The University of Western Sydney Schools Engagement Program provides primary and high school students with opportunities to not only improve their academic performance, but also to expand their horizons.

In 2007 UWS developed a whole-of-institution strategic plan for schools engagement, working in close consultation with the school sector. The three-year plan focuses on mutually beneficial University/school partnerships and programs that contribute to school student engagement in learning, educational aspirations, opportunities and attainment, particularly in Greater Western Sydney.

The plan is being implemented through annual Action Plans. This is guided by ongoing input from an external Reference Group comprising senior administrators and school principals from the public, Catholic systemic and independent school sub-sectors, and an internal Steering Group comprising senior stakeholders from key areas across the University.

UWS has a coordinated and direct relationship with over 400 schools. In 2009 more than 11,000 students participated in enrichment and skill building programs. Many thousands more were involved in research projects, marketing events, sponsored activities and on-campus sport. Over 900 teachers and school staff benefited from professional development run or co-run by UWS. Hundreds of UWS students contributed as did 32 different academic and administrative areas of the University.

The central focus of the Action Plans is to contribute to educational enrichment and attainment. Programs aim to promote student engagement in learning, help build capacity in the school sector and improve results in priority areas as defined by the Schools Engagement Reference Group and the State Plan, and more broadly, at national level. These include:

- gifted and talented education, academic enrichment and critical thinking skills
- numeracy and literacy
- Indigenous education
- Science, Technology, Maths and Engineering (STEM) and
• student engagement in education and lifelong learning, particularly for disadvantaged groups, helping to improve school retention, and higher education preparedness and participation rates.

Speaking at the launch of the Schools Strategic Plan by the then NSW Minister for Education and Training in May 2008, Western Sydney Department of Education and Training Regional Director Lindsay Wasson said, “I know I also reflect the views of my colleague, Tom Urry, Regional Director of South Western Sydney, when I say I cannot conceive of a stronger nor more broadly based commitment by a university to the schools sector. This commitment, and the initiatives that flow from it … are transforming the education landscape in Western Sydney”.

For information on UWS Schools Engagement, visit http://www.uws.edu.au/community/in_the_community/for_schools, or email SchoolsEngagement@uws.edu.au

¹Not a unique count.