, which are still manifest in a cultural divide in the town. As a community subjected to a declining local economy in recent years, job opportunities in the town are also limited. Given the harsh realities of unemployment and poverty, trying to meet the fundamental needs of children—rather than their educational needs—is often considered to be the primary concern within schools. Aspirations for higher education can therefore be seen as symbolising hope for a different kind of future when framed against the background of young people’s current circumstances.

Two communities stand out for the relatively high proportion of students who aspired to high school as their highest level of education: Ironbark (approximately 20 per cent of young people) and Oldfieldii (approximately 27 per cent of young people). Understanding how these aspirations are situated within place and time helps to explain why higher education is

less popular in these areas. In the regional community of Ironbark, farmers have access to water from the local river system, resulting in quite prosperous times for residents. There is an abundance of work available, however this work tends to be in low-skilled jobs associated with the agricultural industry. Even during schooling, the lure of money during the harvesting season represents such a powerful force for residents that some students are taken out of school by their parents to work. In stark contrast, the regional agricultural community of Oldfieldii is experiencing such dreadful drought that some residents have come to rely on jobs in the nearby mining industry. With few professional roles in the town, 'the mines' have come to symbolise optimism and quick money, while the fragility of the industry is often overlooked by young people. These differences *between* regional communities are not dissimilar to the "booms" identified in the research of Corbett and Forsey (2017); however, in our study, the booms stem from two very different sets of natural resources: water and coal.

A focus on spatial-temporal conditions also reveals changes that occur over time within communities. While a community such as Damperia has undergone very little change, merely growing in size with the same kinds of families, the sociodemographic profile of nearby Teasel has completely altered. Indeed, Teasel was previously very much like Damperia–white, middle-class–but is now a "global city" proudly characterised by many residents as exemplifying multiculturalism. Similar to the Australian research by Somerville (2013) in Western Sydney, this demographic shift highlights how similar aspirations can be formed within radically different contexts, despite communities being physically close; in this case, Damperia and Teasel are approximately 10 minutes apart by car. However, in contrast to Somerville's (2013) study, the aspirations among young people in Teasel have not shifted; a consistent culture of high expectations has translated into ambitions for prestigious careers such as law and medicine. With many families in Teasel being first- or second-generation migrants, another layer of time is evident, as parents/carers bring their past experiences into the present, placing their hopes and dreams onto the next generation. Thus, while the community of Teasel has changed, the history of these newcomer families has readily aligned with the predominant ethos.

Community as symbolic boundary

While 'community' has long been conceptualised as encompassing both territorial and relational aspects (Gusfield, 1975), our case studies bring to light the ways in which these elements coalesce to form a symbolic boundary for young people as their aspirations take shape. Unlike other research showing how geographic boundaries of a community can shape the parameters of a young person's world and thus, their aspirations (Connolly & Healy, 2004a, 2004b; Senior & Chenhall, 2012), a number of students across all of our case studies have aspirations beyond the kinds of occupations that are already available in their communities. However, similar to this prior research (Connolly & Healy, 2004a, 2004b; Senior & Chenhall, 2012), "community" did represent a more psychological and emotional boundary for the young people in our case studies, helping to define their views of the world and, in particular, what they see as being possible or impossible. There are stark differences here across geographic dimensions. For instance, in urban Damperia, the "bubble" in which young people live contains everything they want and need — so much so that adults report that young people can be oblivious to the lives led by others in nearby communities such as Teasel. At present, these two worlds rarely intersect despite the physical proximity, however many students will eventually end up at the same universities.

In regional areas, physical isolation was a powerful driving force in establishing and maintaining aspiration-shaping boundaries. For example, as a remote community, Olearia's distance from urban areas, let alone from universities and even TAFE institutions, can mean long drives to other towns, or undertaking study via block-mode in urban locations. These practical and structural aspects of a community are manifest in what Webb et al. (2015) label the "embodied psychology of place" (p. 48). That is, young people know how hard it is to get from Olearia to a place like university, although the community values education and wants all young people to succeed. Similar to other regional communities characterised by

disadvantage such as Muellerina, there are limited job opportunities available within the town, and aspirations for higher education can be compromised as students age. In Olearia, however, even finishing Year 12 is a challenge as a great deal of responsibility is placed on students to complete their studies without a sizeable cohort of peers and without the physical presence of a teacher in some instances. The physical boundary of the levee bank also operates as an affective boundary to shape both perceptions of place and aspirations: residents feel that they have been forgotten, and it is hard for young people to see what possibilities lie beyond. These feelings, that are much more than 'place attachment' (Connolly & Healy, 2004b), show why young people might "choose" to stay in their community, particularly for the Indigenous members of Olearia whose strong connections to country and family are a powerful force.

In the regional town of Oldfieldii, young people similarly feel a boundary around their community. Although Oldfieldii is just 2.5 hours' drive from the eastern seaboard, there is no public transport within the community or to neighbouring communities. Thus, not only is it physically difficult to venture beyond the confines of the town but residents can feel stuck, sensing that it is impossible to leave. While it has been widely recognised that 'community' encompasses more than localised experiences (Reid & McCallum, 2014), there is a strong sense that, for young people in Oldfieldii, the 'local' is detached from what is happening in the 'real world'. Oldfieldii is all about agriculture and mining, and the pull of the familiar is intense as some young people model their occupational futures on the outdated pathways of older relatives. Unlike in Olearia, there is no physical boundary around the town; however the 'invisible wall' named by some residents delimits the choices of young people, challenging not only aspirations for university but even aspirations for something different. If young people want to return home to Oldfieldii after completing a university degree, they can feel forced to compromise on their aspirations, already aware of the lack of professional roles in the town and the dilemma they will likely face in the near future.

Does it take a village?

Our study, *Community influence on university aspirations: Does it take a village?* has explored how aspirations are situated within, and shaped by, vastly different communities. Drawing on a rich dataset of surveys, focus groups, and interviews, we set out to address two key questions:

1. What impact does community have on student aspirations for higher education?
2. What community factors are important for increasing equity participation?

Based on our findings, we argue that communities exert a powerful influence on how young people imagine and construct their futures, and how they are positioned to pursue those futures. That is, young people are not only individuals within families (variously defined), but are also "nested" within the communities in which they live (Corbett et al., 2017). As Merrifield (1993) notes, it is communities where "everyday life is situated" (p. 522). Looking at the lived experiences of people within communities draws attention to the broad fusion of geographic, structural, and relational elements that is often overlooked in research on aspiration formation. While a few studies have highlighted the importance of embedding an understanding of aspirations within the contexts in which they have been formed (Bright, 2011; Stahl & Baars, 2016), our comparative work across communities of disadvantage *and* advantage, in many different geographic locales, has powerfully illustrated aspiration-formation within vastly different milieux. We argue that geographic, structural, and relational elements fuse in both overt and more subtle ways to shape aspirations and the capacity of young people to navigate pathways toward their imagined futures. Communities operate as a form of collective socialisation, an amalgam of time and place, and a symbolic boundary.

So, does it take a village for a young person to get to university? A complex set of community factors are important for increasing equity participation in higher education. Geographic factors such as distance to educational institutions, and structural factors such as public transport and community infrastructure are vitally important, and these factors

require broader attention from all levels of government. The blame for “lacking aspiration” cannot be attributed to young people and their families (Bradley et al., 2008) when there are insurmountable geographic and structural factors blocking their decision-making. We argue, therefore, as others have done in the UK (Lupton & Kintrea, 2011), that rather than focusing on “raising aspirations” it would be more productive to consider how aspirations might actually end up being eroded or compromised, and what can be done to change this. It is here that the relational level of the “village” is key. Living in a particular community does not determine how a young person’s future will play out, and parents/carers, families, teachers, and community members all play important roles in shaping futures. While even small acts from key adults can go a long way to supporting young people, working collaboratively at the level of “the village” provides a new way forward for supporting access to higher education. We conclude by offering a number of important recommendations for communities and higher education providers. These recommendations invariably overlap, but are listed separately to highlight key points for each group.

Recommendations

We conclude by offering a number of important recommendations for communities and higher education providers, largely drawn from participants' own insights as conveyed in their interviews. These recommendations invariably overlap, but are listed separately to highlight key points for each group.

Communities (including schools and community organisations)

- Increase collaboration among community leaders, families, and teachers to provide exposure to higher education through both formal and informal events within the community. Such initiatives could involve inviting university representatives to existing community events, or organising community nights where local residents share their own experiences with tertiary education.
- Establish community-level scholarships to aid in the transition to university. Community members and teachers should actively promote these scholarships across various channels within the community, and work with young people to support their applications.
- Identify and create work experience opportunities that facilitate access to university role models and the opportunity to learn about different kinds of occupational futures. Work experience programs should also take into account the changing nature of the world of work, such as the impact of technology and automation.
- Recognise the importance of providing part-time and casual work to young people during their formal schooling. Early exposure to work is critical in terms of young people feeling a sense of belonging in their communities. In addition, helping to facilitate casual employment when young people return from university during semester breaks can also alleviate some of the economic concerns associated with relocating to attend university.
- Consider how schools can function as "community hubs" to increase training opportunities for both young people and adults. For example, school facilities can be used to implement "taster" sessions for TAFE and university courses, and for community members to utilise internet access or videoconferencing facilities to complete courses via online mode with the support of peers. Block mode delivery that often occurs on-site at TAFE and university campuses in urban areas could also be implemented in these "community hubs", with residents from smaller communities coming together in larger centres.

Higher education providers

- Tailor outreach initiatives to local contexts, not just to equity target groups. Our study has highlighted considerable diversity between communities, even within similar geographic territories. In particular, understanding the nature of local job markets and the history of employment in an area can help shape the initiatives implemented by universities in specific contexts.
- Utilise untapped resources within communities to bolster and support outreach initiatives. In many regional and remote communities, teachers who represent a large proportion of the adults who have firsthand experience with higher education, are in a unique position to provide a "bridge" to the unfamiliar site of university. Teachers can also help to identify community members to be involved in outreach initiatives and act as role models for young people.
- Actively promote scholarships to young people while they are still in school, as well as to their families and communities. Such pre-access initiatives should be supported by transition programs focusing on money management, living away from home, and securing paid work while studying.

- Identify current university students to become “community role models”, creating opportunities as part of their degree to return home to their community and share their experiences of university life.
- Implement work integrated learning programs that can help supplement the essential services required in communities, such as early interventions in eyesight, hearing, speech, and behaviour. Programs, involving academic staff and university students that visit communities to conduct some of these tests can serve a dual purpose of increasing provision of essential services and exposing young people to university role models and different kinds of careers.
- Overall, attention must be paid not only to outreach initiatives that expose young people to higher education but to alleviating some of the geographical and structural factors that coalesce to diminish aspirations for university. Practical solutions must be formulated involving local, state, and federal governments, taking into account the range of context-specific issues that confront young people in different communities, such as public transport and internet access. Widening participation activities cannot focus only on aspirations, but need to address broader issues at play if we are to see real gains in overall participation rates for students from disadvantaged communities, including those from the targeted equity groups.

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Appendix 1: Community-level variables

Item	Description	Census item
Pct Persons aged 0–19	Persons aged 0–19; expressed as a percentage of the LGA population	G01 Selected person characteristics by sex
Pct Persons aged 20–34	Persons aged 20–34; expressed as a percentage of the LGA population	G01 Selected person characteristics by sex
Pct Persons aged 35–64	Persons aged 35–64; expressed as a percentage of the LGA population	G01 Selected person characteristics by sex
Pct Persons aged over 65	Persons aged 65 and over; expressed as a percentage of the LGA population	G01 Selected person characteristics by sex
Pct Under 19 in education	Proportion of persons aged under 19 who are attending an Educational institution	G01 Selected person characteristics by sex
Pct 20–24 in education	Proportion of persons aged 20–24 who are attending an Educational institution	G01 Selected person characteristics by sex
Pct Indigenous	Indigenous persons; expressed as a percentage of the LGA population	G07 Indigenous status by age by sex
Pct Parents not born in Australia	Individuals with both parents not born in Australia; expressed as a percentage of the LGA population	G08 Ancestry by country of birth of parents
Pct Not born in Australia	Individuals not born in Australia; expressed as a percentage of the LGA population	G09 Country of birth of person by age by sex
Pct Other language at home	Individuals who speak a language other than English at home; expressed as a percentage of the LGA population	G13 Language spoken at home by proficiency in spoken English/ Language by sex
Pct Non-English speaking	Individuals who speak English not well or not at all; as a percentage of the LGA population	G13 Language spoken at home by proficiency in spoken English/ Language by sex
Over 20s university qualification	Persons whose highest educational qualification is Bachelor-level degree or higher; expressed as a proportion of LGA population aged 20 and over	G46 Non-school qualification: level of education by age by sex
Over 20s TAFE qualification	Persons whose highest educational qualification is TAFE diploma/certificate; expressed as a proportion of LGA population aged 20 and over	G46 Non-school qualification: level of education by age by sex
Pct Completed Y12	Individuals who completed Year 12 schooling; expressed as a proportion of LGA population aged 20 and over	G16 Highest year of school completed by age by sex
Pct Household income under $999	Proportion of households with weekly income between $1 and $999 (note: does not include negative or nil income)	G29 Total household income (weekly) by household composition
Pct Household income $1000–$1999	Proportion of households with weekly income between $1000 and $1999	G29 Total household income (weekly) by household composition
Pct Household income $2000 plus	Proportion of households with weekly income over $2000	G29 Total household income (weekly) by household composition
Pct Employed	Employed in full-time or part-time work; expressed as a percentage of the LGA population	LG43 Labour force status by age by sex
Pct Not in labour force	Persons not in the labour force; expressed as a percentage of the LGA population	G43 Labour force status by age by sex
Pct Unemployed	Persons registered as unemployed and looking for work; expressed as a percentage of the LGA population	G43 Labour force status by age by sex
Pct Youth unemployed 15–24	Persons aged 15–24 who are unemployed; expressed as a percentage of the LGA population	G43 Labour force status by age by sex
Pct Caring for children	Proportion of the population aged 15 and over who did unpaid caring of children	G22 Unpaid child care by age by sex
Pct Volunteer	Proportion of the labour force who volunteer	G19 Voluntary work for an organisation or group by age by sex

Item	Description	Census item
Pct Caring disability	Proportion of the population aged 15 and over who did unpaid caring of person with a disability	G21 Unpaid assistance to a person with a disability by age by sex
Pct Married	Proportion of LGA population in a registered marriage and a de facto marriage (combined)	G05 Registered marital status by age by sex
Pct Divorced	Proportion of LGA population separated and divorced (combined)	G05 Registered marital status by age by sex
Pct Families single parent	Proportion of one parent families in the LGA	G25 Family composition
Pct Families step blended	Proportion of step/blended/other families with children present and intact families with other children present in the LGA	G27 Family blending
Pct Families with no child/ren	Proportion of families with no children in LGA	G25 Family composition
Ratio Population to household	Ratio of LGA population to number of households	G31 Household composition by number of persons usually resident
Pct Households with families	Proportion of family households in LGA	G31 Household composition by number of persons usually resident
Pct Population moved 1 year ago	Proportion of LGA population who lived at a different address 1 year ago	G40 Selected labour force, education and migration characteristics by sex
Pct Population moved 5 years ago	Proportion of LGA population who lived at a different address 5 years ago	G40 Selected labour force, education and migration characteristics by sex
Pct Religious	Overall proportion of individuals indicating religious affiliation	G14 Religious affiliation by sex
Pct Religious Christian	Ratio of Christian denominations to overall religious	G14 Religious affiliation by sex

Appendix 2: Related publications

Gore, J., Holmes, K., Smith, M., Lyell, A., Ellis, H., & Fray, L. (2015). *Choosing university: The impact of schools and schooling*. Perth, Australia: National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education, Curtin University. Retrieved from http://www.ncsehe.edu.au/publications/choosing-university-the-impact-of-schools-and-schooling/

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Appendix 3: Student background and school-related variables

Student background variables

Variable	Source	Measure
Gender	School enrolment form	Categorised as male or female.
Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander status	School enrolment form	Categorised as Indigenous or non-Indigenous.
Location	NSW Department of Education	Determined by school postcode and categorised as major cities, inner regional, outer regional, remote, very remote.
Language background	School enrolment form	Categorised as English-speaking background or NESB.
Socioeconomic status	School enrolment form	Calculated by combining the highest parental education and occupation levels for each student into an equally-weighted proxy for student SES. Data for all NSW government schools were used to separate scores into quartiles.
Cultural capital	Survey	Cultural capital measure calculated by student responses to the question: *How often do you do the following activities? (Listen to classical music; talk about music; go to the theatre to see a play, dance or opera performance; go to art galleries or museums; go to the cinema to watch a movie; go to a library; talk about books; play a musical instrument or sing; participate in dancing, gymnastics or yoga; talk about art).*

School-related variables

Variable	Source	Measure
Prior achievement	NSW Department of Education	The most recent National Assessment Program Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) test scores for each student. Attainment was taken as the equally-weighted composite of individual student reading and numeracy scores. Data for all NSW government schools within each year level were used to separate scores into quartiles.
ICSEA	My School (www.myschool.edu.au)	The Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage (ICSEA) is a standardised scale measuring school advantage based on summarising student level data. A higher score indicates a relative lack of disadvantage. This national measure was developed to compare aggregate achievement results between schools using scores from NAPLAN. ICSEA scores were categorised using cut-offs from the state quartile values in each year.
Self-perception of relative academic performance	Survey	Perceived achievement relative to peers was a self-assessment item: *How are your marks this year compared with other students? (Well below average, Below average, Average, Above Average, or Well above average).*