“A turning point”

Impact of participation in the University Preparation Program (UPP) on Cradle Coast students

Susan Johns, Nicole Crawford, Mike Harris, Cherie Hawkins, Lynn Jarvis and David McCormack

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*Cradle Coast Cross Boundary Research Fund Report*

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Executive Summary

Introduction
Enabling programs such as the University Preparation Program (UPP) are a key strategy to widen participation in higher education and may deliver a range of social and economic benefits to rural and regional communities. The purpose of the study is to explore the medium to longer-term outcomes of participation in UPP on Cradle Coast students, in terms of further study, employment, community involvement and geographic mobility. The study was funded through the Cradle Coast Cross Boundary Research Fund.

Method
Past cohorts of successful UPP students from 1996 to 2007 were targeted. The retrospective nature of the study favoured participants who had remained in the Cradle Coast region and specifically, those who had remained at the same address. The study was exploratory, and used a mixed methods approach. Former UPP students were surveyed in order to understand what they had done since they completed UPP. A total of 56 surveys were completed, representing an 11.5% response rate. Twenty five survey respondents then self-selected to participate in semi-structured, open-ended interviews, to clarify and expand on ideas identified in the surveys. Interview data were also collected from two key stakeholders: the former UPP coordinator and the former Cradle Coast Campus manager.

Survey data were entered into IBM SPSS version 21 for analysis. Frequencies were run to describe the data. Pearson’s Chi-square tests were used to investigate associations between categorical variables, and Fisher’s exact tests were used where expected cell counts were less than 5. The p < 0.05 significance level was used for all tests. Interviews were transcribed verbatim and analysed thematically.

Participant profile
There were many more female than male survey respondents (71% vs 29%), which is consistent with the 1996-2007 cohorts. Respondents were spread across all age groupings and across all educational levels, although one third had left school at Year 10 or earlier. Approximately half of all respondents were in receipt of Centrelink benefits while studying. Just under half the survey respondents reported completing five or more UPP units (i.e. more than half of the available units). Thirty three (59%) of survey respondents were first in their family to attend university.

UPP was described as an opportunity to undertake second-chance learning. Reasons for not previously undertaking university-level study were mainly linked to expectations and aspirations within families and communities, which valued employment over further study. For many females in particular, the post-Year 10 family expectation was employment, marriage and children. A common perception amongst all participants was that university was only for the rich and the brainy. While many lacked confidence in their own abilities, they also displayed resilience and a strong sense of purpose or commitment to further learning. These attributes were important because they were taking a ‘risk’ by participating in UPP, stepping outside their personal comfort zone and challenging family and community cultural values in terms of education.

The majority of survey respondents said they enrolled in UPP specifically to prepare for university study, with personal development the second most frequently cited reason. Many interview participants saw further study as a pathway to initial employment or a change of career. Most had positive perceptions of
UPP, due to the physical and psychological accessibility of the program and the Cradle Coast campus, relationships between students and staff and amongst students, and the welcoming and supportive environment in which they felt valued and respected.

Most of those surveyed (82%) are still living in the Cradle Coast region. Those living elsewhere were variously located within Tasmania and interstate, and all but one was living in a rural or regional location.

**Individual impacts**

Participation in UPP had a transformative effect for many of the participants, both personally and professionally, and shaped their future lives. UPP represented a turning point in their lives and a catalyst for change.

The impact of participation in UPP is presented in terms of three inter-related areas: foundations for change, confidence, and new opportunities. The findings show that as the former UPP students learnt the nuts and bolts of studying at university, and gained academic skills, and an awareness of the university culture and their options, they developed confidence as university students. Nearly all survey respondents (85%) either agreed or strongly agreed that participation in UPP increased their self-confidence and self-esteem, indicating that increased self-confidence was one of the program’s major outcomes. A significantly greater proportion of females compared with males (92% vs 69%) reported increased self-confidence and self-esteem from participation in UPP.

Increased confidence levels empowered participants to take up a range of new opportunities in terms of further study, employment, and leadership. Most survey respondents (88%) continued with further study post-UPP, with most of these choosing to undertake study at UTAS. UPP is an important bridge or transition to tertiary study for mature-aged students on the Cradle Coast. Of those who continued with university study, 72% completed a Bachelor degree and 28% continued with postgraduate study on completion of their Bachelor degree, including two Doctoral candidates. Of those who continued with further study, over three quarters had completed their course or were still studying, suggesting UPP enhanced retention by preparing students well for further study.

In many cases participation in UPP led to undergraduate study which then led to jobs. Employment outcomes differed according to gender. A significantly greater proportion of females compared with males (72% vs 44%) reported they were currently in paid employment. Around two thirds (61%) of all survey respondents currently working were employed in a professional role. This differs markedly from occupational classifications pre-UPP, where only a very small proportion (12%) were employed in professional roles. Professional roles included teachers, administrators and researchers. Many said that their current employment offered increased status and better job security than their previous employment.

**University and regional impacts**

For the University, UPP was a pathway to undergraduate and later postgraduate study, providing a pool of well-prepared students and helping to increase student demand in the Cradle Coast region. However, the impact of UPP cannot be viewed in isolation. The alignment of Cradle Coast Campus and UPP goals resulted in an increased community awareness of higher education and made the university more accessible.
At a regional level, UPP was a key university strategy in meeting the educational needs of a large number of people who had left school early. It provided an accessible option for those who wished to remain in their local area, paving the way for further study and opening up employment opportunities not previously available to them. As the first point in a learning journey, UPP indirectly contributed to the skills base and capacity of local institutions, industries and businesses, in key areas such as Education, Agriculture and Management. The impact on female participants in particular was profound, in terms of increased participation in the social and economic life of the community.

Leadership outcomes are an important new finding in relation to the impact of enabling programs. Just under half the survey respondents agreed or strongly agreed that participation in UPP assisted or encouraged them to take on leadership responsibilities (either in the community or workplace or both). Interviewees described a range of leadership roles and activities, ranging from exhibiting leadership as a student, to taking on leadership roles in their jobs and community, to acting as a role model for family and friends. Development of leadership potential has implications for the University and the community, in terms of increasing the leadership pool from which to draw.

**Conclusions**

This longitudinal study provides some of the first research evidence of the longer-term value of enabling programs in terms of their contribution to the social and economic wellbeing of regional communities. It is recommended that the University implements processes to systematically track enabling students throughout University and beyond. Further research into the multiple outcomes of participation in enabling programs is also recommended, including leadership outcomes. The far-reaching impact of enabling programs on individuals, universities and communities should not be underestimated.
Introduction

It is acknowledged that increased levels of education contribute to the social and economic wellbeing of communities (Scutter, Palmer, Luzeckyj, Burke de Silva, & Brinkworth, 2011). As education providers, regional universities play a key role in regional development (Allison & Eversole, 2008), with research indicating that students who complete their studies at regional higher education institutions tend to remain in regional areas for both further study and employment (Richardson & Friedman, 2011). Economic development in regional areas relies on access to human capital, indicating a clear role for regional universities in building capacity and reducing ‘brain drain’ to the city (Garlick, Taylor, & Plummer, 2007; Taylor, Plummer, Bryson, & Garlick, 2008). Therefore, increasing educational outcomes in regional areas is likely to benefit both individuals and the region, in terms of increased employment opportunities and availability of a skilled local workforce.

Yet not all people enjoy the same level of access to and participation in educational opportunities. For many years, participation in tertiary education in regional areas has been below participation rates in metropolitan areas (Teese, Nicholas, Polesel, & Mason, 2007). Participation by low socioeconomic groups is also much lower than for high socioeconomic groups (James, 2008), and the Cradle Coast region of Tasmania has a significant population within the low socioeconomic band (ABS, 2011b). Not surprisingly, therefore, University participation in the Cradle Coast region is significantly lower than state and national averages. While 18.8% of the Australian labour force holds a university-level qualification, in Tasmania this figure is 14.3% and only 8.7% in the North West region (ABS, 2011a). Reasons for this low attainment include family tradition and community culture that have tended to value employment over further education. Those non-traditional students who continue with higher education require transitional support to help bridge academic and social/cultural gaps (Devlin, 2012).

However, this is not to say that low participation rates in higher education are the result of low aspirations, with findings from recent research with adolescent girls in the Cradle Coast region suggesting that the aspirations for higher education exist, but the necessary resources to participate in higher education do not (Hawkins, in press). This discrepancy raises some questions about what types of programs, experiences and resources could build the capacity of individuals in the region so that they may be able to fulfil their aspirations for higher education.

This study is set within the context of the widening participation agenda of the Australian government (Bradley, Noonan, Nugent, & Scales, 2008), and also the University of Tasmania’s strategic plan (2012, p. 10) which reaffirms the commitment of UTAS to three Tasmanian campuses, including Cradle Coast,

*to support regional communities through access to world class education and research*, utilising specific strategies to ‘inform distinctive research and teaching programs at each of these locations, leveraging local potential and matching local needs.*

The increasing presence of UTAS on the Cradle Coast is reflected in the Burnie City Council Strategic Plan *Making Burnie 2030*. One of six future directions outlined in the Plan refers to Burnie as ‘a centre for information, knowledge and learning’, identifying a range of strategies to achieve the goal, which include increasing UTAS numbers and expanding UTAS courses.

Enabling programs are a key strategy to widen participation in higher education across Australia. Despite the relatively broad spread of university enabling programs across the university sector
nationally, there is only a small body of research into such programs. This research is largely descriptive, and more likely to focus on an analysis of short-term student outcomes in terms of academic progress and retention. However, there is a lack of research into the medium to longer-term outcomes for participants in enabling programs, and this has been identified as a significant gap in the literature (Albright, Fagan, & Ross, 2011; Clarke, Bull, Neil, Turner, & Birney, 2000).

Enabling programs are critical to rural and regional areas, and particularly to the Cradle Coast, where they offer second-chance learning to mature-aged learners. The University Preparation Program (UPP) is an enabling program offered as part of the suite of pre-degree programs at UTAS. The continued provision and accessibility of pre-degree programs is identified in the UTAS Social Inclusion Plan 2013-2015 as one of a number of actions designed to increase aspiration toward University and improve access and pathways into University for all students. UPP was developed originally on the Cradle Coast in 1996, and has operated continuously since that time. Therefore, there is potentially a substantial body of longitudinal data available regarding program participants and their outcomes.

The purpose of this exploratory study is to examine the impacts of UPP on Cradle Coast students. It outlines what has happened to UPP graduates, in terms of a range of outcomes such as further study, employment and geographic mobility, and attempts to understand how participation in UPP shaped these decisions. By examining post-UPP pathways, the study also provides an insight into the flow-on effects for the Cradle Coast community more broadly, and for UTAS enrolments in undergraduate programs. Given the lack of existing research into the outcomes of enabling programs, it is both necessary and timely that the medium to longer-term outcomes of successful participation in UPP by rural and regional (Cradle Coast) students are explored.
Overview of the literature

A brief overview of literature in the field of enabling programs

Over the decades in which enabling programs have been functioning on the periphery of universities, literature in the field has ranged from practice reports, mainly presented at conferences, to research articles. Regarding the latter category, Robert Cantwell has published numerous articles, along with his colleagues, based on research on the Open Foundation Course at the University of Newcastle (for example, see: Archer, Cantwell, & Bourke, 1999; Bourke, Cantwell, & Archer, 1998; Cantwell, 2004; Cantwell & Grayson, 2002). Cantwell and Grayson (2002) investigated psychological and meta-cognitive measures to find the impacts of an enabling course. Christopher Klinger and Neil Murray (along with other co-authors) have published articles and conference papers based on the University of South Australia’s enabling programs (refer to: Klinger, 2010; Klinger & Murray, 2009, 2011; Klinger & Tranter, 2009; Murray & Klinger, 2011). Julie Willans (along with co-authors) has published several articles from her doctoral research, which focused on transformative learning and the type of characteristics required of enabling programs to facilitate such learning (for example, see: Willans, 2010; Willans, Harreveld, & Danaher, 2003; Willans & Seary, 2007, 2011; Willans & Simpson, 2004).

An unpublished report commissioned by the Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs in 2000 found that there was no significant difference in either retention or academic success for undergraduate students entering courses via an enabling program compared to all other undergraduate students (Clark et al., 2000). More recently, an Australian Government Office for Learning and Teaching (OLT) project led by Barry Hodges investigated the causes of higher attrition in enabling programs, with the aim of recommending strategies for improving retention (see Hodges et al., 2013). A recent article by Bennett et al. (2013) considers reasons why enabling students do not complete their courses. The reasons are multi-faceted, and they argue that ‘success in enabling programs should not be measured solely by numbers’ (Bennett et al., 2013, p. 154).

A search of the literature has not found any reported findings from longitudinal studies of enabling programs. Rosalie Bunn, however, is currently completing a longitudinal study for her PhD research at the University of Newcastle, in which she is investigating the impacts of the Open Foundation program on the region in which it is based (University of Newcastle, 2013).

Students in enabling programs

Archer, Cantwell and Bourke (1999) make several pertinent points from their comparison of two groups of undergraduate students (mature-age students who entered university via an enabling program, and younger students who gained general entry). Of the two groups, they highlight that ‘the motivation of students from the enabling program is to understand what they are studying, rather than to pass their subjects with a minimum of effort and thought’ (Archer et al., 1999, p. 50). They also suggest that the enabling students are more likely to persevere; that is, they have more of a commitment to study. Furthermore, Archer et al. comment on the confidence shown by the enabling students: ‘These students also indicate more confidence to solve problems that arise in their lives, more confidence to plan a desired course of action, and more confidence to appraise accurately their strengths and weaknesses’ (p. 50). They conclude that the mature-age students who entered via the enabling...
program were ‘coping at least as well with their undergraduate studies as younger students entering via more conventional means’ and that the characteristics of confidence and motivation ‘should help them [the enabling students] to persist with their studies even when difficulties arise’ (p. 52).

**Outcomes from enabling programs**

Based on his previous research, Cantwell divides the successful outcomes of enabling programs into two dimensions: firstly, in academic terms, learning what is required by academic staff; and secondly, the personal development of students, and the ‘motivational and epistemological changes that underlie this development’ (2004, pp. 355-356). He states:

> the experience of the foundations course has resulted not only in gaining certain content knowledge, but has also resulted in the beginnings of fundamental metacognitive and affective development. The students are beginning to think differently about the nature of knowledge and learning and about themselves as learners – they have begun to cross over to a higher order way of thinking, one which implies a developing lens that allows them to subsequently see the ‘why’ and the ‘when’ as well as the ‘how’ and the ‘what’. In short, they are in the process of ‘getting it’ (p. 357).

Cantwell further explores the meaning of the developmental changes, stressing it is not just about adding knowledge, but about ‘knowing differently’ (p. 359).

Julie Willans’s publications (along with co-authors) are based on her doctoral research, which examined the transformation undergone by nine mature-age students in a 13-week enabling program at Central Queensland University. In her doctoral thesis, Willans (2010) concludes that a process of transformation occurred in the mature-aged learners as they re-conceptualised themselves as learners and as they built bridges ‘between their old and new ways of knowing’ (p. 153). She further contends that these transformations were often complex and contradictory and took a significant amount of time to be properly processed. In describing the enabling program, known as STEPS, Willans, Harreveld and Danaher (2003, p. 5) state: ‘[f]or these learners, the preparatory program is one of life’s transitions, albeit a transition that has the potential to change their lives both personally and professionally’. They add that if such a program is ‘built into the university experience… it can become part of a lifelong learning continuum’ (p. 5).

Willans and Seary (2007) describe STEPS as ‘the vehicle through which a many and varied clientele move from a narrow and often distorted view of themselves as learners and people to a more mature and healthy perspective’ (p. 450). They argue that the course is a ‘transformative experience’ and ‘provides the breeding ground for new self-knowledge and a sense of liberation achieved through the challenging by learners of long-held assumptions about self, others and the world in general’ (p. 450).

In taking an autobiographical approach to mature-age women’s engagement with tertiary study, Debenham and May (2005) highlight the transformation that takes place for students in an enabling program, either as a result of a ‘disorienting dilemma’ or an ‘accumulation of transformations’ over time (Mezirow, 1991, p. 50 cited in Debenham & May, 2005, p. 87). They refer to Mezirow’s term ‘a perspective transformation’ when discussing the change in a student’s approach to information (p. 97). An example they provide of the impact of such a change in perspective is the difficulty students have in communicating with their old friends, as they have not undergone a change in their thinking. Debenham and May go on to mention other challenges that students face with the non-university aspects of their
lives, such as with their families and the roles they play within them (p. 97). While the students may experience challenges with their old friends and family members, a beneficial change is the importance of their new friends at university (Debenham & May, 2005, p. 98).

In a comparison of students who entered a degree via an enabling program at the University of South Australia with students who entered via other entry pathways, Klinger and Tranter (2009, p. 8) found that ‘on average those admitted via our enabling programs have a higher mean GPA [Grade Point Average]’. Reporting on the first phase of a qualitative study of enabling students’ views of their challenges and opportunities, Klinger and Murray (2009, p. 8) conclude that the ‘value’ of the experience is multi-faceted: it is related to human capital, social capital, and identity capital. They add that their investigations show that ‘education is a powerful force in transforming lives and societies’ (p. 8). In a recent small-scale study of UPP students at the UTAS Launceston campus, Crawford (2013) has found that benefits of the enabling program include former UPP students taking on leadership roles in their first semester of undergraduate study, and that they had changed their long-standing attitudes and understandings of people from cultures different from their own.

In contrast to most of the literature, in one publication Eleanor Ramsay questions the effectiveness of bridging courses. She highlights an example in South Australia in which she claims an initiative between a university and secondary schools is a successful entry course, in comparison to bridging courses (2004, p. 274). Given that enabling courses vary in design, content and skills taught, Ramsay’s argument is limited to the context, time and location of the programs under investigation.

A UTAS study investigated the reasons why mature-age students pursue university (Walter, 2000). The participants were former UPP students based on the north-west coast of Tasmania, which is the same location and target population for the current project. The research by Walter focused on students who had recently completed UPP (within the preceding 12 months). Walter found that most students rated their confidence in their skills and ability at the end of UPP quite highly, suggesting confidence is an outcome of the program (pp. 18-19). As far as outcomes are concerned, the study found that students who enrolled in UPP with the intention of continuing with further education were more likely to continue with further study. In this way, UPP was seen as a link in the transition to tertiary study. Walter also found a positive correlation between the number of UPP units completed and continuation with further study. The study looked at what students went on to study after UPP, and where they studied. It found that the campus location of courses was an important factor (p. 23). Additionally, lack of access to preferred courses, or lack of knowledge of preferred courses, deterred approximately one third of the sample from enrolling in further study. Similarly, Debenham and May (2005, p. 88) make a brief comment about location of campuses being of importance in encouraging students to continue with further study.
Methodology

Approach and research design

The project was funded from the Cradle Coast Cross Boundary Research Fund. In keeping with funding requirements, the approach and research processes were cross-boundary and collaborative. The project team included a mix of emerging, early career and experienced researchers from across the three campuses, including staff involved in teaching, research and management roles. It included former and current Pre-degree Programs and other staff from the Centre for University Pathways and Partnerships, and a PhD candidate from the Institute for Regional Development.

A key feature of the project methodology is its focus on building research capacity and on facilitating collaborative research practices amongst partners across the three campuses. Capacity building and facilitating collaborative practice also aligns with the broad purpose of the Pre-degree Programs Research Group within the Centre for University Pathways and Partnerships, to which most of the research team belong. Capacity building includes the provision of training in research processes, mentoring of individuals, and preparation of collaborative project outputs such as seminar presentations and a conference paper.

The study was exploratory, using a mixed methods approach to provide an understanding of the post-UPP pathways of individuals. Although a qualitative approach is most suited to exploratory research into issues not previously investigated (Creswell, 2003), the study was strengthened by a quantitative element to allow for generalisation of post-UPP pathways. Themes identified from quantitative data also informed qualitative data collection, allowing the researchers to explore issues in greater depth. Combining quantitative and qualitative approaches allows for an additional level of understanding of the impacts on individuals of participation in UPP, whilst still enabling for broader generalisations to be made.

Target population

Following approval from the Tasmania Social Sciences Human Ethics Committee (H13312), past cohorts of successful UPP students from the Cradle Coast from 1996 to 2007 were targeted, with a view to examining their further study and employment choices, geographic mobility and future intentions. Successful students were defined as those who had successfully completed (Pass or higher) at least one UPP unit. Recent graduates of UPP were not included because the purpose of the study was to track former students’ pathways post-UPP over a number of years.

A request was made for a search of University student records, to identify participants who met the study criteria. The contact details for eligible participants were provided to a third party, who coordinated dissemination of initial data collection material. Other forms of publicity were used to recruit potential participants, including an article in the local newspaper the Advocate, an interview on local ABC radio, postings on the Cradle Coast campus website and Facebook page, an entry in the UTAS alumni e-newsletter, and by word of mouth.

Data collection

There were two phases of data collection: quantitative and qualitative.
Quantitative data
Quantitative data were collected via a survey. Surveys were mailed out in hard copy, and a link to an online version was also provided. Surveys were emailed to the small number of potential participants who had a current UTAS email address. The online version was developed using Qualtrics Online Survey Software. Questions in both the hard and online versions were identical. (A copy of the survey is provided in Appendix 1.) The survey requested information about participant backgrounds including details of their UPP study, along with information about further study, employment, community involvement and geographical mobility post-UPP. The purpose of the survey was to provide a better understanding of the program’s impact on a larger number of individuals, allowing the research team to obtain what Merriam (1998 cited in Shkedi, 2005, p. 21) refers to as ‘a quantitative or numerical description’ of the UPP cohort, including demographics and life trajectories. The survey was trialled with a small number of recent UPP graduates, and minor changes made, before dissemination.

A total of 614 surveys were mailed or emailed, of which 126 were unable to be delivered and were returned to sender. A total of 56 surveys were completed, representing an 11.5% response rate. On completion of the survey, participants were also given the option of nominating for an interview.

Qualitative data
The second phase of data collection comprised qualitative interviews which were designed to enable a deeper exploration of the demographics, and the lives and pathway decision-making of former UPP students. Themes identified in the survey data informed the construction of the qualitative semi-structured interview protocol. Interviews were conducted because they provide insights that are valuable and go beyond the data collected in everyday conversation (Kvale, 1996) and, to go even further, semi-structured interviews provide a depth of data that is difficult to gather by other means (Fontana & Frey, 2003). The semi-structured interviews provided the opportunity for ideas to be clarified and expanded, which allowed for the collection of rich, descriptive data.

A sub-group of the survey sample (n=25) participated in semi-structured interviews. Most were interviewed individually. However, two group interviews were conducted: one with a group of former UPP students who had subsequently completed Education degrees; and another interview with two participants who both indicated a strong involvement in community activities. All participants who indicated they would be willing to participate in an interview were subsequently interviewed, with the exception of four people, who were unable to be accessed during the data collection period.

Although the primary focus of the study was exploration of the impact of participation in UPP on individuals, interview data were also collected from two key stakeholders: the former UPP coordinator and the former Cradle Coast Campus manager. These interviews, together with data collected from former UPP students, assisted the researchers to develop some conclusions about the flow-on effects of UPP participation, in terms of the Cradle Coast community and UTAS undergraduate enrolments.

Data analysis
Survey data were entered in IBM SPSS version 21 for analysis. Frequencies were run to describe the data. Pearson’s Chi-square tests were used to investigate associations between categorical variables, and Fisher’s exact tests were used where expected cell counts were less than 5. The \( p < 0.05 \) significance level was used for all tests.
Interviews were transcribed verbatim and each transcript was assigned a pseudonym to protect the anonymity of participants. Each member of the project team undertook cluster analysis (Miles & Huberman, 1994) of the interviews they conducted. This process involved a line-by-line analysis of the data to find open codes, which were then refined into categories or themes. Further analysis of the individual statements under each of the categories was undertaken to provide a more descriptive picture of the data. To ensure consistency amongst coders, all members of the project team coded the same interview individually, then met to discuss coding rationale and resolve any discrepancies. This process was repeated with a second shared interview, after which a shared code book of agreed definitions and examples was produced to guide subsequent coding.

Following cross-interview data analysis, and in keeping with the exploratory nature of the research design, interview data were then re-interrogated and a series of vignettes produced to highlight some of the complexities of individual lives and the way in which successful UPP completion impacted on the interviewees’ life trajectories. The vignettes represent the personal stories of individuals and captured a broad range of experiences of former UPP students from the Cradle Coast. Vignettes were selected using a purposeful sampling strategy to include richness of information, a variety of participant backgrounds and a wide range of experiences in terms of participant journeys. Purposeful sampling is an important part of the qualitative research design because it allows researchers to learn more about issues that are central to the research topic (Patton, 1990). The selection of different stories allowed for interpretation of the phenomenon from a variety of perspectives (Bassey, 2002; Yin, 2003).

**Limitations of the study**

The study is not based on a representative sample of UPP participants, but, rather, on those who had successfully completed at least one UPP unit. Additionally, because of the retrospective nature of the study, it favoured past participants who had remained in the Cradle Coast region and specifically, those who had remained at the same address. Nearly all of those who chose to participate in the study had positive experiences of UPP and the program had impacted positively on their lives. This is not unexpected in a study of this kind; it is likely that people will respond to studies when they have something in particular to report (i.e. either positive or negative outcomes). The researchers are aware that the outcomes from participation in UPP reported by study participants do not necessarily represent outcomes experienced by the broader body of UPP participants. However, they illustrate the far-reaching impacts on participation in UPP for those who chose to take part in the study.
Findings: Who were the UPP participants?

Gender, age and socioeconomic status

Of the 56 survey respondents, there was a much larger proportion of females (71%) than males (29%). This was similar to the proportion of females and males in the 1996-2007 UPP cohorts.

There was a broad spread of ages at enrolment in UPP (Figure 1), although the clustering of people in the 30-54 age groupings suggests it was meeting its intended purpose, to provide second-chance learning for mature-aged students.

Figure 1: Number of respondents by age grouping at enrolment

Survey respondents were asked whether they were in receipt of Centrelink benefits while studying UPP. Receipt of Centrelink may be considered one indicator or proxy of low socioeconomic status (SES). The sample was evenly divided, with half reporting they received Centrelink benefits while studying and half who did not. There was an association between gender and receipt of Centrelink benefits, with a larger proportion of males compared with females (81% vs 38%) in receipt of Centrelink while studying UPP ($\chi^2 (1) = 8.8, p = 0.003$).

\footnote{Note that raw numbers rather than percentages are provided in tables and charts where there are multiple categories and only small numbers in each category.}
Previous education, employment and voluntary work

Survey respondents reported a broad spread of previous education levels, although one third had left school at Year 10 or earlier (Table 1).

Table 1: Education levels prior to commencing UPP

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Highest education level prior to UPP</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percentage (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Year 10 or below</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year 11</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year 12</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Certificate I/II</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Certificate III/IV</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diploma/Advanced Diploma</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>56</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Nearly two thirds of respondents were employed prior to starting UPP. There was little difference in pre-UPP employment rates for males and females. Fewer than half the survey respondents who were employed pre-UPP were full time. People who were self-employed were included as full-time workers.

The 34 survey respondents who were working pre-UPP described a wide variety of occupations, including child and personal carers, health workers, retail assistants, trade occupations, several self-employed owner operators of businesses, and several in supervisory or management positions. These occupations were grouped into classifications based on the Australia New Zealand Standard Classification of Occupations (ABS, 2013). According to this classification, the greatest proportion (26%) was employed in community and personal service work (Table 2).

Table 2: Occupational classification pre-UPP

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Occupational classification</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percentage (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Manager</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technician and Trade Worker</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community and Personal Service Worker</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clerical/Administrative Worker</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sales Worker</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Machinery Operator and Driver</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Labourer</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>34</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In terms of voluntary work, the survey sample was evenly spread, with half reporting they were undertaking voluntary work pre-UPP and the other half not undertaking voluntary work pre-UPP.

Other background details

Thirty three of the survey participants (59%) were first in their family to attend university. There was a small difference in the rates of females and males who reported they were first-in-family to attend university (50% vs 63%) but this was not statistically significant. Of the 23 respondents who were not
first-in-family, most reported siblings rather than parents, as having attended university (sister n=15; brother n=12; father n=3; mother n=2).

A number of interviewees discussed the reason why they had not previously undertaken university-level study. There were those who had intended to go but other circumstances had prevented this from happening. This was the case of Barbara whose husband’s job took them to a remote location where further study was not possible. Maggie also described ‘family circumstances’ as curtailing her aspirations to go further, whilst Scott indicated that his family was unable to fund further study. Both Maggie and Scott left school at the end of Year 10.

Expectations and aspirations within families also appear to have played a significant role in either encouraging or discouraging further education. For participants who had a family member (usually an elder sibling) who had attended university, this was not seen as an unusual choice. However, more common was the notion that going to university was not seen as a possible or even desirable pathway within the family. University, in fact, was seen as the domain of males, the ‘rich’ and the ‘brainy’.

Wendy talks of her family’s expectations for girls: ‘I came from a family, a generation of parents where boys studied and girls didn’t’. She recalls her father saying she should, ‘just get a job and wait until [she was] married’.

The former UPP coordinator speaks about another student:

….and she came to UPP because she’d left school at the end of Year 10 and her family had the view – and this was a very traditional view at the time and probably still remains that way on the North West coast – that a girl didn’t need to go to university.

Melissa speaks of the post-Year 10 expectations that prevailed:

…. there was an expectation that I would go on and just work after Year 10. My parents weren’t in any position and didn’t think that was a pathway for me.

For males there were also barriers to participation in further education. The former UPP coordinator saw that boys too, were constrained by local expectations, ‘So there was a male thing where boys had left school when they were 16 or 17 to become a [tradesman]’.

Eric describes how he saw university, ‘I thought university was for rich kids and everything else, you know?’ His thoughts are echoed by Andrea, ‘when I left matric … you only went to university if you were rich and brainy’.

Ashley succinctly describes the lack of family conversation about university-level education saying, ‘So there was never the word “university” mentioned in our house. Not once’. For her, getting out of school and into work was the key priority:

I couldn’t wait to get out of high school. I had grown up in a working class family and our employment options were, you know, all those traditional manual labour-type things…..

Several interviewees reported that the decision to enrol in UPP was not always greeted positively by their family, and placed extra pressure on them. University was perceived as a ‘threat’ to family and
community cultural values, and some parents also resented the time their adult children spent on study rather than family matters. Wendy explains:

> they didn’t like it too much because as I said, it was a full time commitment … so basically they got to talk to me and see me when I had spare time. … Also it was interesting – I love my dad dearly, obviously, and when he passed away it was a terrible shock – but even at the point when I first said I was going to uni he was well [pause], the comment that I’ll never forgive him for was ‘oh just get another job and wait until you’re married’; he just didn’t understand, you know what I mean, he’d come from a different time. But yeah, it did cause a bit of a ruckus actually.

Melissa went on to complete an Education degree after UPP, and reflects:

> Mum and Dad if asked would probably still say I’ve done a TAFE course. They don’t really understand it … Mum was always a stay-at-home mum and she thinks that’s the role of a mother to do that so I wouldn’t say she’s supportive of working full-time or taking time outside the household to go out and do things like [study]…

The motivation of interviewees to bring about a change in their lives (see later section on ‘When and why did they enrol?’) drove them to continue with UPP and then with further study, despite the tensions and pressures from family. Two of the female interviewees describe how their persistence eventually ‘won over’ their parents:

> … in the end I think it became a bit of a novelty for them that I was actually studying. (Wendy)

> … although I think they were quite proud of me when I finished [my Education degree]. (Melissa)

Many of those interviewed spoke about the range of challenges they faced when beginning their university study. These challenges included being first-in-family, limited skills in areas such as information technology (IT), their prior educational experiences, home circumstances, and lack of self-efficacy.

As Joshua articulates, going to university without background family support or expectations made things difficult: ‘I was the first person in my family ever to go to university sort of thing and had absolutely no idea what to expect’. Andrea and Wendy also identified themselves as ‘first-in-family’.

Lack of IT skills was a particular problem for some interviewees. This was echoed by the former UPP Coordinator:

> When we first started in 1996 we had IT classes where the first couple of weeks the homework exercises were to play solitaire so that people could learn how to use a mouse; they just had never touched a computer before.

Over time, limitations in terms of IT skills became less common, as students entering UPP were increasingly more IT-literate.

Interviewees’ prior educational experiences also contributed to what students perceived as challenges. Ashely explained: ‘I didn’t even finish …like, I didn’t even go to college. I just finished at 16 and went straight into a trade… I wasn’t a very good student’.
This experience was echoed by Amanda who described herself as a ‘high-school drop-out’. Other interviewees noted that their previous level of education gave them little insight into university-level study, as evidenced by Kevin who identified that a traineeship in pulp and paper making ‘wasn’t the same style as university’. Another variation of this theme is the time that had elapsed since students had last studied. In Cynthia’s case, for example, there was a 40-year gap. For Kevin there was an eight-year gap.

Family circumstances posed a number of issues ranging from serious relationship problems to time pressures and competing demands.

_We had one woman whose husband stalked her. One night she had to call the police because he was outside the building threatening her._ (former UPP Coordinator)

Gaylene and Melissa had to juggle the demands of studying and caring for very young children. Scott described a range of family pressures which in the end forced him to withdraw from the course:

_The problem was I was working 50-60 hours a week … It was just too much time involved [in UPP]. I’d got other things – a farm to run, cows to milk, young kids at home and everything else – I just ran out of time._

Some interviewees described a lack of self-efficacy as a significant barrier to overcome. This was the result of family and community perceptions, limited or no previous academic success and the notion, as previously discussed, of who should go to university. This seems to be closely linked to being first-in-family or coming from a family background where continuing on to university was not considered an option:

_I took a lot of convincing because when she said ‘university’, I said ‘No way! Absolutely no way I can go to university’. (Ashley)_

_To be honest I didn’t think I’d cope and probably didn’t think I was smart enough to go on to do that [university]. (Melissa)_

_I had absolutely no confidence whatsoever that I would be able to do it._ (Joshua)

Not all interviewees needed to overcome feelings of self-doubt and belonging. At least two interviewees revealed that they were quite confident about their abilities:

_Growing up, it [going to university] was something that I thought I would be able to do. … In high school I had really good grades … It’s a bit of a cliché; you know, teenager, parents divorced, mixes up with the wrong crowd, grows hair too long. … I felt that I had the potential to study university … (Chris)_

_So I think I always had a niggling thing that I … I always enjoyed study so I was happy to go back…._ (Maggie)

While the challenge of combining work, family and UPP proved too great for Scott, most of the interviewees persevered. Eric, for example, explained: ‘I persisted and my keyboard skills picked up as I went through’. The former UPP coordinator witnessed determination in overcoming significant barriers:

_It seemed to be that if they became encouraged enough with the subject they were looking at they could rise above any shortcoming they had in terms of background academic skills._
Some interviewees motivated themselves to keep going, as in the case of Leah:

*I just need to have some more self-discipline and a make myself get out there and ask for help… Get help and get to know things.*

Others were inspired by external stories:

*I read this magazine article about a woman who'd gone back to university three different times and worked in three different careers and I thought, 'Well if she can do it, I can do it.'* (Andrea)

**When and why did they enrol in UPP?**

Survey respondents were spread across all of the target study years, from 1996 to 2007 (Figure 2). There was only one respondent from 2002. Data were checked to ensure there were no data entry errors.

**Figure 2: Number of respondents by study year**

![Chart showing number of respondents by study year](image)

Figure 3 (following page) shows that just under half the survey respondents completed five or more units (i.e. more than half of the available units).
The majority of survey respondents said they enrolled in UPP specifically to prepare for university study, with personal development the second most frequently cited reason for enrolment (Table 3).

### Table 3: Main reason for enrolment in UPP

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason for enrolment</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percentage (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Prepare for university study</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improve general education</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Get a job</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Get a better job/change careers</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal development</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Over half the interviewees said they enrolled in UPP as a stepping stone into tertiary study. They needed the skills and knowledge the course provided so they could complete a university degree. Often they did not specify what study skills they hoped to obtain through enrolling in the course.

> I became involved in that program as a pathway to get into studies at the University of Tasmania… I planned to teach education, so to do an education degree. (Melissa)

> I wanted to do a Bachelor of Arts and I was struggling to get into uni. (Amanda)

> I knew that I needed to update my IT skills and I needed to know as much as I possibly could about what undertaking study would involve. (Jessica)

Although the main motivation for enrolling in UPP was to develop skills to undertake a university degree, this was not the only reason for enrolling.

For many interview participants, the need to secure employment or increase employment prospects was a strong motivating factor behind enrolling in UPP. More than half of the interviewees reported that...
their reasons for enrolling was to upskill, so as to increase employment opportunities or change careers. They saw university completion as providing the qualifications required for a particular occupation or change of career.

Circumstances of my life were similar to most young people living in Tasmania. I was unemployed, had few employment prospects and things weren't that positive. I was also about to become a father for the first time and that was a big motivator to look at my life and ask, 'what are you doing?' (Chris)

I actually wanted to get back into the workforce, but I thought that I had been out of work for a period of time so I thought I needed to upskill somehow. (Gina)

That one [UPP] was set up by The Pulp [local paper mill] when there was talk about it closing down. It was more the guys, so to give them more avenues to go on to a different type of work. But it was also offered to the partners... (Emma)

Scott was the only interviewee who said he enrolled in UPP because he wanted to upskill in his current position. Although only one story, the following from Scott suggests that UPP may be viewed by some as a way to increase their professional-level skills for effective work practices or upward mobility in an existing position:

Well I was a serving police officer and the police promoted study to make you more effective at your job and everything else...the idea was I'd gone from a practical working police officer running a crew or a shift or whatever, into the higher fields of administration. And the idea was to make you better equipped to deal with that sort of situation; to deal with heads of departments and all sorts of government agencies. (Scott)

For a number of interviewees, the motivation to enrol in UPP to increase employment options was interconnected with the need for security or stability, or triggered by a particular life circumstance. In these stories, the decision is connected with 'need', whether that was 'need' for financial stability or 'need' for a different line of work due to injury.

I wanted a career and I wanted to be able to know I could support myself and the kids so there was quite a lot of motivation for me to start. (Melissa)

I'd had a career as a hairdresser so about 25, about 20 years at that time. I was looking at another career. I wanted to change so I went down to the TAFE and just thought I'd have a bit of a look at the courses there and happened to meet the counsellor who mentioned this new program, the UPP Program... I was quite fearful that I wouldn't be able to look after myself for the rest of my life as a hairdresser so...I would have been on the poverty line on a pension or... you know, just going from one low skilled job to the next and that wasn't what... I couldn't bear that. (Ashley)

I [worked] at the mill in Burnie but I had feet problems and I got to the point where I also had 110 acres and one thing and another and it was full-on. But then my feet problems caught up with me and I just couldn't maintain farming and [job at the paper mill] and I knew I had to make a change and it had to be something off my feet. (Daniel)

I'd come to a stage in my life where I'd sort of semi, well, not semi-retired, but I was no longer working full-time and I actually made some enquiries about further study because I thought that might be something to do... (Joshua)
For some of the interviewees, enrolling in UPP was a matter of ‘need’ in regard to securing employment (see above quotes), and also a matter of ‘want’ in regard to wanting something more, or a challenge. However, these reasons are mainly described by the students as separate from one another, rather than enmeshed. In other cases, they report ‘needing’ UPP as well as ‘wanting’ it.

I really needed to do something and just working on farms and in factories and stuff, wasn’t I suppose stimulating enough for me. (Robert)

If I wanted to make money, I’d go do something else [other than uni], but if I wanted to get a job where I was doing something and working with my brain, which is what I hoped to be able to do, then yeah, uni’s the way to go. (Joshua)

Mine [reason for doing UPP] was that I got to the stage where, heading back to work, ‘do I really want to be in retail for the rest of my life? Is this it? Let’s explore a different path …’ (Gaylene)

At the time, due to a number of life factors, I suppose, personal factors, I was looking to do something different and looking to do some kind of learning/training and went at the time to Adult Ed, TAFE and the university to see what was available…I walked through the door at the university in June/July, somewhere around there, and they said, ‘we have a university preparation program about to start in semester two, why don’t you come to that?’ And, I ummed and ahed about it and then thought, ‘I might as well give it a go’. (Andrea)

Some interviewees wanted the challenge that they believed university study offered, but did not know if they were capable. They expressed their uncertainties about their capabilities to complete UPP and a desire to ‘test’ these.

I had been thinking about it [UPP]; I had been thinking about trying to find out – everybody was always telling me I spoke good English but it is my second language. I read it, I write it but it is my second language. I wanted to know did I have the ability to formalise that second language. (Sonya)

…I did matric [Year 11 and 12] but not with outstanding results [laughs]. But then I got on the website and I saw this course and I thought, ‘I’m going to do that’. I thought, ‘that’s going to sort me out’ in terms of if I can or can’t and then I went from there. (Kahla)

Without the encouragement of others, many of those interviewed would not have eventually enrolled. For some interviewees this encouragement came from a university staff member or a person directly involved in UPP. The positive and welcoming nature of UPP staff helped overcome student fears (see next section on ‘Perceptions of UPP’). For others it was a family member, employer or friend who encouraged them, or in several cases, a TAFE employee. The following examples highlight ‘how’ a particular individual influenced the interviewees’ decision to enrol in UPP.

Well, I had been working sort of full time and that job had finished and someone suggested to me, ‘why don’t you have a go at uni?’ And I thought, ‘Oh gee’, because I didn’t know if I could do it. (Kahla)

[I was] swept up in the enthusiasm of one of the UPP team members who was providing information about the course. Without this wave or embrace of enthusiasm, I would not have been interested in starting study. (Mary)

I was working as a hairdresser at the time and thought I had always wanted to go to university, but didn’t have the opportunity through family circumstances. So I approached someone at TAFE who was
a careers counsellor or something like that, I believe. I can’t remember the person but she suggested, she said, ‘Look, this University Preparation Program is staring next year, it might be just what you need…just a taster of university and see how you go from there’. So I enrolled and the rest is history. (Maggie)

A small number of interviewees said they enrolled in UPP because of the proximity of the campus and the fact that they did not have to travel, which meant they could maintain a family/work life balance. Andrea referred to the accessibility of the local campus and Kevin mentioned that the course was free.

**Perceptions of UPP**

On enrolling in UPP, the majority of the interviewees in this study believed that the program would provide them with the necessary skills to engage in further study and/or increase their options for work. The interviewees mostly referred to the program as ‘excellent’ or ‘very good’ or ‘good’, and this is often connected with learning academic writing skills, communication skills, computer skills, time management skills or with gaining confidence, as illustrated in the following examples:

> It was very good. I did computers…it was how to navigate your way around…and what I did with UPP just concreted everything into place…so that was brilliant and the teacher was amazing… (Kahla)

> Learning how to write an academic essay and the referencing was good. Um, learning to talk and to share a bit of ourselves in front of others was also very good… (Laura)

> I could tell from the first week that the skills we were going to learn were just going to be so invaluable. Not just for uni but for a career after uni… (Kevin)

However, the positive perception of UPP extended well beyond skills learnt and successful outcomes (see next chapter on ‘The impact of participation in UPP’). It is closely linked to the nature of the program and the nature of the Cradle Coast campus. Several interviewees talked about the physical and psychological accessibility of the campus and the program, and described a sense of belonging in what might previously have been seen as an unfamiliar or threatening environment.

> So I just came up here to see what the go was and ended up in the UPP. (Gina)

> I had always wanted to teach and I said to my husband, ‘I’ll go and be a teacher’s aide, you know, I’m a bit old for this university game’. But then I happened to see a thing in the paper about UPP and he said, ‘go and give that a go’, and I said, ‘they won’t want me’. So I went up and had an interview with [the former UPP coordinator] and she said, ‘yeah, come up, you’ll be fine, come and have a go’. So I did. And that was it, I never looked back. (Gaylene)

> I haven’t been on the other campuses so I can’t really say, but it’s [Cradle Coast Campus] very friendly and very welcoming, particularly for mature aged students. (Kayla)

> I think here [the Cradle Coast campus], the north-west centre at the time, was such a quiet, home-like environment… (Amanda)

> I loved the course so much. It was… because it was small and just starting off, it was intimate, it was like a big family and all my friends were there. I couldn’t wait to go so it was very enjoyable doing the course with lots of encouragement. (Ashley)
For many in this study, this sense of belonging was enhanced through relationships that were developed between students and staff, and amongst students.

It was a very comfortable environment. Everyone there was there because they themselves thought that they were underprepared. It was formal enough to be taken seriously but at the same time it was a comfortable environment. By the end of the first week everyone was friends, everyone was able to chat comfortably with the lecturers and it really was really comfortable… (Kevin)

Also, I hooked up with a study buddy and she was fabulous as well and we were both on the same wavelength. (Jessica)

I think also because we were a small group, maybe there were sort of eight, ten of us in that group. And you help each other. You really tried to help each other because everybody was making a sacrifice to go back and study. (Cynthia)

The majority of interviewees described how UPP allowed them to learn, test and affirm their abilities in a ‘comfortable’, ‘home-like’, ‘welcoming’ and ‘supportive’ environment. They mostly attributed this to the program itself, the small regional campus, small class sizes, and, above all, UPP staff, who were typically described as ‘supportive’ and ‘encouraging’ as well as ‘inspirational’, ‘enthusiastic’, ‘fabulous’, ‘wonderful’ and ‘brilliant’.

She was awesome. She took us for [name of unit], made it enjoyable … was very accommodating. She was again, you know, able to boost your confidence, especially just from her life story herself. (Joshua)

The UPP certainly gave me the opportunity to work out, ‘yep, can I do this, am I going to be okay?’ Certainly the staff down there gave me a lot of support and it was nice having that environment and being able to do that. (Melissa)

I couldn’t fault the teachers in any way; they were good. I didn’t find them doing it for you or anything like that, but basically the encouragement that they gave you was all practical which was good; you could actually go through, and doing something with it; it wasn’t just telling you the answer or anything like that, it was excellent. (Wendy)

I thought it was exceptionally well structured and it’s what the community needs. That’s the sort of…we need nurturing and reinforcing all the time. (Cynthia)

Common themes running through the interviews were those of feeling valued and being treated respectfully by staff.

The personal attention that you get from the lecturers, I really felt like I was valued… (Gaylene)

That is the way we were treated. There was never a stupid question. (Kevin)

… once you actually get explained something to you so it’s understandable then it’s fine. [Former UPP coordinator] always used to say to us ‘There’s no such thing as a stupid question’ and I’d heard that expression before but when you actually think about it, yeah, well, if you don’t know, [the] only way you’re going to find out is by asking the question… (Joshua)

Only one interviewee communicated a negative perception of UPP and this was in regard to their experience with online delivery.
It gave me a heck of a lot of frustration on occasion, but it meant that I had a deadline, things had to be
done by a certain time, I had to get the information I needed, I had to do the digging, I had to go in
places I never knew. (Sonya)

Her frustration was less to do with feeling isolated, and more to do with technical difficulties and
problems contacting staff. Others, such as Melissa, had positive perceptions of the flexible nature of the
program, because online delivery allowed her to study at home while caring for a very young child, and
also prepared her for undergraduate study online:

It allowed me to get into online learning and to learn all about that, which of course helped later on with
my studies with that. (Melissa)

Where are they now?

Most survey respondents (82%) are still living somewhere in the Cradle Coast region. The small
number of respondents not living in the Cradle Coast region (n=10) were variously located in the
Australian Capital Territory, New South Wales, Victoria, Western Australia and elsewhere in Tasmania.
Only one was living in a metropolitan centre; the remainder were in rural or regional locations. Those
who are no longer living in the Cradle Coast region mainly cited employment reasons for leaving.
Another one was about to leave the Cradle Coast to seek employment interstate. Two respondents had
never lived in the Cradle Coast region, instead studying by distance from their home locations
elsewhere in Tasmania and in Victoria.
Findings: The impact of participation in UPP

There were numerous outcomes from participation in UPP. Analysis of these outcomes suggests they can be grouped into three inter-related areas – foundations for change, confidence, and new opportunities – as shown in Figure 4.

Figure 4: Outcomes of participation in UPP

Foundations for change

A key aim of UPP is to provide an introduction to university culture, and develop skills that will be useful for university study and beyond. Interview findings show that students did gain an understanding of university culture and realistic expectations of university life. Of the interviewees who went on to further study, just under half commented specifically on how UPP had smoothed the way and made explicit the expectations and often unspoken ‘rules’ of university study.

I didn’t struggle at all in my first year and I think if it wasn’t for UPP, there would have been lots of things… you know, there was lots of questions I was able to answer with the people I did my Education degree with… and it was just because I’d had that knowledge … (Melissa)

I think the UP program introduced me to academic life and showed me what the expectations were. So, ‘this is uni’, ‘this is what is expected of you’, ‘if you don’t like it, get out now’, ‘if you don’t like it but want to keep going, this is what you have to deal with’. (Amanda)

…then when we moved to Launceston [to study an Education degree], because of the grounding we had here we felt really comfortable with what was expected of us work wise up there. (Robert)

On completion of UPP, Wendy continued with TAFE study but was planning to articulate to university. For her, UPP provided a realistic expectation of what will be required when she articulates:

I think trying to tackle university without prior skills, I think you’d be very much overwhelmed … I had no idea what university education required – the level of commitment and basically the quality of work needed – and if anything I’d say I thrived more on it than being detrimental. (Wendy)
Some interviewees said they learnt how to study, developing a range of literacy, IT and research skills.

*Just to me, the skills to be able to study which I think was just invaluable, invaluable. So I saw a lot of other people drop out quickly. (Maggie)*

*It taught me much better research skills than I had before and the ability to put forward a reasoned opinion. (Mary)*

A number of interviewees described how literacy, IT, research and time management skills gained through UPP provided an important foundation for other areas of their life, such as the workplace, creative pursuits and lifestyle management:

*The grounding that we got in UPP gave you the basis for a lot of stuff. (Joshua)*

*…and what I did with UPP [in terms of information technology] just concreted everything into place. … I would have been lost on this job without the computer skills I picked up in UPP, that has been invaluable. Because you are expected to know quite a bit already and because I had the confidence to go in and play with the computer more. (Kahla)*

*In general I think that it gave me life skills. You know, time management … It made me become a forward thinker and a forward planner … If I have to write a letter or write anything, straight away the skills I learnt in UPP in sentence structure and punctuation and all that are self evident. People pick up my writing and go ‘Gee you write well’ and I go ‘Yeah, I was taught to’. And not in high school. … (Kevin)*

Some interviewees described how participation in UPP made them aware of options in regard to their degree studies, as well as broader future possibilities that they had not previously considered. Jessica recalled that ‘we learnt about a new degree which had been formulated’. Wendy changed her mind about her future studies, once she heard of other options during her time in UPP:

*But it was quite funny actually, half way through the UPP course there was a course they had begun to offer that was environment science, um, a Bachelor of Regional Resource Management, and funnily enough I actually changed the idea of what I would have liked to have done once I started studying in the UPP. (Wendy)*

Some interviewees commented more generally about how UPP alerted them to greater possibilities in terms of lifelong learning:

*An interesting and engaging experience that opened my eyes to the possibilities of studying at university. (Mary)*

*Once it [UPP] opened the doors I realised there was so much more out there which was good. (Wendy)*

Other interviewees were aware of longer-term study options. Robert, for example, mentioned the possibility of doing a PhD in the future. Similarly, Eric had choices in regard to doing Honours in the future in two different faculties. Kahla saw further study as an option if her job application was unsuccessful.

Knowing about options did not necessarily translate into action. Amanda and Emma were aware of degree options at UTAS, but pointed out that they were not realistic for them as they were taught in
Hobart or Launceston, and for family and other reasons, they were not prepared to move towns to study.

*It was scary but it showed options as well. Like at the time, the Psych I wanted to do wasn’t here, it was in Hobart and I wasn’t prepared to move to Hobart at the time but there were options at other universities.* (Amanda)

The findings show that as the former UPP students learnt the nuts and bolts of studying at university, and gained academic skills, and an awareness of the university culture and their options, they developed confidence as university students.

**Confidence**

Nearly all survey respondents (85%) either agreed or strongly agreed that participation in UPP increased their self-confidence and self-esteem, indicating that increased self-confidence was one of the major outcomes from participation in UPP (Figure 5).

*Figure 5: Participation in UPP and positive influence on self-confidence*

There was a significant difference between the genders in terms of self-confidence and self-esteem, with a greater proportion of females compared with males reporting increased self-confidence and self-esteem from participation in UPP (92% vs 69%, p = 0.038). No relationship was found between increased self-confidence and any other student characteristics.

Respondents who had completed four or fewer units were just as likely to report similar levels of confidence as respondents who had completed five or more units. This finding differs from an earlier study of UPP participants (Walter, 2000) which found a positive correlation between the number of units completed and reported confidence levels in terms of abilities and skills to continue with tertiary study. However, it should be noted that the current study asked students about their confidence levels in general, rather than specifically in relation to further study.
Nearly all the interviewees referred to increased confidence as an outcome of participation in UPP. Most used the word confidence at least once during their interview, and others described examples of confidence building without using the term confidence. Only two interviewees did not identify or imply that one of the outcomes of UPP was increased confidence.

Interviewees talked about the impact of increased confidence in several ways. Nearly half of those who continued with further study talked about the way in which skills gained through UPP developed their confidence.

And you know, when you start your course, and you start with students that haven’t done UPP and have been out of education for a while, I mean, you hit the ground running. And they can see, you know, it’s a struggle at the start. I could probably have done the uni course without UPP, but I would have struggled, and it would have been stressful for me. It took out that stress. (Gaylene)

Nearly half the interviewees talked in very specific terms about confidence and skill building which was linked to successful transition to undergraduate study, noting they would never have continued with undergraduate study without UPP.

…if I hadn’t done UPP, I would not have probably gone to uni. I just don’t think without that pathway I would have been able to know that I could do it and could cope and probably would have gone down another path which probably didn’t include uni. I just was in that place at the time where I didn’t think that I’d probably be able to cope with it or wasn’t smart enough or just wasn’t able because of the kids … (Melissa)

I would never have come and done a university course without having first done UPP. (Daniel)

But I couldn’t have done it without UPP, because I had been out of education for so long, and it gave me the confidence to move forward, to live my dream. (Gaylene)

Some talked about how UPP had given them confidence in their own abilities:

…the most important thing was that it gave me confidence in my ability to undertake university. (Chris)

Well, it showed me that I could do it. It gave me confidence. (Amanda)

I was sure they’d say ‘nah, go up to TAFE and just be a teacher aide, you’ll be right’. But no, ‘yes come in, we can do it’ and then success followed, and yeah it just builds from there. (Gaylene)

Others talked more generally about how increased self-confidence was a key step in allowing them to develop personally and to overcome potential barriers such as shyness, which had an impact on their life at university and beyond:

…it helped me build my self-confidence, and knowing who I wanted to be, and what I had to do to get there … building on that self-confidence was one of the biggest things that I could have done. I was the most nervous, timid person walking in here on the first day … (Robert)

I think also UPP made me unafraid to ask questions and to ask for help if I was struggling, especially with the distance education. (Maggie)
Several interviewees noted that UPP built confidence by filling a gap in terms of literacy skills that should have been learnt in school but, for various reasons, were not. Two of these people have embarked on subsequent careers as authors, with one noting:

*I would never have embarked on starting to write a book if I hadn't done UPP … I am a talker, not a writer and I still struggle with that a bit today. … I would never have been able to do that sort of thing without what I gained out of the UPP those years ago about structure and breaking it down into bits and headings and all those sort of things.* (Daniel)

One exception was Brandon; rather than giving him confidence in his abilities and helping him develop academic skills, UPP highlighted his weaknesses: ‘I made a realisation how dumb I am. I just can’t write essays’.

The development of confidence is a theme that permeated the interviews. As illustrated above, it was gained during UPP and empowered students to move on to further study, and take up other opportunities.

**New opportunities**

*Further study and willingness to continue lifelong learning*

Nearly all survey respondents (88% or 49 out of 56) reported continuing with further study post-UPP. This included higher education, vocational education and training (VET), and other learning opportunities not specified. The relatively high number of respondents reporting they had continued with further study is specific to this sample, and is not representative of the 1996-2007 cohort as a whole. There was no association between reason for enrolment and continuation with further study, showing that students who enrolled for reasons other than preparation for university study were just as likely to continue with further study as those who enrolled to prepare for further study. This finding differs from the earlier study (Walter, 2000), which noted a strong link between purpose for enrolment and subsequent continuation with further study.

Over half of the survey respondents reported that they strongly agreed that participation in UPP had influenced their decision to undertake further learning or study (Figure 6).
Survey findings show that students who completed five or more units (i.e. more than half) were significantly more likely to continue with further study than students who completed four or fewer units (100% vs 78%, p=0.016). These findings partly reflect those of an earlier study (Walter, 2000) in terms of the positive correlation between the number of units studied and continuation with further study. However, it should be noted that the earlier study examined the relationship between reported levels of confidence, number of units studied, and progression to further tertiary study. No association was found between respondents’ previous education, previous employment status or occupation, and further study. This supports findings from the earlier study (Walter, 2000).

Of the 49 survey respondents who continued with further study, most (80%) undertook higher education (rather than VET or other unspecified study). Most of the further study was undertaken at UTAS. this study at UTAS, showing that UPP was a pathway to undergraduate study at UTAS (see Appendix 2 Table 6). A small number of respondents (n=10) reported having undertaken further learning at more than one institution, in addition to UTAS.

Of all those who continued with higher education, most (72%) undertook a Bachelor degree, while 28% completed a Bachelor degree then continued with postgraduate study (Honours n=5; Masters n=4; PhD n=2) (see Appendix 2 Figure 13). They were involved in studies across most fields and disciplines (Table 4 on the following page). These were classified according to the Fields of Education provided in the ABS Australian Standard Classification of Education 2001 (ABS, 2001).

The most popular fields of further study were Education (31%) and Society and Culture (including social work/counselling) (25%). This is not surprising given that these courses were delivered (in part, if not wholly) on the Cradle Coast Campus, giving students the opportunity to study without having to leave their local region. Although not statistically significant, a higher proportion of females than males undertook further study in Education (36% vs 15%).
Table 4: Field of study post-UPP

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Field of study</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percentage (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Natural and Physical Sciences</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information Technology</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engineering and Related Technologies</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agriculture, Environmental and Related Studies</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Management and Commerce</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Society and Culture</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not stated</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>49</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Those who continued with further study had relatively good completion rates. Over three quarters had completed their course or were still studying (Figure 7). This suggests that for this sample UPP enhanced retention by preparing students well for further learning, including undergraduate study. Those who deferred or withdrew from further study cited various reasons, including health, relocation interstate, or inability to complete the course of their choice at the Cradle Coast campus.

**Figure 7: Status of further study post-UPP**

Most interviewees went on to further study immediately following UPP, describing how UPP acted as a bridge to tertiary education, and provided an opportunity to demonstrate their potential to be successful in undergraduate study. The former Cradle Coast Campus manager reflects: 'this program enabled them to get up to a level that they hadn’t hoped to or hadn't thought of doing before…'.

Most interviewees who continued with further study chose to study in areas that would help them establish a new career or transition to an alternative career. For example, Gina was seeking to enter the workforce after a number of years at home raising children, so chose to study computing/information systems which led to a job offer part way through the course. Laura raised five
children then began an Education degree. Chris described how he had lost his way when younger, and talked about the role of UPP and subsequent undergraduate study in helping to turn his life around.

Others were seeking a change in employment to secure a career that was less physically demanding and that would provide different challenges. This included hairdresser Ashley who studied Social Work, tradesperson Kevin who studied a Bachelor of Arts to get into the public service, and injured outdoor worker Robert who studied Education.

Others were seeking to progress in their chosen field, such as Amanda who undertook further study to move from support worker to management in a community services workplace.

Not all interviewees continued with further study for employment purposes, but because they had an interest in the particular subject and wanted to pursue this further, such as Brandon who had an interest in philosophy, and Sonya who had an interest in public policy. Others were less specific in reasons for undertaking further study, citing things like ‘I had always wanted to go to uni’ (Leah; Amanda).

For some interviewees, further study in a particular field led directly to employment in their chosen field. This is particularly true of those who chose to study Education.Others had a particular career in mind but changed their further study plans during UPP, such as Maggie who subsequently chose Applied Science instead of Education, and Jessica who subsequently chose Regional Resource Management instead of Education. Eric and Joshua were able to use evidence of their success in UPP to apply for scholarships to continue with the Bachelor of Regional Resource Management, and Amanda and Maggie received scholarships to continue with postgraduate study.

Some interviewees talked about how participation in UPP contributed to successful outcomes in their further study:

I was able to get a distinction average, no worries whatsoever, just with using the skills that I learnt in UPP. (Kevin)

I actually got the highest mark in the state [for a major project in the undergraduate degree] … I wouldn’t have gone into the uni, you know, and be able to succeed at the level I succeeded at without the UPP. (Gina)

I probably wouldn’t have gone back to study if I hadn’t have done that [UPP]; I wouldn’t have considered it an option basically with what was going on at the time, and straight away it wasn’t an option, but now … I have been back to study for the last couple of years … I still use the same skills that I learnt doing the course down there [UPP]. … part of the course I’m doing, we actually had to pull a company apart and find out what was actually going on with their finances and it had to be presented in a report style. And just to be able to compile a report and have it, have the information presented in an academic standard, I mean I still use that skill all the time. (Wendy)

The majority of survey respondents agreed or strongly agreed that UPP had helped them make connections with new people and groups (Figure 8 on the following page), although we are unable to determine from the survey data the nature and extent of these networks and connections.
Interview data give an indication of the importance of connections with others. For some interviewees, connections and networks built during UPP were useful to support further study:

I think probably those students who were UPP students who went into particular undergraduate areas like Education or Nursing remained close, particularly in situations where they were required to travel. In the early days only the first year of Education was offered here, so those people would have had to car pool for the second and third years of Education. So you become fairly good acquaintances so that’s a network they would have developed. (former UPP coordinator)

…there was certainly always people who I knew who I’d met that initial year before I began my education degree, met as part of UPP who were able to assist you and, you know, keep you buoyed up along the way, you know, to do this. (Melissa)

Findings from the interviews suggest that beyond undertaking studies in Bachelor degrees, a number of interviewees showed a willingness to do further study/learning in the future. This includes the two students who are contemplating higher degrees. Robert, for instance, has completed a Master of Education and is considering PhD studies. Melissa would like to embark on her Master of Education:

Having done Honours, I know it’s a little bit of an easier process for me to go into that so yeah, I would definitely like to finish my Masters at some point. (Melissa)

Others, such as Maggie and Andrea, have already completed or are about to complete their PhDs.

Laura, now a teacher, is interested in further study to develop her skills:

I’d like to extend some of my learning, maybe take on another course, just to be a better teacher because I know more and have more interests. So really, to continue what I’m doing but to include more things in my repertoire, I suppose. (Laura)
Some of the interviewees now see further study as a part of life. Kevin comments that ‘further study is always ongoing’; Andrea sees UPP as the beginning of a long pathway: ‘once started, I haven’t stopped, really. I’m still on it’. Similarly, Amanda’s study has become ongoing:

*I always wanted to be really good at something or know a lot about at least one thing. And the UPP program showed me what I had to do to get to that point...yeah, but I just couldn’t stop. Every time I finished a course or a degree, I wanted to do something else. Um, so yeah, just the bug.* (Amanda)

**Employment**

Around two thirds of survey respondents report they are currently in paid employment; this is a similar rate to those who reported they were in paid employment prior to undertaking UPP. However, in terms of gender there has been a shift in employment rates post-UPP. A greater proportion of females compared with males (72% vs 44%) reported they are currently in paid employment ($\chi^2 (1) = 4.1, p = 0.043$). (For a comparison of pre- and post-UPP employment rates by gender, see Appendix 2 Tables 7 and 8.)

Of the 36 survey respondents who are currently working, more than half (58%) are employed full-time. This represents an increase from pre-UPP employment modes where 44% respondents reported full time positions. (For a comparison of pre- and post-UPP employment modes, see Appendix 2 Table 9).

Around two thirds of the survey respondents who are currently working are employed in a professional role, with the remainder spread across various employment categories (Table 5).

**Table 5: Occupational classification post-UPP**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Occupational classification</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percentage (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Manager</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technician and Trade Worker</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community and Personal Service Worker</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clerical/Administrative Worker</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sales Worker</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Machinery Operator and Driver</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Labourer</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not stated</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This differs markedly from occupational classifications pre-UPP, where only a very small number (n=4) were employed in professional roles (see Appendix 2 Table 10). A comparison of pre- and post-UPP occupational classifications shows that those who moved into professional roles came largely from the community services and personal workers, and sales workers, classifications.

When asked whether participation in UPP helped them to enter the workforce, a relatively large proportion of survey respondents were neutral on the issue (Figure 9 on the following page). No relationship was found between the impact of UPP on entry to the workforce and respondent characteristics.
Figure 9: Participation in UPP and positive influence on entry to the workforce

Just over half the survey respondents either agreed or strongly agreed that participation in UPP had a positive influence by assisting them to get a better job or improve their career prospects, but again a relatively high number were neutral on the issue (Figure 10). Given that a relatively small proportion of respondents cited employment or improved employment as the reason for enrolling in UPP, these findings are not surprising.

Figure 10: Participation in UPP and positive influence on career prospects
For two interviewees who did not continue with further study, participation in UPP impacted directly on them gaining employment. Emma described how completion of UPP demonstrated to employers her ability to complete a course of study, which assisted in gaining a part-time market research role.

But, it [UPP] was enough to get me to the next level and get a bit of part-time work. I know that I did use the UPP certificate as a part of my resume. You know, I had something that I could put on there to say that I had actually been to university. (Emma)

Over the years Emma’s role has increased in hours, and the number of companies seeking her research expertise has also increased.

Kahla learnt useful skills and made contacts that assisted her in the job application process:

…the reason that I've got the job I've got now is because of the UPP course. I can guarantee that. It was a combination of two things. The fact that I had done the course and the fact that one of the ladies I met there Sarah Telly [pseudonym], she helped me do my resume and address the selection criteria and it was her and another girl there that helped me get that together and I couldn’t have done that by myself. And that made a big difference. So out of that I got the interview and then I got the job. (Kahla)

However, for most of the interviewees UPP led to undergraduate study which led to employment (and frequently to better employment than before). Some interviewees talked about doors opening and an increased range of employment options opening up.

Now, as a person with a university degree, I was able to just go straight in [to the armed forces] as an officer. (Chris)

I've had more options, where I've had to take one job rather than another, which has been fantastic. I suppose people have always wanted to be able to decide where they want to work rather than worry about what they are going to do or if they are going to get any kind of work. I don't feel like I have a worry about finding work. (Amanda)

I've been in the fortunate position of being offered jobs all the time … I think the fact that the person who offered me the job knew I was at uni … It gives you… makes you sound a little bit brighter than if you’re not at uni, doesn’t it? (Gina)

Gina was offered employment on the basis of her partly completed Information Systems undergraduate degree, which led to a promotion to project management. Prior to this Gina had been out of the workforce for some time, caring for her children.

I think the reason I became project manager … was because I had this uni grounding you know? Like, your mind went a bit like this you know, instead of just ‘let’s just sit here and do what was always done, whether it worked or not’ kind of thing. (Gina)

Amanda described how further study had improved her career prospects within the same field, moving from a community services support worker pre-UPP to a community services management position after completing further study.

The issue of increased job security was either mentioned or implied by a number of interviewees. Melissa was experiencing relationship issues, and ‘wanted to be able to know [that she] could support [herself] and the kids’. Melissa goes on to say:
without that [flexible delivery of UPP], I certainly wouldn’t be where I am now [employed as a teacher] and I wouldn’t have the career I have without UPP. … It’s made a huge difference to mine and the kids’ lives. I mean, I know, you know, where my job is. It’s a stable job. I’ve never had any problems gaining work in Education and, you know, I think UPP gave me that – definitely to do this.

Many interviewees thought that their current employment offered better security in terms of ongoing employment than their previous employment. However, a small number of interviewees noted that their current employment offered less security than their previous employment. Three were on fixed-term contracts, but still considered there had been an improvement in their employment status because they had jobs in the tertiary and government sectors that they found interesting and stimulating. Another interviewee said her job prospects had not improved since completing UPP, but was philosophical about this:

Well, I’ve not moved into anything that has required any of the degree that I’ve done and I think that’s because of lack of opportunity. I’ve put my CV out to various local councils. I could have picked up a traineeship with [name of Council] in planning which was a bit disappointing but something happened there and… my fault, and it didn’t work out but it was there. So there was the opportunity, so I can’t say that there hasn’t been an opportunity… (Jessica)

Several interviewees noted how participation in UPP gave them additional skills and knowledge which improved their workplace performance.

UPP really did take a holistic approach to university, and also the follow on skills. I use absolutely everything that I learnt in UPP, in my current job. The whole suite was absolutely perfect, not just for university but also for a follow on career in the public service. (Kevin)

… it [UPP] made it easier to deal number one with the police department culture, but secondly, with all the other government and semi government organisations. It broadens your mind I suppose. Gives you exposure to things you’ve never been exposed to before. (Scott)

I think from the computer skills point of view, UPP taught me… this is back in the ’90s, so UPP taught me how to use the Internet, how to use email. It taught me how to reference a written assignment correctly. It taught me about some of those… you know, what are really basic, fundamental concepts for a white collar person working in today’s society. So that was really, really important. (Chris)

… the extra study certainly gives you the extra knowledge and skills that you need and that’s a nice, comfortable feeling when you need to make professional decisions in your job; that … you sort of know what you’re doing. (Ashley)

Leadership
One third (33%) of the 36 survey respondents currently in paid employment, and just over one third (38%) of those currently involved in voluntary work, reported a leadership role. Respondents were not asked if they had a leadership role in either their workplace or in the community pre-UPP, so we cannot determine if there has been a change in the number of people undertaking leadership roles post-UPP. However, there were slightly fewer people doing voluntary work post-UPP compared with pre-UPP (see Appendix 2 Table 11 for a comparison). The majority of those doing voluntary work post-UPP reported regular activity (see Appendix 2 Figure 14) and involvement in at least one community group (see Appendix 2 Figure 15).
Survey respondents were largely neutral on the influence of UPP on their community involvement (see Appendix 2 Figure 16). However, just under half agreed or strongly agreed that participation in UPP assisted or encouraged them to take on leadership responsibilities (either in the community or workplace, or both), although 39% were neutral on the subject (Figure 11).

**Figure 11: Participation in UPP and positive influence on leadership**

It may be that people who become involved in the community already have a predisposition towards voluntary and community-based activity, but for some of those people, the extent of their involvement (i.e. taking on a leadership role) may have been influenced to some extent by participation in UPP.

When interviewees were asked about leadership, they described various roles and activities. They ranged from exhibiting leadership as a student, to taking on leadership roles in their jobs and community, to being a role model for family and friends.

In regard to student leadership, Melissa helped her peers in the first year of her degree:

> there was lots of questions I was able to answer with the people I did my Education degree with... and it was just because I’d had that knowledge, I knew the programs they were using for their distance part – how to submit things online – where other people even... you know, they’d been straight out from school.

In Chris’s experience in the Special Forces, he found that having an education enabled him to take on leadership roles, ‘to act as an advocate for others’, and to ‘provide useful assistance to people who weren’t necessarily in a position to help themselves’. In Chris’s case, the impacts of UPP on leadership might be described as indirect, because he is referring to higher education in general, rather than UPP specifically.

Several interviewees spoke of specific leadership roles that they had taken on at work and in the community. It may be that these roles were an indirect result of doing UPP. Robert, for example, mentioned being a year coordinator in the school he teaches in, as well as having a position in the
voluntary fire service. Daniel has been the president of two community organisations/associations since completing UPP.

Three of the interviewees, Andrea, Gaylene and Barbara, explained that their leadership roles could be directly attributed to gaining confidence through UPP to take on higher-level roles and responsibilities:

*The roles have increased and mostly I think that’s because of my confidence in my abilities and my confidence in putting myself out there, I suppose, which UPP was a big part of that.* (Andrea)

*So you feel more qualified, to be able to be part of it. And give back, and know you are giving back sound knowledge. You know, not just helping out at a lower level, you’re quite happy to step up to that next level.* (Gaylene)

*Yeah, confident, empowered, so, yeah. Go on the committee and quite happy to do the secretary’s [role] whereas before I would have been like ‘yeah, nup.’ I’ll be your dog’s body, you go and do that job.* (Barbara)

Some of the leadership mentioned is in terms of taking on a mentoring and supportive role. Gaylene, for example, has felt more confident in providing supervision to undergraduate Education students who are on their professional experience in her classroom.

Although they may not have described it as leadership, survey respondents and interviewees were clear about the influence on their family and friends of their participation in UPP and subsequent study. The majority of survey respondents agreed or strongly agreed that UPP had benefitted their family and/or friends (Figure 12).

**Figure 12: Participation in UPP and positive influence on family and friends**

Several interviewees described how they were an example to their children. For instance, Andrea spoke of the importance of demonstrating to her children ‘that university is a part of normal life; it’s not something that just other people do’. Gaylene talked about being a role model and also about showing
that education is important. Jessica remarked: ‘I’ve sort of brought them up just reminding them it’s the norm’. By attending university, such a pathway came to be seen as ‘normal’ and a real possibility for their families and friends, when in the past it had not. Andrea’s experience illustrates the powerful impact being at university can have on family members:

  I’m the first one in the family but now my eldest son who’s now 27, he has almost completed his degree. My second son is considering university study and my daughter, who’s considerably younger, who’s 11, thinks it’s a definite. She helps me at Open Day at university and she… you know, it’s part of her life kind of thing… Won’t consider any other option.

She added: ‘not only has it broadened my horizons and my prospects but for my whole family’. Ashley also spoke of her children studying at university and that she ‘always talked to them about going to university’. Kevin talked about his family seeing the changes in him and some went on to complete degrees.

Some interviewees commented that without them leading the way, their children may not have ended up at university as it was not what their family did or expected of their children. Emma, for example, explained that

  our kids probably would have never considered doing uni and my eldest daughter at that stage because we were at uni she got a bit of a feeling about what was going on and come down and see the buildings at that kind of thing… So she probably wouldn’t have even thought, or I wouldn’t have encouraged her, to go that way because our family has never been to uni. Our family was go to Grade 10 or 12 and then get a job. So I guess our involvement sort of followed on to her wanting to do it. She’s [daughter] got three kids but now she is going back and doing an aged care course…

Similarly, Barbara commented: ‘I don’t think he [my son] would have even contemplated a uni degree if he hadn’t seen what we had already gone through’.

Not only did the interviewees encourage their children to study at university, but they also were able to help them, because, as Gaylene pointed out, ‘it wasn’t that long since I was at uni’. She added that she helped with proof-reading.

In addition to influencing their own children or families, Barbara remarked that she was an influence on her children’s friends. She explained that when they came over to visit they would ‘see you working away on assignments and go oh yeah, and then they see you graduate and they go OK, that leads to that path’.

To what extent did UPP impact on the participants?

Some interviewees said that UPP had a significant impact on their lives and attitudes. Just over one third described ways that their attitudes had changed as a direct and indirect result of studying in UPP. These impacts can be divided into three main areas: i) changing one’s way of thinking about issues; ii) changing one’s attitude towards education, and iii) a focus on changing one’s entire life or major elements of it.

In regard to the first of the three themes, Jessica found that instead of being opinionated in a ‘black and white’ way, she came to understand issues as having many perspectives. Similarly, Daniel spoke of
‘respecting diverse views’. He added: ‘I’ve learned to listen, I’ve learned to accept that somebody else may have a different view to me and I’m certain that that all came out of doing UPP’. Brandon spoke of actually learning to think: ‘That’s … what UPP and that first year did to me was make me think. Oh, it’s the greatest positive in my life’. Scott mentioned UPP as broadening the mind, and ‘exposure to things you’ve never been exposed to before’. For Joshua, UPP ‘certainly changed [his] way of thinking’. He added:

even before UPP, I would have considered myself a fairly unengaged person with issues… Whereas now, and still today, when I look at the news, I don’t believe anything they tell me sort of thing.

These comments about ‘learning to think’, realising that there are different perspectives, and not believing everything they read, see, or hear, illustrate that the students learnt critical thinking skills, a major aim of UPP. These critical thinking skills, it seems, have had a major impact on people’s lives, if they have changed the way they think, and, therefore, their understanding of issues and the world. In contrast to the comments above, one student, Gina, does not think that her world-view changed at all.

In regard to the second theme, two students, Jessica and Cynthia, mentioned that they changed their attitudes towards the value of education. For example, Cynthia explained:

I just found UPP was a wonderful thing to do because it showed me how important education was too, for people who had … you know, had a break in their life, like having children or not having gone to school.

In regard to the third theme, some interviewees reported that UPP had been life-changing. Ashley, for example, spoke of UPP changing every part of her life. Similarly, for Robert, he could see that he changed aspects of his personality and could ‘almost reinvent’ himself. In fact, Robert attributes his family and professional life to UPP:

Well I could tell you a story about how the UPP has pretty much set up my entire life. Met my wife while doing UPP, she also did the UPP the same year. If I hadn’t of met my wife, I wouldn’t have my son. Wouldn’t have anything I’ve got now so, I put it all down to the UPP.

He added:

I owe everything I have right now to the UPP, that’s all I’ve got. I’ve got two degrees, I’ve got a beautiful wife and a friendly little (sometimes) almost teenager. I’ve got a solid job that pays really well.

Daniel claims that the research skills he learnt in UPP helped him to look overseas for innovative ways to treat his serious health condition; contrary to local doctors’ prognosis, Daniel’s health has improved and he puts this down to his ability to research his condition:

I walked in here okay this morning but didn’t need a wheelchair and so again, I always… look back and think ‘Now, how did that all come about?’ and it does, it comes back to UPP; that ability to research.

Just over half the interviewees commented specifically on the level of impact of their participation in UPP. One participant thought that UPP ‘didn’t really improve my lot, it just sort of gave me a format to study at university’ (Brandon), but this is in contrast to the other interviewees who described the multiple outcomes of their experience in terms such as ‘significant’ (Daniel, Kahla), ‘valuable’ (Maggie, Amanda), ‘huge’ (Ashley, Melissa), ‘profound’ (Mary), and ‘fantastic’ (Gina). A common theme was the
way in which people’s lives had been changed ‘dramatically’ (Maggie) or ‘massively’ (Andrea) following participation in UPP, with several interviewees identifying participation in the program as ‘revolutionising’ (Ashley) or as a ‘turning point’ or ‘circuit breaker’ (Chris).

For these people, participation in UPP had built self-confidence and self-efficacy, which in turn had provided choices and opened the door to future possibilities. The common theme running through interviews was about UPP as a catalyst for change, whether in relation to realising a lifelong goal, developing independence and financial security, or personal satisfaction:

It’s made a huge difference. I’m free. I’m free. I was trapped. You know, I was trapped because I didn’t have any choices and now… and the day I got my degree, I applied… I opened the newspaper and there were three jobs I could apply for and I applied for them all and I got two of them. (Ashley)

Vignettes: Some participant stories

The vignettes on the following pages capture a range of stories of former UPP students. They are not intended to represent ‘typical’ stories, but are provided to supplement the findings presented in this chapter, by illustrating the complexity of individuals’ lives and the differing impacts of participation in UPP on their lives.
Amanda

Amanda describes herself as a ‘high school drop-out’ who was brought up in an isolated community on the west coast of Tasmania. As a teenager in the 1980s, success at school was not required to secure work in the local mines, the traditional pathway for many in her home town. Education was not highly valued, as it was not seen as needed, and many in Amanda’s family formed relationships and had children at a young age. Following high school (Year 10), Amanda’s family moved to the north-west coast and she enrolled in a course with TAFE Tasmania. She secured work in the community services industry, volunteered in the community and continued with VET studies.

At the age of 20, Amanda realised that she wanted to study at university and complete a Bachelor of Arts. Amanda wanted to be good at whatever job she did, or enjoy what she did, and decided that university could enable this. As she did not have the necessary subject pre-requisites and could not gain entry as a mature-age student, Amanda enrolled in UPP in the year of its inception, 1996. She continued to study at TAFE, and work in community services with youth, at the same time as doing UPP. Amanda successfully completed all of the units, including ‘tasters’ in sociology and history. The units on interpersonal communication and essay writing, in connection with an increased awareness of university expectations and norms, were invaluable in preparing her for what she calls ‘academic life’. But, Amanda emphasises how the feel and warmth of the campus itself, the closeness of the cohort and the encouragement and support of the teacher all impacted on her UPP success and the later impacts this had on her life.

Following her UPP success, Amanda continued on to do a Bachelor of Arts, with a history major and a sociology minor, and then a Graduate Diploma in Psychology. The next step for Amanda was completing a Master of Human Resources Management. Amanda remained in the community services industry but decided it was time to ‘get out’ and on securing a scholarship she completed a Master of Education. Amanda is currently working as a Human Resources Manager, volunteers on several boards and committees, and is studying towards obtaining a Doctorate of Education. She credits UPP largely for providing her with an understanding of the university culture, the academic writing skills, communication skills, and confidence that she needed to continue on to tertiary study, and the many other pursuits that stemmed from this. Amanda believes that if it wasn’t for UPP, she would not have the lifestyle she currently has, including the stability through increased income and job security, and the increased professional and academic opportunities that are now available to her.
Chris

At high school Chris had displayed significant academic potential and he had always assumed that he would go to university, but then the wheels came off, as he explained: ‘It’s a bit of a cliché; you know, teenager, parents divorced, mixes with up with the wrong crowd, grows hair too long’. Although he completed Year 12 he did not do so with any particular academic distinction and he found himself as one of many unemployed young adults on the north-west coast and saw his prospects as ‘bleak’. About to become a father for the first time, he realised that he had to change his situation.

UPP helped him achieve a critical and transformational life change. When he started in UPP, he felt it was ‘like a kind of sense of homecoming’. Chris describes UPP as a ‘turning point’ in his life and, significantly, it gave him ‘confidence in … [his] ability to undertake university’. He successfully completed an Arts degree with UTAS.

Chris’s comments about his life experience reveal a man with a capacity for insightful self-reflection and analysis. His obvious motivation to succeed and to create a positive future for himself and his young and growing family resulted in a rewarding professional career as a journalist, media adviser to a Federal politician, and a media role with the Australian Army. His Army service included two deployments to Afghanistan.

Chris now resides in regional mainland Australia and is working as a marketing officer for a university. He believes that his achievements and experience at university have played a key role in his life ‘because the greater one’s education, the better one is able to navigate just the complexities that life throws at you … I don’t think there’s any substitute for having an education when it comes to understanding the ways and the language of people who make rules and the language of people who impose authority’.
Gina

Until the age of 45 Gina’s story might be considered fairly typical. She left school at Year 10, had a range of unskilled jobs and then devoted herself to bringing up her children and her family. At 45 years of age, however, Gina did something that would change the direction of her life forever. Wanting to get back into the work force, and recognising she probably lacked relevant ‘employability’ skills, Gina made the momentous decision to follow up on someone’s suggestion to go up to the local Cradle Coast campus of UTAS and see what was on offer. There she learnt about UPP and decided to enrol. She took units over two semesters in areas such as computing, academic writing and study skills and then was accepted into a Bachelor of Computing.

But here Gina’s story is once again not quite typical. Before she had finished her degree she was offered the opportunity to create a database for a local firm involved in the construction industry. This one project led to an offer of more ongoing employment as a project manager, a career that has seen her manage projects worth over $20 million. She continued to study part-time, and manage her home and employment for some time, but was eventually forced to give up when what she wanted to study was not available locally. Despite not finishing her degree, Gina credits her university experience and the skills and confidence she gained as a result, both in UPP and her degree, as pivotal to her unbroken employment and successful career in project management from that time on. ‘I can’t speak highly enough of it because I wouldn’t have gone into the uni and be able to succeed at the level I have without UPP. I can guarantee that’.
Melissa

Although Melissa had always wanted to be a teacher, there was an expectation that she would leave school at the end of Year 10 and get a job. Her parents didn’t think that university was a pathway for her. After some years working in retail and then in retail management, Melissa thought she had gone as far as she could and ‘really wanted a career’. A broken relationship also meant that she needed to work family-friendly hours and be able to support herself and her young children.

Melissa was encouraged to apply for UPP by her former school teacher, who by that stage was coordinating UPP. She had some doubts about whether she would be able to cope with the demands of single parenthood and study, especially given her youngest child was only three months old when she started UPP. And she was also unsure about whether she was ‘smart enough’ for university. Studying UPP by distance helped to allay her fears, and her perception of her ability changed to: ‘I’m going to be able to do okay’.

Melissa hasn’t looked back since completing UPP ten years ago, continuing with an Education degree and graduating with Honours. As she said, ‘I always had quite a drive and pushed myself’. Her Education degree led to employment in a local primary school, and she moved from relief to contract to permanent full-time teaching within three years. Melissa is very happy with her career, and future plans include completing her Master of Education.

The future looks bright for Melissa and her children. She reflects that UPP has made ‘a huge difference’ to her life and her children’s. She adds: ‘I certainly wouldn’t be where I am now and I wouldn’t have the career I have without UPP’. An unexpected outcome was her parents’ reaction. Initially less than supportive of her study, Melissa is pleased that they were proud of her when she completed her Education degree.
Eric

Eric had grown up thinking university wasn’t for people like him, but he became curious about UPP when he heard about it at a UTAS Open Day, as well as in advertisements in the local newspaper. He’d suffered a physical injury in the military, so was looking for something new. He studied in UPP full-time for a year and took on every unit available. As he didn’t grow up with computers, he found using them daunting to start with, but he persisted and over the year he developed his computer skills, and other academic skills; as his skills developed so too did his confidence.

Eric enjoyed his year in UPP and made quite a few friends. Following UPP, he was accepted into a Bachelor of Regional Resource Management; he was also fortunate to receive a scholarship. He completed his degree, studying full-time for three years. On completion, he was offered places in two honours programs in two different faculties. Unfortunately, he’s found it difficult to find work in his area of interest and expertise in Tasmania, so he’s set to move interstate to pursue a career in regional development.

Thinking back, Eric says that UPP gave him the confidence to take the next step into degree studies. Studying wasn’t easy, but he got through with good marks and gained a social network of friends that he went through UPP and his degree with. On a personal level, these days he’s much more confident when interacting with people. He remarked: ‘You know, I can look people in the eye and [I’m] not as shy… I can hold a conversation with someone now and just ask a general question’, whereas before he would probably not have said anything or even made eye contact. He added: ‘I feel as though I’m talking with a little bit more authority now because I’ve got the educational background.’

Eric wishes more people would do UPP. He recommends it to anyone who will listen. ‘Just go and give it a go’, he urges. ‘You can’t lose!’
Ashley

After twenty years of hairdressing Ashley came to the conclusion that she needed a change of career. She had grown tired of running her own salon and felt, given the level of responsibility and how hard the work was from day-to-day, that she was simply not remunerated enough for her time and effort. In fact, Ashley’s growing concern was that she was not going to be able to provide for herself into the future and that she could even end up living on ‘the poverty line on a pension’. The disquiet from this realisation propelled Ashley to make inquiries at TAFE to tentatively pursue a course in social welfare. She was encouraged to undertake a university-level course. The new bridging course, UPP, on the Cradle Coast Campus appeared a good option.

Ashley’s entry into university could almost be considered ‘counter cultural’ in terms of familial expectations. The attitude ‘that it [university] wasn’t for us; that we couldn’t do that’ combined with Ashley’s misplaced belief that she was a poor student, fed class-based beliefs that ‘traditional manual labour-type work’ was a preferred employment option. In fact, when Ashley announced to her father that she had accepted an apprenticeship into hairdresser he said ‘thank God, one down, three to go!’ However, despite initially offering employment security and a consistent income, hairdressing progressively lost its appeal, ultimately promoting the need for Ashley to seek a change of direction.

Despite a tentative start, Ashley’s entry into UPP became an extremely positive experience for a number of reasons: ‘I loved the course so much. It was… because it was small and just starting off, it was intimate, it was like a big family and all my friends are there. I couldn’t wait to go so it was very enjoyable doing the course with lots of encouragement’.

For Ashley the course ‘revolutionised’ her life, providing the necessary confidence and self-belief to pursue further studies and move out of hairdressing. Somewhat symbolically, on the day Ashley received her degree she closed the salon and sought employment in the social services sector. Moving through several jobs, Ashley now works for the Department of Education and feels that after coming from a position of being trapped that she is ‘free’ to choose what she does; this is a point of transition she happily credits to UPP.
Discussion

Individual impacts of participation in UPP

It is clear that participation in UPP had a transformative effect for many of the participants, both personally and professionally, and shaped their future lives. This impact is consistent with findings from Willans (2010; Willans et al., 2003). Those who participated in UPP were all seeking change of some kind, and there is evidence that participation in UPP represented a turning point in their lives. Not only did it provide a range of foundational skills to prepare them for further study and beyond, but it encouraged them to think differently. For example, Brandon spoke of learning to think; Scott talked about ‘exposure to things you've never been exposed to before’, and Joshua asserted that UPP ‘certainly changed [his] way of thinking’. This reflects Cantwell’s (2004) findings about students ‘knowing differently’

A key outcome of UPP was the development of self-confidence which brought about a change in terms of the former UPP students’ perceptions of themselves and their abilities. Most importantly, it helped participants to develop new identities as learners, and even more, as lifelong learners. Gaylene’s comment illustrates the shift:

Because coming to UPP I felt very insecure, and not that I would be able to do it. I was sure they'd say ‘nah, go up to TAFE and just be a teacher aide, you'll be right. But no, ‘yes come in, we can do it’ and then success followed.

This outcome supports findings from other research regarding the impact of enabling programs, in terms of new self-knowledge and challenging of assumptions (Willans & Seary, 2007) and perspective transformation (Debenham & May, 2005).

However, the mature-age participants in UPP were not blank slates; they had strengths in terms of perseverance, commitment and ability to problem solve, similar to the participants in Archer et al.’s (1999) study. They brought with them life experience, resilience and a strong sense of purpose or commitment, and the findings suggest that these attributes, coupled with the opportunities offered by UPP, delivered positive outcomes. Resilience and commitment were important attributes, because participants in many cases were taking a ‘risk’ by participating in UPP; they were stepping outside their personal comfort zone and challenging family and community cultural values in terms of education. This situation was particularly noticeable amongst female participants, such as Melissa and Wendy, who talked about their parents’ lack of support, and who were risking disapproval and possible alienation because they were challenging gender and educational stereotypes. This theme is also identified in other research into the challenges faced by female mature-aged learners (Debenham & May, 2005).

It is clear that participation in UPP built human capital in terms of upskilling participants and supporting and encouraging participation in further study. There was a relatively high rate of progression to higher education as a result of UPP, indicating that the program was effective in achieving its aims of preparing students for university study. The findings suggest that these outcomes are linked to a more prolonged engagement with the program (completion of more than half the available units). UPP is an important bridge or transition to tertiary study for mature-aged students on the Cradle Coast, supporting findings from an earlier study (Walter, 2000). The program assisted in transition by providing the skills
and knowledge, as well as confidence, needed to undertake higher education. The transition was described as a pathway:

...if I hadn’t done UPP, I would not have probably gone to uni. I just don’t think without that pathway I would have been able to know that I could do it and could cope and probably would have gone down another path which probably didn’t include uni. (Melissa)

I did my first year [of an Education degree] here, really enjoyed it, again, felt a close relationship with all of the lecturers and tutors who were here. Yeah and then when we moved to Launceston, because of the grounding we had here [in UPP and the first year of Education] we felt really comfortable with what was expected of us work wise up there. (Robert)

However, UPP was about more than picking up where they left off in terms of unfinished or unsuccessful previous learning. It was seen as the first step in exploring options and choices that had not been available in the past, often because of family and community expectations. The fact that there was no relationship between previous education level and continuation with further study is important, suggesting that UPP impacted on a broad range of students. As noted in an earlier study this is an important finding for the Cradle Coast, where ‘due to cultural and practical constraints, a large proportion of those capable of continuing to tertiary education, have not previously done so’ (Walter, 2000, p. 6). The impacts on these students were profound:

and you see that those people who had no hope and ended up being Honours students in university Education degrees teaching in the region, you see that as an example of the concept of accepting people wherever they were, bringing them into what would otherwise have been a foreign learning culture, but bringing them in in a way that they could feel comfortable. (former Cradle Coast Campus manager)

The findings demonstrate a change in people’s employment status in terms of conditions and nature of their appointment. In many cases participation in UPP led to undergraduate study which then led to jobs. This allowed participants to explore employment opportunities that previously would not have been available to them. Post-UPP there has been an increase in the number of people employed on a full-time basis and a shift in the proportion of people engaged in different occupational classifications. A notable finding was the increase in the proportion of people in professional occupations from 12% pre-UPP to 61% post-UPP, and a decrease in most other occupational classifications such as community and personal service workers (26% down to 14%), technicians and trade workers (14% down to 3%) and sales workers (12% down to 0%). Professional occupations post-UPP, such as teachers, administrators and researchers, bring with them increased status, and a range of other benefits depending on the job (such as increased pay and job security in terms of permanency and full-time employment, increased satisfaction, better career path, and less physically demanding work). Entry to these professional occupations was through completion of degree-level study, and a number of participants indicated that UPP was the first stage in the process. Comments such as the following from Daniel, confirm the crucial role of UPP: ‘I would never have come and done a university course without having first done UPP’.

For many, participation in UPP was the beginning of a journey of discovery, delivering a range of personal and professional outcomes. For some, the journey was about escaping an unhappy relationship; for others, it was about seeking security and fulfilment through work; for others, it was
about enriching their lives through study or giving back to the community. However, the effect of participation in UPP on female journeys was a key finding, in terms of increasing self-confidence and providing options and choices beyond the traditional 'get married and have children' pathway. Although other research (Debenham & May, 2005) explored mature-aged women in enabling programs, the focus was on transformation within the program, rather than impacts following completion of the program. The proportion of females in employment post-UPP was significantly greater than the proportion of males; whereas prior to completing UPP, the proportions of employed males and females were similar. While participation in the workforce post-UPP may not have been a direct result of participation in UPP for all females, the implication is that without UPP many of the females in this study may not have continued with further study which then led to employment. Gaylene’s comment sums it up:

*I couldn’t have done it without UPP, because I had been out of education for so long, and it gave me the confidence to move forward, to live my dream.*

For some, if not most, of the females in the study, participation in UPP opened up employment opportunities for them that may not have existed previously, providing them with independence and a greater sense of empowerment.

One of the most interesting findings from the study, which has only recently been identified in enabling program research (Crawford, 2013), relates to the leadership shown by participants. Some of the former UPP participants assumed roles in helping to promote the value of education within the community, particularly to family and friends. The former Cradle Coast Campus manager also described a ripple effect, noting that participation by individuals in UPP (even for a short time) influenced others in their family, professional and social circles to consider a university education:

*So if you find then that a person goes to the UPP and they do one unit and then they drop out, and their friend discovers that they did it or their daughter knows they did it, the person who was there for a semester is having a significant impact on the people in their circle.*

Interviewees such as Gaylene and Melissa talked about how the skills and confidence developed through UPP gave them an advantage over some of their undergraduate peers, noting how they provided assistance or mentored their classmates ‘just because I’d had that knowledge’ (Melissa). Similarly, in a recent study of a UPP cohort on the UTAS Launceston campus, Crawford (2013) has found that former UPP students display leadership qualities in the first year of their degree in assisting students that have entered undergraduate studies via mainstream pathways.

Yet others, like Andrea and Barbara, talked about having the confidence to take on leadership roles within their community organisations. Andrea explained: ‘because of my confidence in my abilities and my confidence in putting myself out there … UPP was a big part of that’. The leadership shown by these participants is empowering at an individual level, allowing them to move beyond ‘dog’s body’ roles to make more meaningful contributions to the community. Development of leadership potential amongst individuals also contributes to the development of community capacity, providing a larger and more diverse leadership pool from which to draw.
University and regional impacts of UPP

It is suggested that UPP impacted on the University and also contributed to social and economic wellbeing in the Cradle Coast region. At a regional level, UPP was a key university strategy in meeting the educational needs of a large number of people who had left school early:

*unless we had intervened with a program similar to that the people who’d missed out on finishing school at Grade 12 ... I think we never would have been able to address the needs of those people in preparation for university*’ (former Cradle Coast Campus Manager).

The impact of UPP cannot be viewed in isolation. The findings suggest that it could not have impacted on individuals to the extent that it appears to have done if it was not available locally through the Cradle Coast Campus. The impact of UPP is part of a complex process driven by the existence and mission of the Campus, and the purpose and timing of the introduction of UPP. As the former Cradle Coast Campus manager noted, the existence of a university campus within the region changed the way the community viewed further education and contributed to the development of a learning culture within the region. UPP (and the related New Pathways program) helped to bring about a change in community attitudes towards the University, making them more ‘higher-education conscious’.

UPP was a pathway to undergraduate and later postgraduate study at UTAS. The findings suggest that UPP helped the Cradle Coast Campus to increase its student base. Not only were mature-aged people being prepared for university study, which is something they may not have previously considered, but a number of them continued with undergraduate degrees. Gaylene, like a number of others, continued with an Education degree. She noted the change from the early years when only the first year of the Education degree was available on the Cradle Coast Campus, to later years when the full degree could be completed locally.

*It [UPP] grew the campus here, when we started it was very limited stuff available, you could do a little bit here and then have to go to Launceston, but then you know, each year, more students came and that’s coming in via UPP, that they offered more for the campus, and so the campus grew ... So I think that has been a really important thing, to get people here, so there are bums on seats, and therefore a reason to grow the campus. Yeah I think that was really important.* (Gaylene)

Most survey respondents said they were still living in the Cradle Coast region. This would seem to support findings from an earlier study that mature-age students want to remain in the Cradle Coast region (Walter, 2000), although it is acknowledged that the methodology for the current study tended to favour participants who had remained in the region. The findings suggest that UPP provided an accessible option for those who wished to remain in their local area, paving the way for further study and subsequent employment opportunities. The former UPP coordinator noted that

*Many Year 12 students see university as a path out of their particular location whereas, on the whole, the majority of the mature-aged people [who participated in UPP] saw it as a means of remaining here in an environment where employment is hard to find in many cases, and made more secure by level of professionalism.*

UPP, as the first stage in increasing educational outcomes, indirectly contributed to the economic wellbeing of the region. For example, increased educational outcomes contributed to the skills base and capacity of local institutions, industries and businesses. For many participants, UPP led to further
study and then to local employment in a range of key areas, including education, nursing, agriculture and business:

A significant number of UPP students have done postgraduate studies with TIA [Tasmanian institute of Agriculture] and there are two still working here undertaking postdoctoral studies …. So teachers or nurses or agricultural scientists with formal qualifications are more likely to find employment in their industry than people without, and so I suppose that was the impact that it had. (former UPP coordinator)

Some participants talked about UPP being a turning point in their lives, and many described the new opportunities available to them. In short, it is suggested that UPP facilitated social inclusion within the region, and contributed to community wellbeing by assisting people to participate more fully and/or contribute to the community in a range of ways, such as through employment or by taking on leadership roles.

The former UPP coordinator and one of the former UPP students, noted that the success of UPP was publicly recognised within and outside the community, and further afield. Other Local Government Areas were interested in how UPP might benefit their communities by assisting them to adapt to a changing industry base, and the program won a prestigious national teaching award. It may be that this public recognition of a successful regional initiative also helped to reinforce a sense of community identity and wellbeing, although there is insufficient evidence within the current study to confirm this. This is an area that may warrant further investigation.
Conclusions

UPP has had a significant impact on individuals in the north-west coast region of Tasmania. Participation in the program helped to forge new patterns of educational expectation and achievement, against the backdrop of previously low levels of educational attainment and low levels of participation in post compulsory learning. Participation in the program contributed to the development of social and cultural capital within the community, challenging long-held assumptions about educational attainment in the region, and supporting a range of mature-aged students to take on a new identity – that of lifelong learner. The impacts of UPP are closely linked to the location and welcoming nature of the Cradle Coast campus, which played a central role in bringing people into the University. In one sense, UPP was a microcosm of the Cradle Coast campus. Whilst enabling programs like UPP can also deliver positive outcomes in larger campuses, there is a sense that the positive impacts from participation in UPP were enhanced because of the location and nature of the Cradle Coast Campus.

Previous research into UPP on the Cradle Coast did not examine the longer-term outcomes from participation, in the way this study has done. This longitudinal study provides some of the first research evidence of the medium to longer-term value of programs such as UPP in regional communities. The far-reaching impact on individuals, universities and communities should not be underestimated. Only by monitoring and tracking successful participants can we begin to understand the full effect of enabling programs on rural and regional communities. There is a strong argument for the implementation of processes that will allow for longitudinal tracking of enabling students throughout University and beyond. This research should extend to the tracking of students enrolled in other pre-degree programs at UTAS, such as the Bachelor of General Studies and the Murina program. Further research is also needed to explore the multiple outcomes of participation in enabling programs for individuals, universities and the communities. This should include further examination of the role of such programs in nurturing and developing leadership potential.
References


Appendix 1: Survey

Impact of participation in the University Preparation Program (UPP) on Cradle Coast students

Centre for University Pathways and Partnerships
University of Tasmania
Locked Bag 1354, Launceston 7250

Questions about you and your participation in UPP

1. Gender
   □ Female
   □ Male

2. Which of the following members of your immediate family, if any, have attended university? (tick all that apply)
   □ mother/female guardian
   □ father/male guardian
   □ sister
   □ brother

3. In what year did you do most or all of your UPP study? (if you have had two or more experiences with UPP, put the date of your most recent study)
   □ 1996
   □ 1997
   □ 1998
   □ 1999
   □ 2000
   □ 2001
   □ 2002
   □ 2003
   □ 2004
   □ 2005
   □ 2006
   □ 2007

4. How many UPP units/subjects did you complete?
   □ 1-2
   □ 3-4
   □ 5 or more

5. How old were you when you enrolled in UPP?
   □ 15-19
   □ 20-24
   □ 25-29
   □ 30-34
   □ 35-39
   □ 40-44
   □ 45-49
   □ 50-54
   □ 55-59
   □ 60-64
   □ 65-69
   □ 70+
6. What was your highest level of education before starting UPP (select only one)

☐ Year 10 or below  ☐ Year 11  ☐ Year 12
☐ Certificate I/II  ☐ Certificate III/IV or trade qualification  ☐ Diploma/Advanced Diploma
☐ Other (give details)………………………………………………………………………………………………………………

7. What was your employment status before starting UPP? (select only one)

☐ Casual  ☐ Part time  ☐ Full time  ☐ Not in paid employment

8. If you were in paid employment before starting UPP, what was your job? (eg. sales assistant, personal carer) …………………………………………………………………………………………………………..

9. Were you on a Centrelink payment when you were a UPP student?

☐ No  ☐ Yes

10. Did you do voluntary work in the community before starting UPP? (eg. coaching child’s soccer team, delivering Meals on Wheels)

☐ No  ☐ Yes

11. What was the main reason you enrolled in UPP? (select only one)

☐ to prepare for university study  ☐ to improve general education  ☐ to get a job  ☐ to get a better job/change careers  ☐ personal development  ☐ other (give details) …………………………………………………………………………………………………………………

Questions about what you have done since participating in UPP

Further learning or study

12. Have you undertaken any other learning or study since UPP? (this includes any courses you are currently enrolled in)

☐ No (go to question 17)  ☐ Yes (go to question 13)
13. Where was the learning or study undertaken (tick more than one if you have done more than one course of study since UPP)

☐ at UTAS
☐ at Another university (give details) ..............................................................................................................................
☐ In Tasmania at a VET provider (eg. Polytechnic, TasTAFE)
☐ at TAFE or other VET provider in another state
☐ other (give details) ...............................................................................................................................................................

14. From the list below, which best describes the name of the other learning/study you have done since UPP? (if you have done more than one course, tick the highest level course)

☐ Certificate I/II
☐ Certificate III/V
☐ Diploma/Advanced Diploma
☐ Associate Degree
☐ Bachelor degree
☐ Honours/Grad Cert/Grad Diploma
☐ Masters degree
☐ PhD
☐ Other (give details, eg. short course on computers) ......................................................................................................................

15. What was the field of your other learning/study? (eg. construction, nursing, marketing).................................................................................................................................................................................................

16. Did you complete this course of learning/study? (ie. were you awarded a statement of attainment, certificate, Bachelor’s degree etc.)

☐ Yes, I completed the course
☐ No, I am still studying
☐ No, I deferred my study
☐ No, I left/withdrew before completing the course

Paid employment

17. Are you currently in paid employment?

☐ No (go to question 21)
☐ Yes (go to question 18)

18. On what basis are you employed? (If you have more than one job, answer for your main job, ie. the one where you work most hours)

☐ casual
☐ part time
☐ full time
19. What is your current paid job (eg. teacher aide, engineer - put down your main job only)………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………

20. Do you have a formal leadership role in your workplace? (eg. manager, supervisor, team leader, advanced skills teacher)

☐ No
☐ Yes

Voluntary work

21. Are you currently doing voluntary/unpaid work in the community? (eg. coaching child’s soccer team, delivering Meals on Wheels)

☐ No (go to question 25)
☐ Yes (go to question 22)

22. Approximately how often do you do voluntary work?

☐ at least once a week
☐ at least once a fortnight
☐ at least once a month
☐ several times per year
☐ on an irregular basis

23. How many community groups are you actively involved in at the present time? (eg. sporting club, environmental group, school parents and friends)

☐ 0
☐ 1
☐ 2
☐ 3
☐ 4
☐ More than 4

24. Do you have an elected leadership role in any of your community activities? (eg. chairperson, treasurer, coordinator)

☐ No
☐ Yes

Your current location

25. Are you still living in the Cradle Coast region? (ie. the North West or West Coast of Tasmania)

☐ No (go to question 26)
☐ Yes (go to question 28)
26. Why did you move away from the Cradle Coast region?

☐ to secure employment/better employment for myself
☐ to undertake further study
☐ family reasons (eg. spouse’s employment, child’s education)
☐ other (give details) ........................................................................................................................................

27. What is your current location (please do not give your street address)

Name of suburb/town/city......................................................................................................................................

Name of State/country ........................................................................................................................................

Questions about the influence of UPP

28. For each of the eight statements below, please indicate your level of agreement or disagreement.

| participation in UPP has increased my self-confidence and self esteem | SA A N D SD NA |
| participation in UPP has benefited my family and/or friends | SA A N D SD NA |
| participation in UPP has helped me to make connections with new people/groups | SA A N D SD NA |
| participation in UPP has encouraged me to undertake further learning/study | SA A N D SD NA |
| participation in UPP has helped me to enter the workforce | SA A N D SD NA |
| participation in UPP has helped me to get a better job/improve my career prospects | SA A N D SD NA |
| participation in UPP has encouraged me to become involved or more involved in the community | SA A N D SD NA |
| participation in UPP has given me the confidence to take on leadership responsibilities (eg. in the community or workplace) | SA A N D SD NA |
Would you like to participate in an interview?

We would like to interview some former students to talk further about the pathways they have taken since participating in UPP. The interview would take about 45 minutes and would be held at a time and place convenient to you. Would you be interested in participating in an interview within the next few weeks?

☐ No (thank you for completing the survey)

☐ Yes – please provide your first name, day time phone number and email address below so we can contact you

  First Name…………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………
  Email…………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………

  …

  Phone…………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………

  …

  …

*Important note:* This information is for further contact purposes only. It is not for identification purposes. Your name and contact details will be removed from this survey before being made available to the project team

________________________
THANK YOU FOR COMPLETING THIS SURVEY. YOUR ASSISTANCE IS APPRECIATED. PLEASE RETURN YOUR COMPLETED SURVEY IN THE REPLY PAID ENVELOPE PROVIDED.
Appendix 2: Additional tables and figures

Tables

Table 6: Institution at which further study undertaken

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Place where further study undertaken</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percentage (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>UTAS</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other university</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tasmanian VET provider</td>
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<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other state VET provider</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
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</table>

Table 7: Pre-UPP employment rates by gender

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Employment pre-UPP</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>25 (62%)</td>
<td>15 (38%)</td>
<td>40 (100%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>9 (56%)</td>
<td>7 (44%)</td>
<td>16 (100%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 8: Post-UPP employment rates by gender

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Employment post-UPP</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>29 (72%)</td>
<td>11 (28%)</td>
<td>40 (100%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>7 (44%)</td>
<td>9 (56%)</td>
<td>16 (100%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

p = 0.043

Table 9: Pre- and post-UPP employment status

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Employment status (%)</th>
<th>Full time</th>
<th>Part time</th>
<th>Casual</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pre-UPP</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post-UPP</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>17</td>
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Table 10: Comparison of pre- and post-UPP occupational classifications

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pre-UPP occupation category</th>
<th>Post-UPP occupation category</th>
<th>Manager</th>
<th>Professional</th>
<th>Technician &amp; Trade</th>
<th>Community/Personal Service</th>
<th>Clerical/Administrative</th>
<th>Sales Worker</th>
<th>Machinery Operator/Driver</th>
<th>Labour</th>
<th>Not stated</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Manager</td>
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<td></td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Technician &amp; Trade</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Community/Personal Service</td>
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<tr>
<td>Clerical/Administrative</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
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<tr>
<td>Machinery Operator/ Driver</td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Labourer</td>
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Table 11: Comparison of pre- and post-UPP rates of voluntary work

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Voluntary work post-UPP</th>
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<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>28</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
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<td>28</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>56</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figures

Figure 13: Level of further study post-UPP

![Bar chart showing the level of further study post-UPP. The x-axis represents different levels of study, and the y-axis represents the number of respondents. The chart shows a significant increase in the number of respondents for a specific level of study.]

Figure 14: Frequency of voluntary work post-UPP

![Bar chart showing the frequency of voluntary work post-UPP. The x-axis represents the frequency of voluntary work, and the y-axis represents the number of respondents. The chart shows a range of frequencies with a peak at a specific frequency.]

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Figure 15: Involvement in community groups post-UPP

![Bar chart showing involvement in community groups post-UPP.]

Figure 16: Participation in UPP and positive influence on community involvement

![Bar chart showing participation in UPP and influence on community involvement.]

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