

Benchmarking Report of In-School Enabling Programs Across Australia

2026

Dr Angela Jones

UniPrep Schools (Edith Cowan University)

Dr Fiona Navin

UniPrep Schools (Edith Cowan University)

Michael Howie

UniPrep Schools (Edith Cowan University)

Anita Maclaurin

FlexiTrack High (Murdoch University)

Dr Naomi Ryan

UniPrep (University of Southern Queensland)

Dr Johanna Nieuwoudt

UniStart for Schools (Southern Cross University)

In collaboration with

Selena Dhondea-Tenakov

UniPrep Schools (Edith Cowan University)

Shaz Attree

UniPrep Schools (Edith Cowan University)

Dr Joanne Lisciandro

FlexiTrack High (Murdoch University)

Dr Fabiane Ramos

UniPrep (University of Southern Queensland)



Table of Contents

Acknowledgements	i
Executive Summary	1
Introduction	9
Methodology	10
Findings	13
Conclusion	42
Recommendations	43
References	44
Appendices	47

Acknowledgements

High School Communities

Edith Cowan University, Murdoch University, Southern Cross University, University of Southern Queensland and high school partners with In-School Enabling Programs worked together to explore different In-School Enabling Program models, how they operate across different locations, the experiences of teachers and students, and the academic outcomes of students. Without the partnership with school communities, the development and maturation of In-School Enabling Programs would not be possible.

National Association of Enabling Educators of Australia (NAEEA)

We wish to acknowledge the significant role of the National Association of Enabling Educators of Australia (NAEEA) in building a rigorous and supportive network of Enabling practitioners in Australia. We acknowledge NAEEA's previous benchmarking projects in 2016 and 2023 which established a robust framework for benchmarking Enabling programs in Australia. This framework forms the foundation for this project. All researchers in this project are members of NAEEA, and the goal of this project is to extend benchmarking to unique offerings within the Enabling sector, specifically In-School Enabling programs. This is the first national, cross-institutional and cross-sector benchmarking study of In-School Enabling Programs that will contribute to standardising programs, quality assurance, transparency, and portability of qualifications, while also guiding best practices for In-School Enabling Programs.

ACSES

We acknowledge that this benchmarking project was funded in part by a grant from the Australian Centre for Student Equity and Success (ACSES).

Country

Edith Cowan University, Murdoch University, University of Southern Queensland and Southern Cross University are committed to reconciliation and recognise and respect the significance of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' communities, cultures and histories. Further, we acknowledge the cultural diversity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and pay respect to Elders past, present and future. We celebrate the continuous living cultures of First Australians and acknowledge the important contributions Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have and continue to make in Australian society.

The authors that contributed to this benchmarking report did so from the following lands:

Whadjuk Noongar Boodjar	Edith Cowan University (Mount Lawley and Joondalup)
Wardandi Noongar Boodjar	Edith Cowan University (South West Campus)
Whadjuk Noongar Boodjar	Murdoch University (Murdoch Campus)
Binjareb Noongar Boodjar	Murdoch University (Mandurah Campus)
Jagera, Giabal and Jarowair lands	University of Southern Queensland (Toowoomba)
Yugambah Chagun	Southern Cross University (Gold Coast)

Inclusive Practice

At ECU we have a strong and maturing commitment to equity, diversity and inclusion and we acknowledge the benefits that diversity brings to our institution, allowing all of us to thrive. Everyone is entitled to see themselves positively reflected and acknowledged in our community, especially in the language we speak and write. Using inclusive practice fosters an inclusive culture and delivers a curriculum that reflects the natural diversity of human experiences.

Glossary

AQF

The Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF) is a national policy that sets standards for educational qualifications in Australia. It includes various qualification levels, from certificates to degrees, ensuring consistency and quality in education. The AQF facilitates the recognition of qualifications, supporting pathways for learners and lifelong learning.

Australian Universities Accord

A government initiative aimed at reviewing and reforming Australia's higher education system to enhance access, equity, quality and sustainability, thereby addressing challenges such as funding and aligning university outcomes with workforce needs for a more effective education sector.

Program

A program refers to a structured schedule of learning that is made up of multiple units, curriculum and qualification requirements.

Learning Outcomes

Learning Outcomes are specific statements outlining what students are expected to know, understand, or be able to do by the end of a program. Learning Outcomes articulate the skills and competencies students should acquire, guiding both teaching and assessment.

Enabling Program

Non-award program offered by universities and private providers to prepare students with the required skills and knowledge for undergraduate study (Australian Government Department of Education, 2025). Also known as a pathway program or bridging program.

NAEEA

The National Association of Enabling Educators of Australia is a professional association that supports educators in Enabling programs aimed at helping students transition to higher education. It promotes best practices, professional development, and collaboration among educators to improve the quality and accessibility of Enabling Education in Australia.

Semester

A period of study typically made up of 12 or 13 weeks of teaching followed by one or two weeks of an examination period. Some universities refer to their semester as a session, study period or term.

TEQSA

The Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA) is an independent national quality assurance and regulatory agency for higher education in Australia.

Unit

Unit refers to a specific component of a program. It is often synonymous with a subject or module.

Unit Learning Outcomes

Unit Learning Outcomes (ULOs) are a statement outlining the specific knowledge, skills, or competencies students should achieve upon completing a unit in a program. ULOs guide instruction and assessment, ensuring alignment with program goals.

Executive Summary

Enabling programs, also referred to as pathway or bridging programs, form an important part of the higher education landscape, providing preparation for and access to university for students who have faced educational disadvantage, disruption, or who have not thrived in traditional secondary education systems. These pre-tertiary or pathway students “are typically from groups underrepresented at university, and/or have experienced disruption during their educational journeys” (Crawford & Johns, 2018).

Whilst existing in the higher education landscape for over five decades, Enabling programs are not defined in the Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF) and a national framework defining standards and learning outcomes has yet to be established for Enabling programs. In 2023 the National Association of Enabling Educators of Australia (NAEEA) published the ‘Report on Benchmarking of Enabling Programs across Australia to the National Association of Enabling Educators of Australia (NAEEA)’, being referred to as the ‘NAEEA Benchmarking Project’ (Davis et al., 2023a) from here on, which detailed the comprehensive benchmarking of the curriculum, assessment, and moderation practices of nine Enabling programs in Australia. The study utilised Morgan and Taylor’s six-phase benchmarking framework and created templates for cross-institutional collaboration and consistency, and a method for reporting the project’s findings. Several smaller-scale national or institutional studies had previously explored the comparability of curriculum and assessment in Enabling programs, but none to the scale or depth of NAEEA’s Benchmarking Project (Davis et al., 2023a). As noted by Davis et al., “the establishment of a national framework can contribute to the security and longevity of the programs by setting a consensus driven by rigorous standards for all programs nationally (Sadler, 2017), fulfilling TEQSA and AQF requirements” (2023a, p. 2). Thus, benchmarking programs to identify and maintain standards, levels, and potential portability is imperative to show transparency, parity, relevancy, accountability, and program rigour within the sector, higher education, and wider Australian community.

In-School Enabling Programs are a unique type of pathway program as they are delivered within high schools, creating new routes into tertiary study for select cohorts in senior school. They are designed for senior school-aged students in Australia and are aligned with learning outcomes to standard Enabling programs. Additionally, these programs offer an option for university-bound students and effectively support the transition from secondary to tertiary education (Olds et al., 2022). Finally, while existing in some forms at a small number of universities for decades, In-School Enabling Programs have grown in the sector in the past few years. These programs can take varied structures, durations, and delivery models, but are recognised as having similarities in target cohorts, learning outcomes, assessments, and moderation practices. However, like the historical space of Enabling education, there has been little to no benchmarking of these programs.

In early 2024 four universities offering In-School Enabling Programs embarked on a benchmarking project. Utilising the framework from the NAEEA Benchmarking Project (Davis et al., 2023a) as a guide, this was the first study of In-School Enabling Programs across Australia, which will play a role in standardising the program constructs of these programs. It is imperative to prioritise transparency and enhanced uniformity in program design to bolster the cross-institutional acknowledgment and portability of programs. The aim of this benchmarking project was to understand current alignment/similarities and, where relevant, move closer to a standardisation of educational experience for In-School Enabling Programs, including alignment in holistic outcomes and approaches to assessments and the grading of assessments. This project was created after the Australian Universities Accord Final Report, which stresses the importance of equitable higher education participation for

underrepresented groups, particularly in regional areas, through comprehensive support and Enabling programs to ensure their success (Department of Education, 2024).

The universities participating in this project partner with high schools across three different states and various education systems (public and private). Nationally, Enabling programs are designed to be responsive to the local context and communities, and In-School Enabling Programs are additionally responsive to senior secondary sectors. In Western Australia, concern regarding continual decline in ATAR attainment prompted a review of post-school pathways. The benchmarking project reported here was undertaken prior to the release of the Pathways to Post-School Success: Review of Western Australian senior secondary pathways (Department of Education Western Australia, 2024) report. In relation to In-School Enabling Programs, the Pathways to Post-School Success Expert Panel Report recommended in Recommendation 21 that universities should improve data collection and analysis on students who enter through Enabling programs to better understand the effectiveness of programs and how to best support students. Additionally, Recommendation 22 stated that universities should work with the School Curriculum and Standards Authority (SCSA) to create and maintain consistent standards and parity for Enabling programs, ensuring transparency and quality, as well as drawing from universities' current benchmarking activities (Department of Education Western Australia, 2024).

The four participating universities and In-School Enabling Programs in this benchmarking project were:

Edith Cowan University – UniPrep Schools
 Murdoch University – Flexi Track High
 Southern Cross University – UniStart for Schools
 University of Southern Queensland – UniPrep

The researchers examined whether the participating universities had explicitly or implicitly aligned curriculum and assessments by benchmarking select units across four programs, with a focus on university preparedness and academic literacies. In addition, the researchers discussed program structure, delivery and duration, unit offerings, and moderation processes. The researchers reflected on program alignment with the Common Learning Outcomes (CLOs) developed by NAAEA (Table 1).

Table 1: NAAEA Common Learning Outcomes (2019)

Field	Outcome
Knowledge: Students completing an Enabling program will have a knowledge of:	university environments and expectations, requirements, academic conventions, and ethical practice including academic integrity; knowledge of academic literacies; and may include some discipline specific and/or technical knowledge.
Skills: On completion of an Enabling program, a student will demonstrate:	cognitive skills to understand, analyse, synthesise and critically evaluate information;
	information skills to find, retrieve and analyse information for use in academic contexts;
	communication practices to foster the exchange of knowledge and ideas within an academic context;
	academic literacy skills fostering the written communication of ideas, theories and analysis; and
	independent learning skills.
Application of knowledge and skills: A student	engaging with the university learning and teaching environment in an ethically and contextually aware manner;

completing an Enabling program will demonstrate the application of knowledge and skills by:	applying independent learning techniques to achieve their learning outcomes;
	using their developing critical thinking skills and broadening knowledge in particular contexts; and
	adopting student practices that meet their institution's academic expectations.

Findings

This report highlights seven key findings across the In-School Enabling Programs. While there were variances in duration and delivery methods, overall, the universities shared comparable partnership models, visions, and goals, as well as a high degree of alignment in topics, content, and learning outcomes. Additionally, assessments were comparable in terms of type, academic rigour, and grade outcomes, and allowed students to demonstrate essential skills for success at an undergraduate level. All universities provided clear and accessible rubrics to support well-structured assessments, ensuring consistent standards and expectations across programs, as well as rigorous moderation practices to maintain consistent marking across the duration of programs. Finally, all programs were designed to improve access to undergraduate study; the programs particularly focused on supporting students from regional and remote areas, low socio-economic status (SES) backgrounds, and Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander communities.

The report highlights the rigour of In-School Enabling Programs, showcasing the universities' commitment to delivering high-quality programs focused on appropriately challenging curricula for high school students, to adequately prepare students for undergraduate studies. Benchmarking discussions revealed a number of common principles and practices when designing In-School Enabling Programs, indicating strong alignment with sector standards and demonstrating program viability as a pathway to university. Through the benchmarking process, it was agreed that developing a community of practice to share practice and align curriculum and assessment/grading levels is integral to maintaining the academic standards of In-School Enabling Programs nationally. In line with the NAEAA Benchmarking Project (Davis, et al., 2023), the findings from the benchmarking of In-School Enabling Programs are provided with further details, linking with "good practices" in program design and delivery, and "benchmarking impacts" suggesting future improvements to programs.

Finding One: All programs include a partnership model: curriculum is designed by the university and implemented by the high school with university support.

Good practice

- Foster strong partnerships between university curriculum designers and high school teachers and establish regular feedback mechanisms for teachers to provide input based on classroom experiences and high school context.
- Provide thorough initial training and ongoing professional development and support for teachers, ensuring they have access to all necessary resources, including teaching resources and assessment tools.
- Maintain strong support systems led by the university, including regular check-ins, mentoring, and troubleshooting assistance, and encourage peer support networks among teachers.
- Design the curriculum to be adaptable to different local contexts and student needs, allow flexibility in delivery methods, and implement regular assessments to evaluate and iteratively improve the program and support systems.

Benchmarking impacts

- Develop strong partnerships between the university, partnership schools, and other stakeholders.
- Ensure curriculum designed by the university is relevant and tailored to the needs of high school students while maintaining academic standards and integrity for university preparedness.
- Ensure teachers are effectively trained and supported to deliver the program and maintain academic rigour.

Finding Two: All programs target specific cohorts, primarily regional and remote, or equity schools.**Good practice**

- Prioritise outreach to regional, remote, and equity schools to ensure that students from disadvantaged backgrounds have access to higher education opportunities. This targeted approach helps bridge the gap for students who might otherwise face barriers to university entry.
- Engage with local communities and stakeholders to promote the program and build trust. This can include information sessions, school visits, and collaboration with community organisations to raise awareness and encourage participation.
- Offer programs that are free or low-cost to reduce financial barriers for students and schools. This makes higher education more accessible to students from low SES backgrounds, first-generation university students, and those facing challenging life circumstances.

Benchmarking impacts

- Collaboration across universities and sharing of in-school pathway development rationale.
- Development of community of practice to create school-based learner profiles.
- Review of program design to ensure it is learner profile-centred and supporting targeted groups.
- Increase data collection and analysis to monitor and improve program effectiveness and student supports.

Finding Three: All programs have a process for student eligibility and admission, including recommendation by school, and English competency standards requirements.**Good practice**

- Ensures a consistent approach across different programs that can facilitate easier comparison and benchmarking of program effectiveness and outcomes.
- Helps students understand the requirements and pathways to enter these programs. This transparency can improve student preparedness and motivation to meet the necessary standards.

- Ensures that students have the necessary language skills to succeed in the program, with the focus on academic preparedness potentially leading to better student performance and higher retention rates.
- Involving school principals in the recommendation process ensures that students who are likely to benefit the most from the program are identified and can help target support to students with the greatest need.

Benchmarking impacts

- Ensure programs include eligibility criteria such as low SES backgrounds, first-generation university students, and those facing challenging life circumstances.
- Ensure programs include English competency standards for entry.

Finding Four: Learning Outcomes in all four programs emphasise common academic, learning, and socio-emotional skills.

Good practice

- Ensuring that students gain expertise and practice using the academic skills, including effective academic communication, summarising and evaluating sources, reflective thinking, research, collaborative learning, independent learning, and ethical practices related to academic integrity, including the ethical use of generative artificial intelligence.
- Incorporating project-based learning that requires students to plan, execute, and reflect on their projects, helping them develop organisational and time management skills.
- Encouraging students to engage in activities that promote social and emotional learning.

Benchmarking impacts

- Create a modified version of the NAEEA CLOs tailored specifically for high school Enabling programs to ensure their relevance and applicability.
- Develop a set of guiding principles and CLOs to support universities and organisations in designing and delivering In-School Enabling Programs.
- New and existing programs should be designed (reviewed) with identified academic skills, content knowledge, and attitudes needed for high-school student transition to university.
- Continuous benchmarking and collaboration with other universities.

Finding Five: Assessments in all programs were highly scaffolded, shared assignment types, with a common academic skill focus in order for students to demonstrate comparable standards and alignment with common learning outcomes.

Good practice

- Design assessments that gradually increase in complexity and break down larger assignments into smaller, manageable tasks with clear milestones and deadlines with embedded scaffolding.
- Use common assignment types across units, develop standardised grading rubrics, and ensure assignments focus on key academic skills.
- Offer sessions on specific academic skills like citation practices and research methods.
- Clearly articulate learning outcomes for each assignment to align with program goals, provide detailed feedback, and encourage students to reflect on their performance.
- Foster a collaborative learning environment where students can work together on assignments, share ideas, and provide peer feedback.

Benchmarking impacts

- Increased sharing between programs of exemplar assessment rubrics to increase transparency of standards, practices, and innovations.
- The establishment of communities of practice to provide a powerful means of co-creating shared understandings of assessment design and rubric application.
- Findings to be presented to university academic boards and other relevant university, government, and community bodies to increase the visibility of Enabling Education and advocate for In-School Enabling Programs.

Finding Six: All four programs provided scaffolded assessment explanation and rubrics that are clear and explicit for students.

Good practice

- Provide explicit grading criteria and rubrics in accessible language, use varied feedback methods including hybrid rubrics and visual elements to cater to different learning styles, and incorporate growth mindset principles in rubric descriptors to build learner self-efficacy.
- Highlight the importance of academic integrity and responsible research practices within rubrics, ensuring they promote independent learning and foster a culture of ethical engagement and accountability.
- Implement low-stakes, skill-building assessments that use rubrics to clearly outline expectations and criteria for essential skills.

Benchmarking impacts

- A commitment to developing students' academic literacies and foundational skills through well-structured and transparent assessment practices.
- Continued sharing, review, and co-creation of rubrics to ensure standardisation.
- Greater marking moderation and benchmarking between institutions is needed to monitor and address variances in grading descriptors within rubrics across the learning skills and academic writing units.

Finding Seven: All programs include moderation practices prior to major assessments that ensure consistency of marking of assessments by teachers and within universities.

Good practice

- Implement a process for markers to compare sample outcomes and check consistency before releasing grades.
- Ensure markers have a shared understanding of assessment requirements and standards.
- Present marks and provide clear feedback, so students can use them to improve future work.

Benchmarking impacts

- Revise assessment tasks and rubrics for clarity (where needed).
- Communicate moderation practices across the schools and programs.
- Effective moderation practices to enhance consistency are shared within the schools and university.

Recommendations

There were seven recommendations identified at the end of the benchmarking process.

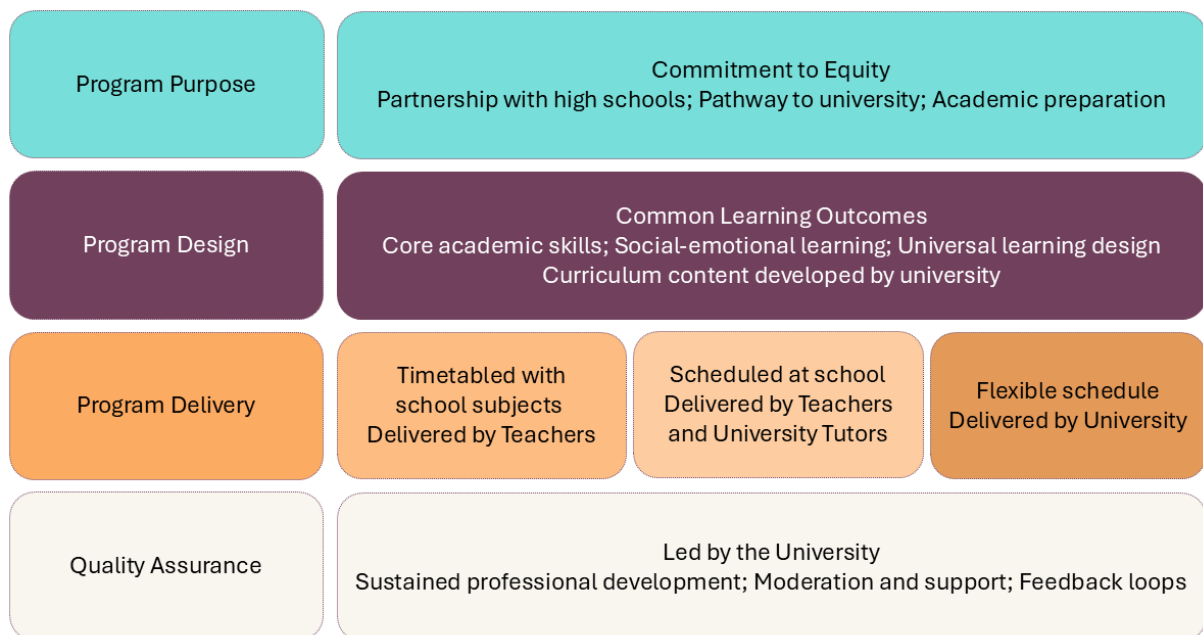
1. Establishment of Guiding Principles: Develop a set of guiding principles and Common Learning Outcomes to support institutions and organisations in rationale, design, and delivery to ensure consistency and quality across In-School Enabling programs.
2. Strengthening Partnerships: Define the relationship between institutions and their partner schools, recognising their role in program success.
3. Development of Adapted Common Learning Outcomes (CLOs): Create a modified version of the NAEAA CLOs tailored specifically for In-School Enabling Programs to ensure their relevance and applicability.
4. Cross-Institutional Collaboration: Continue cross-institutional collaboration to collect data on efficacy of programs, maintain entry and assessments standards through benchmarking, and facilitate resource sharing.
5. Development of Community of Practice: Develop an understanding of high school student profiles and target cohorts.
6. Pedagogy Development: Further develop pedagogical approaches that specifically address the unique needs and learning styles of high school-aged students.
7. Transition Processes for Students: Ensure the inclusion of transition processes for students at critical junctures to provide clear pathways and support mechanisms to facilitate progression into undergraduate programs.

An Emerging Typology

The benchmarking process revealed strong commonalities and notable differences across the four In-School Enabling Programs. All programs share a commitment to equity, accessibility and inclusivity, and offering academically rigorous pathways to university through partnerships between high schools and universities. Core design elements included consistent learning outcomes focused on academic skills and curriculum that promoted social and emotional learning (SEL). Additionally, programs were supported by university-led quality assurance.

Key distinctions lay in the delivery modes. Two programs were scheduled into the school timetable and delivered by high school teachers. One adopted a more collaborative model with shared delivery by school teachers and university tutors, with additional online support. The fourth program provided flexible online delivery with university tutor support, accommodating variation in school integration and home school. These variations reflected a responsiveness to local contexts and point to an emerging typology of In-School Enabling Programs. Further exploration with a broader sample of programs will enable refinement and, in the future, analysis of program outcomes by program type.

Figure 1: Typology of In-School Enabling Program models



Introduction

Educational Enabling programs in Australia, developed independently to meet the diverse needs of universities and their students, facilitate the transition to undergraduate study for those otherwise excluded from higher education, yet remain unregulated due to their exclusion from the Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF) (Davis et al., 2023b). The Australian Universities Accord emphasises the need to expand the higher education enabling system by ensuring diverse pathways into higher education, especially for students who are under-prepared. This is particularly important for students from low socio-economic status (SES) backgrounds and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, who often utilise a broader range of entry routes (Jackson et al., 2023; Pitman, 2016). As In-School Enabling Programs offer a pathway to university and effectively support the transition from secondary to tertiary education for students who were potentially not considering a tertiary qualification, it is important that these programs, as suggested by Jones et al. (2016a), prioritise the holistic development of learners by fostering resilience, self-efficacy, and effective study habits. A thoughtfully crafted and effectively implemented Enabling program can enhance students' focus, confidence, independence, and critical thinking skills, and ultimately lead to their academic success (Goode et al., 2022).

The objective of the benchmarking project was to understand existing In-School Enabling Programs and, where applicable, move closer to a standardisation of educational experience for these programs, including alignment in holistic outcomes and approaches to assessments and the grading of assessments.

Since this is the first benchmarking study of In-School Enabling Programs that aims to help steer and standardise the approach of these programs across Australia, it is crucial to focus on the commonalities amongst the programs, improve the consistency of the program design, and ultimately strengthen the recognition of the In-School Enabling Programs from different universities across Australia.

Table 2: Participating universities and In-School Enabling Program

University	In-School Enabling Program
Edith Cowan University (ECU)	UniPrep Schools
Murdoch University (MU)	Flexi Track High
Southern Cross University (SCU)	UniStart for Schools
University of Southern Queensland (UniSQ)	UniPrep

The combined reach of these programs in 2023 across three states (Western Australia, Queensland, and New South Wales) included:

- 1196 students
- 94 partner high schools

Key Aims

The key aims of the project were to:

1. Contribute to the standardisation of educational experience for In-School Enabling Programs.
2. Improve the alignment of the holistic outcomes, approaches, and grading of assessments.
3. Improve collaboration, academic practice, and student outcomes across the In-School Enabling education sector.
4. Demonstrate alignment with NAEEA learning outcomes, thus contributing to the goal of an establishment of national standards, and provide input for inclusion into the AQF.

Key Outputs

1. Increasing Access and Opportunity: Nesting Enabling Programs in Senior Schooling Final Report.
2. Benchmarking Report of In-School Enabling Programs Across Australia.
3. Implementation Guide for In-School Enabling Programs.

Methodology

The methodology used in this project was based on the NAEEA Benchmarking Project (Davis et al., 2023) which was underpinned by Morgan and Taylor's (2013) Framework and involved six phases. This project endeavoured to closely follow the NAEEA methodology, but as In-School Enabling Programs differ from standard Enabling programs in cohort age, program maturity, mode, and delivery, there are variances in phases to the NAEEA project.

Phase One

Prepare for benchmarking by recruiting university partners and agreeing to the scope and terms of the project.

As part of standard university quality assurance processes, ECU set to benchmark its UniPrep Schools program with other In-School Enabling Programs. Through a desktop review of the sector, five universities were identified across Australia that delivered an In-School Enabling Program. The criteria for identification were that the program must be a university accredited pathway, offer entrance into undergraduate study, and be delivered in Year 11 or 12 (or a combination). Through an Expressions of Interest (EOI) process, the ECU UniPrep Schools team invited universities from across Australia—one from Western Australia, Queensland, New South Wales, and Tasmania—that delivered an In-School Enabling Program. All initially agreed, but the University of Tasmania did not have the capacity to be involved at that point in time.

At the initial meeting of the universities, the scope and terms of the project were discussed and agreed upon. Given the small number of participating universities, the benchmarking team opted to meet as one unifying team. Additionally, as there was diversity across the focus of the programs, it was agreed that the project would focus on two academic units: a study preparation/skills unit and an academic communication/writing unit, as all programs had an assemblage of these.

Phase One commenced prior to receiving the grant from the Australian Centre for Student Equity and Success (ACES). The grant enabled implementation of some benchmarking recommendations and project expansion.

Phase Two

Develop an evidence portfolio of curriculum documents and assessment tasks.

An evidence portfolio of curriculum documents (including learning outcomes and topics), assessment tasks, and rubrics were uploaded to an online repository by each institution for a learning skills unit and an academic communication unit. A summary document outlined why the assessment had been included in the unit, as well as the skills/content that are important for the student to develop. These documents were uploaded onto a shared data point for all participants to access and would be the focus for a deep comparison.

For the purposes of calibration of assessment grading, each university provided two random de-identified assignments from each of the major assessment tasks with a rubric attached for the two units under scrutiny.

Phase Three

Compare assessment standards through collaboration and discussion of processes and outcomes, including blind marking, moderation practices, as well as learning outcomes and curriculum comparison template.

Within this phase, participating universities identified program structures and units and compared the curriculum and learning outcomes within each unit in the templates. While blind

marking was conducted and results compared in a template, the team deeply focused their comparison on assessment instruction, assignment structure and focus, rubric structure and instruction, and moderation practices, given that assessments were taught, and delivered by the school teachers, and markers varied across programs (some used teachers and some academics). These elements were discussed and recorded in fortnightly meetings.

To ensure rigour in blind marking, a spread of markers from the universities in the project, as well as markers working in Enabling education but not on the project, were used. Random (not pre-marked) assessments were chosen to not pre-load markers' grading expectations, and markers were instructed to mark to the rubrics provided. This was to calibrate assessment level to grading schemas and rigour of rubrics.

Phase Four

Analyse and discuss findings by comparing the data in the templates.

The representatives from the different universities analysed the data that had been collected and collated information as one group. The data was scrutinised, with the commonalities and differences being identified and discussed. They also conducted an assessment comparative analysis for the templates, including blind marked assessments, assessment structure and instruction, rubrics, and moderation practices between universities.

Phase Five

Improve practices through identifying areas of best practice and future improvements.

Through robust discussion of the findings, the team identified best practices amongst the universities' programs and compiled these for future improvements for the programs and suggestions for the sector.

Phase Six

Final reporting through collation of findings.

This report is the result of the sixth and final phase, where the findings and recommendations are presented.

Findings

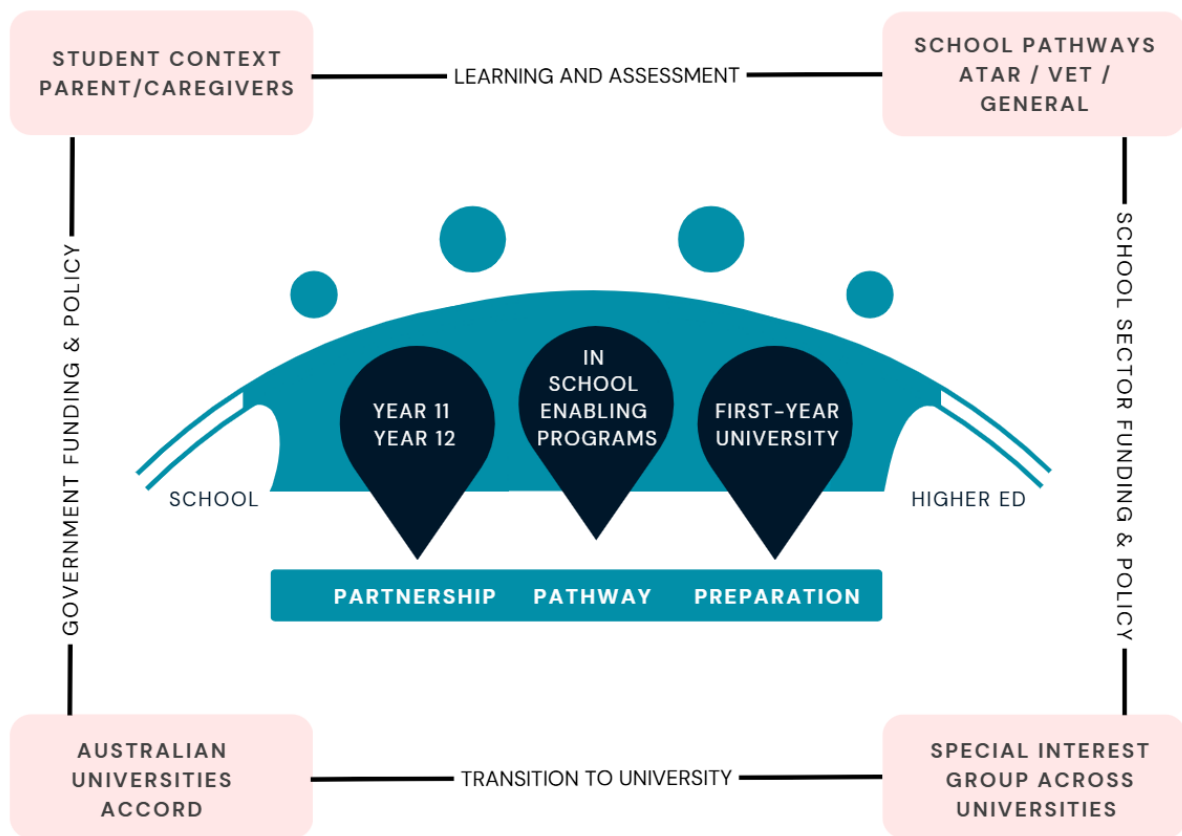
In the initial discussion of the programs (Phase One), it was ascertained that while there was some variance in their structure, all four programs operate using a variation of the partnership model. A partnership model, in this context, includes the university and partnership school working in collaboration for the shared objective: successful delivery of teaching and learning leading to the completion of an In-School Enabling Program that transitions high school students into, and enables them to achieve success in, undergraduate study. The collaborative model is a formalised arrangement and includes a sharing of resources as well as key responsibilities for each educational provider (see Table 3), with consideration of the student context, other school pathways, government funding, educational policies, and the secondary sector (see Figure 2). As shown in Table 3, this model contains shared responsibility where universities design the curriculum and structure, but require, with university support and training, either experienced high school teachers or a combination of high school teachers and university tutors to deliver the content.

Table 3: Partnership Model: An overview of responsibilities

University Responsibilities	School responsibilities
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Program design, structure, and delivery method • Setting entrance and completion requirements • Designing program of study in alignment with Enabling learning outcomes • Curriculum design, resources, and assessments • Assessment moderation • Communication protocols and guidelines for implementation • Teacher training and continued support • Delivery of program materials with high school teachers (in some programs) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Timetabling the program • Student selection, recruitment, and application • Participate in teacher training • Delivery of learning materials and program of study in alignment with training and guidelines • Participate in assessment moderation

The benchmarking project identified that types of support and training varied between the programs in terms of whether it was a teacher teaching the program face-to-face with no university tutor (but access to a Unit Coordinator), a teacher teaching the program face-to-face with online academic tutor support, or if the program was being taught by an academic tutor (see Table 4). However, all programs provide documentation to schools outlining explicit guidelines for: student recruitment, application processes, school requirements (technology, philosophical and pedagogical alignment with Enabling), timetabling, communication protocols, and the roles and responsibilities of the university and schools (outlined in Table 3 and broken down in Table 4). All programs also provide annual training to teachers on how to implement the curriculum. This is an important finding as it informs the discussion throughout the following benchmarking report. The delivery of programs is not reliant solely on the university but requires strong relationships between the university, partnership schools, and other stakeholders to uphold the rigour of the program content and the entry standards of the university.

Figure 2: Situating In-School Enabling Programs



A detailed breakdown of the partnership model elements, including target cohorts, entry and completion requirements, program of study, units, delivery assessment, and teaching training is provided in Table 4 below.

Table 4: A detailed breakdown of Partnership Model elements

	Edith Cowan University	Murdoch University	Southern Cross University	University of Southern Queensland
Program Name	UniPrep Schools	FlexiTrack High	UniStart for Schools	UniPrep
Target Schools and Promotion	<p>Target schools:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> regional or remote ICSEA of 1000 (or less) have students that fit the eligibility criterion listed below. <p>Not advertised or promoted, schools are not approached by ECU.</p>	<p>Target schools:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> regional or remote have students that fit the eligibility criterion listed below. <p>Not advertised or promoted, schools are not approached by MU.</p>	<p>Target schools:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> university campuses' footprints. <p>No marketing, except by Future Students Team as part of general promotion of SCU pathways when visiting/communicating with schools.</p>	<p>Target schools:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> any secondary school across Queensland with focus on those schools within footprint of campuses. <p>Program is marketed widely through the UniSQ Marketing and Future Students/Schools Engagement Team. Program staff also visit schools to build partnerships.</p>
Student Entry Requirements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Students recommended by the principal through the completion of a Principal Recommendation letter. Must be in Year 11 or 12. Attend a partner school. Meet one of the following eligibility criteria: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> low SES background first-in-family Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander have a disability have had family or other life circumstances that have affected their education in a regional or remote area. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Students are selected by schools. Must be in Year 12. Attend a Partnership School. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Academically capable students are selected by schools. Must be in Year 12. Attend a partner school. Students must be an Australian Citizen, a New Zealand Citizen residing in Australia, or on a Permanent Humanitarian Visa. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Students must be enrolled in Year 11 or 12 (approval can be sought for Year 10 entry depending on need) in a school, home learning environment, or distance education facility across Queensland. Students must be an Australian Citizen, a New Zealand Citizen residing in Australia, or on a Permanent Humanitarian Visa.

English Language Requirements for entry	Recommended Year 10/11 English B grade (General) or C grade (ATAR), but at schools' discretion.	Achieved 'B' or higher in general English or 'D' or higher in ATAR English in Year 11.	Evidence of English language proficiency only required for students from countries where English is not the standard language of instruction.	Equivalent to IELTS 5.5 to be enrolled. Principal's discretion and Versant Testing can be used to determine equivalency.
Cost	Regional/Remote: Free Metro ≤ 1000 ICSEA: Free Metro ≥ 1000 ICSEA: School annual fee.	Fee: \$300 per student. Fee waiver available for students from equity groups upon application.	Program is fee-free.	Program is fee-free.
Offering	Face-to-face <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1 year (4 units) • 2 years (2 units / year) • 5.5 hours contact time / week (per unit) • 5 hours personal study (recommended) / week. 	Online and face-to-face <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 30 weeks (1 unit of 4 modules) • 4 hours contact time / week • 6 hours personal study (recommended) / week. 	Face-to-face <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 15 weeks (1 unit) • 3 hours contact time / week • 5 hours personal study (recommended) / week. 	Online (teacher guided) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 28 weeks (2 units).
Core Units and Electives	Core Units: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Future Ready Skills • Academic Literacies • Society and Cultural Studies • Mathematics. Electives: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • None. 	Core Units: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Academic Culture and Literacies • Knowledge in the Arts • Knowledge in the Sciences (including mathematics). Electives: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduction to Health Professions • Introduction to Education • Introduction to Criminology and Digital Media. 	Core Units: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • UniStart. Electives: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • None. 	Core Units: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transitioning to University • Applied Academic Literacies. Electives: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • None.
Curriculum Design	University created and moderated. Available on LMS for access: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unit content 	University created and moderated. Available on LMS for access: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unit content 	University created and moderated. Available on LMS for access: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unit content 	University created and moderated. Available on LMS for access: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unit content

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assessments (including rubrics). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assessments (including rubrics). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assessments (including rubrics). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assessments (including rubrics).
Delivery and Teaching	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Program is based in the high school and scheduled within the school timetable. Delivered by high school teachers. Training and ongoing support for schools and teachers is provided by the university. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Program is based in the high school and scheduled within the school timetable. Team-teaching model of delivery by high school teachers, and select teaching by university tutors and asynchronous online support through the LMS provided to students by university tutors. Training and ongoing support for schools and teachers is provided by the university. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Program is based in the high school and scheduled within the school timetable. Delivered by high school teachers. Training and ongoing support for schools and teachers is provided by the university. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Program is online (self-paced) and managed independently by students. Some schools offer scheduled class time for students which is supervised by a teacher, whereas other students undertake the program in addition to scheduled curriculum. Weekly drop-in sessions run by university academic staff are available to all students. The school must nominate a coordinator/mentor for students undertaking the program.
Assessment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Marked by teachers. Moderation of assessments (teachers and university academics). Moderation meetings for markers. University-led quality assurance through panel review every iteration. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Marked by tutors (university academics). Moderation meetings for tutors. University-led quality assurance with stakeholders every iteration. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Marked by teachers. Moderation of assessments (teachers and university academics). Moderation meetings for markers. University-led quality assurance, moderation of grades by SCU Coordinator every iteration. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Marked by tutors (university academics). Moderation meetings for tutors. University-led quality assurance in place.
Teacher Training	Annually.	Annually.	Annually.	Annually.

(See Appendix Template 1 for details on questions used for comparison).

Finding One: All programs include a partnership model: curriculum is designed by the university and implemented by the high school with university support.

When comparing program costs and durations there was some variation, with programs being free, subsidised, or low-fee. The costing for the two Western Australian universities was determined by the student's/school's equity or Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage (ICSEA) status to ensure access to the pathway for underrepresented students. In Western Australia, as across Australia, the ICSEA is a statistical scale used to represent the average level of educational advantage of students at a school. For ECU, SCU, and UniSQ, students must be recommended or selected by their schools and also meet at least one eligibility criteria, for example, the student is: from a low SES background, first-in-family to attend university, Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander, a person with disability, experiencing a challenging life circumstance, or living in a regional or remote area. This criterion, however, was a requirement for the fee-free places for MU. A no-cost for students from equity groups was a focus for all programs, allowing them to target specific schools, primarily those that are regional or remote. The higher program cost for schools with higher ICSEA standings, such as private schools, provided the funding for university staffing and delivery of the programs, as In-School Enabling Program places are not funded in the same way as standard Enabling programs. There was also a range in completion time of the programs, from 14 weeks to two years. Three of the four universities shared a similarity in length (28-30 weeks), timetabled school time, and study commitment for students commencing in Year 12. ECU's two-year option is the same content spread over two years.

Finding Two: All programs targeted specific cohorts, primarily regional and remote, or schools with a large equity cohort.

All four programs require students to demonstrate a minimum English competency for entry. However, universities offer flexibility for demonstrating/determining English proficiency/equivalency, with English (unit) grades, completion of alternative assessment methods (such as *Versant Testing*), or the school's discretion. All four programs are delivered in Year 12 of senior schooling, and ECU and UniSQ programs additionally provide an elongated Year 11 and 12 offering. Two of the benchmarked programs offer a 15-week teaching period and two can be 30-weeks in length. All four of the programs are offered to schools that are regional or remote.

Finding Three: All programs have a process for student eligibility and admission, including recommendation by school and English competency standards requirements.

The completed templates for each benchmarked program allowed for easy comparison of the learning outcomes, topics, assessment types, timing, and weightings across the four universities. In line with NAEAA's project (Davis et al., 2023a), "a close thematic analysis of the learning outcomes was undertaken" and descriptors identified and mapped to each program, and the NAEAA outcomes. Assessment types, timing, and weightings were also analysed and compared. Online meetings allowed for robust discussion and sharing of good practices.

An understanding of the nuances of the specific Enabling cohort and an awareness of the processes required to move towards the learning outcomes is evident in the curriculum design of the four programs. All programs keep university readiness at the forefront of purpose and similarly align their programs with NAAEA CLOs and TEQSA guidelines. The project also involved ongoing identification and implementation of unit improvements and modifications, aligning with the key aims of this benchmarking project.

Table 5: A comparison of the learning outcomes, topics, and assessment types in the university preparation skills and academic literacies units

University	Unit	Learning Outcomes	Topics	Assessment types
ECU	UPU0011 Future Ready Skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use appropriate strategies to plan and organise learning. Apply ethical practices when using data, information, and ideas. Apply reflective thinking processes to communicate career awareness. Summarise foundational academic content. Communicate to a specific audience using relevant digital and audio tools. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Getting ready for UniPrep Schools. Planning to action. Navigating new learning. Thinking about thinking. Identifying key words and ideas. Plagiarism and APA referencing. Disruption in the workplace. Building professional relationships. The art of reflection. Reflective digital presentations. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Exercise: Academic Readiness Task [semester planner and written reflection]. Portfolio: Learning Portfolio Task [organised notes and academic source analysis]. Presentation: Reflective Presentation [digital presentation].
	UPU0012 Academic Writing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Locate and evaluate relevant academic sources in readiness for undergraduate study. Paraphrase, summarise, and synthesise ideas from the literature to support academic writing. Construct sentences, paragraphs, introductions, and conclusions for academic writing. Act responsibly in relation to academic integrity and referencing. Apply reflective thinking processes in academic contexts. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What is academic writing? What is academic reading? Active reading, referencing, and paraphrasing. Organising readings and notes. Essay planning. Extending reading and writing for essays. Developing paragraphs. Synthesis for paragraphs. Consolidation of academic writing and reading. Study skills. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Exercise: Academic Integrity Task [referencing and paraphrasing quizzes]. Assignment: Research Plan and Notes [notes matrix and essay plan]. Assignment: Academic Written Response [final essay]. Portfolio: Common Academic Tasks [final exam].
MU	UPP011 Academic Culture and Literacies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify, locate, and use academic sources. Summarise and critically analyse academic texts. Apply foundational mathematics to solve problems and interpret data. Construct an academic text in accordance with academic conventions. Create and present an oral presentation in accordance with academic conventions. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Module 1 (University Culture): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Referencing Reading Summary writing Social and emotional skills development. Module 2 (Knowledge in the Arts): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Essay writing Critical concepts: "Creating social change" 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Module 1 (University Culture): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Online quiz Participation Referencing quiz Reading summary Reflective learning journal. Module 2 (Knowledge in the Arts): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Online quiz

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Apply a range of independent and collaborative learning skills such as time management, self-regulation, effective communication, and teamwork to complete tasks within set timelines. • Use appropriate strategies to plan and organise learning. • Engage in regular reflection on the learning process, including social and emotional learning. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Social and emotional skills development. • Module 3 (Knowledge in the Sciences): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Report writing ○ Critical concepts: “Responses to global challenges” ○ Mathematics ○ Social and emotional skills development. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Participation ○ Annotated bibliography ○ Essay ○ Reflection learning journal and blog. • Module 3 (Knowledge in the Sciences): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Participation ○ Draft report ○ Report ○ Reflective learning journal and blog.
SCU	UNIP0001 UniStart	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Demonstrate an understanding of the culture of writing in a university context. • Apply independent learning and self-management strategies to studies. • Undertake and manage guided research and enquiry. • Apply principles of academic integrity to individual academic practices. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduction to learning at university. • Principles of academic integrity. • Self-management and project management skills and strategies. • Finding and evaluating sources. • Critical reading and thinking. • Gathering and analysing data. • Reporting and presenting results. • Academic writing, academic arguments, and academic voice. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Online quiz x 2. • Annotated bibliography. • Report (draft). • Report (final).
UniSQ	AEP1111 Transitioning to University	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engage successfully with university systems, processes, programs, policies, and practices relevant to first year study. • Apply skills, knowledge, and attributes necessary to self-manage in an academic community. • Correctly use a wide range of textual features in a range of communication modes and genres. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understanding the university processes and environment. • The social context of university study. • Using technology to support study. • The future of work. • Understanding your goals and aspirations. • Planning your future study and career. • Developing effective study practices. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quiz. • Reflection. • Portfolio.
	AEP1112 Applied Academic Literacies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use a variety of media to locate, interpret, analyse, and critically evaluate information in a range of genres and modes. • Generate an academic argument. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use a range of media to locate and collect appropriate information. • Use reading strategies to interpret and analyse data, information, ideas, theories, and issues. • Use critical literacy and skills to evaluate information and data. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quiz. • Planning document. • Online forums. • Essay and reflection.

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interpret, analyse, evaluate, and use texts to support an academic argument. • Communicate and collaborate in a university environment to produce desired outcomes. • Understand and use a wide range of textual features in a range of communication modes and genres. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use evidence and logic to construct an academic argument. • Use communication skills to work effectively with others. • Use language purposefully to express a written academic argument. • Use multimodal presentation skills to express ideas. 	
--	--	---	---	--

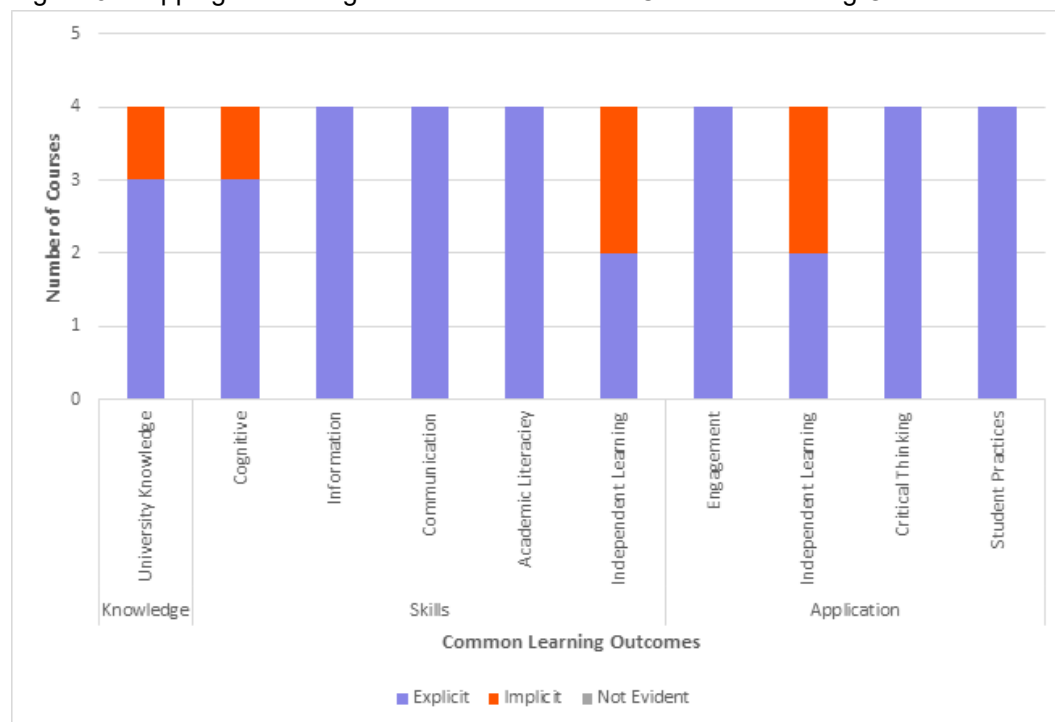
As aforementioned, each university varied in the ways in which academic literacies and preparation skills were taught. While ECU and UniSQ provide two explicit units to teach these skills, MU and SCU, which operate as a larger single-unit program, weave these literacies through concept-driven topics. While the topics across the different programs vary, all emphasise foundational academic skills and strategies necessary for success in a university setting. There are key similarities in all programs, which include a focus on effective reading and writing practices, such as academic writing, essay planning, and active reading, which are essential for mastering university-level program work. All programs also share an emphasis on study skills, self-management, and project management, highlighting the importance of organisation and personal responsibility in academic success. Topics also address social and emotional skills development, recognising the significance of emotional intelligence in navigating the university environment and building professional relationships. All programs also embed concepts of critical thinking, evaluation of sources, and academic integrity, and reinforce the importance of engaging with information critically.

Comparing the learning outcomes across all four programs showed strong similarity in academic skills necessary for success in higher education. These include effective academic communication, summarising and evaluating sources, and ethical practices related to academic integrity. They highlight the importance of reflective thinking, encouraging students to engage in self-assessment to improve their learning outcomes, and the need for strong research skills, with a focus on locating, interpreting, and analysing academic sources. They also underscore the significance of developing independent learning and collaborative abilities, equipping students with time management, self-regulation, and teamwork skills essential for completing academic tasks.

All four universities explicitly teach the skill of academic argument development and communication as central to the academic experience. The learning outcomes also highlight some differences, namely in their specificity and focus areas, particularly around academic writing. ECU specifically includes detailed skills related to academic writing, such as constructing sentences and paragraphs, while also emphasising a broader understanding of the culture of writing in a university context. UniSQ places greater emphasis on engaging with university systems and processes relevant to first-year students, as well as the use of various communication modes and genres. While most programs address the reflective practices linked to social and emotional learning in their learning activities, only MU makes this goal explicit in the learning outcomes.

Figure 3 illustrates how the learning outcomes of the four programs are mapped to the NAEEA CLOs (outlined in Table 1). Figure 3 shows that there is alignment to the NAEEA CLOs across all four programs, whether the learning outcomes are explicitly taught (orange) or implied (purple) in the curriculum documents, and that the programs share common expectations for students to acquire the knowledge and skills specified in the CLOs.

Figure 3: Mapping of learning outcomes and NAEEA Common Learning Outcomes



Such alignment between the In-School Enabling Program learning outcomes and NAEEA CLOs demonstrates a strong agreement on the essential knowledge, skills, and attributes that Enabling education students should possess when they transition to undergraduate studies, regardless of whether the Enabling program is in-school or post-secondary. It is evident that all the benchmarked Enabling programs explicitly address these expectations at the program level. Whilst the NAEEA CLOs function effectively for Enabling programs broadly, the unique cohort and context of In-School Enabling Programs required particular consideration of aspects important to the high school context that are not captured in the NAEEA CLOs. As such, as part of the benchmarking process and discussion, the aforementioned CLOs were expanded upon to help universities transition towards a more holistic In-School Enabling Program set of common outcomes; these are detailed further in Table 8.

Finding Four: Learning outcomes in all four programs emphasise specific academic skills.

The assessment component comparison analysis presents a detailed evaluation of a selection of assessments in two key units: a study preparation/skills unit and an academic communication/writing unit, as identified in Phase One (see Table 6). For ease of comparison, the selection includes a range of formative and summative assessments that had a similar focus. The aim of the comparison was to identify how essential skills are assessed, highlight practices required for academic success in a university environment, and identify if there is standardisation.

Table 6: A comparison of selected assessments from the university preparation and academic writing units

University	Assessment	Outline	Program Learning Outcomes	Unit Learning Outcomes	Length	Weighting
ECU	Academic Source Analysis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Choose two of the sources to complete detailed analysis using the template provided. Applying your learning in M6 and M7, this assignment gives you the opportunity to write descriptively, with evaluation, and reflectively. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Engage with the university learning and teaching environment in an ethically and contextually aware manner. Find, retrieve, and analyse information for use in academic contexts. Adopt student practices that meet their university's academic expectations. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use appropriate strategies to plan and organise learning. Apply ethical practices when using data, information, and ideas. Summarise foundational academic content. 	NA.	25%
	Essay Plan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This assignment scaffolds writing a structured essay through accessing appropriate sources, critical reading, effective note-making, paraphrasing, synthesising, paragraph writing, and using academic language. You will be provided three academic sources for the question of choice, and then you must locate three additional academic sources using your literature search skills. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Critically analyse and synthesise information from a range of contexts. Communicate to foster the exchange of knowledge and ideas within an academic context. Adopt student practices that meet their university's academic expectations. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Locate and evaluate relevant academic sources in readiness for undergraduate study. Paraphrase, summarise, and synthesise ideas from the literature to support academic writing. 	NA.	15%
	Final Essay	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The essay will be written in the style of an academic argument in response to one set 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Critically analyse and synthesise information from a range of contexts. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Locate and evaluate relevant academic sources in readiness for undergraduate study. 	1200 words.	25%

University	Assessment	Outline	Program Learning Outcomes	Unit Learning Outcomes	Length	Weighting
		<p>question (choice between two questions).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The three provided sources must be used in your essay plan and final essay along with the three academic sources you choose (six academic sources in total for the Final Essay). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Communicate to foster the exchange of knowledge and ideas within an academic context. Adopt student practices that meet their university's academic expectations. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Paraphrase, summarise, and synthesise ideas from the literature to support academic writing. Construct sentences, paragraphs, introductions, and conclusions for academic writing. Act responsibly in relation to academic integrity and referencing. 		
MU	Annotated Bibliography and Skeleton Essay Plan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> An essay about an activist organisation. The essay question is: "Both Gandhi and Martin Luther King Jr. created change by using non-violent protest methods. Choose a contemporary activist, describe the change the activist(s) is advocating for, and compare and contrast the protest methods to either Gandhi or Martin Luther King Jr." 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Construct an academic text using the appropriate structure and academic conventions. Use the university library (interface) to identify, locate, and reference a range of academic resources related to a single topic. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 	800 words.	20%
	Draft Report	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Socio-economic status and education levels may impact mental health outcomes. This kind of research is important for helping national governments decide where funding is 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Construct an academic text using the appropriate structure and academic conventions. Apply a range of independent and collaborative learning 		800-1000 words.	30%

University	Assessment	Outline	Program Learning Outcomes	Unit Learning Outcomes	Length	Weighting
		<p>best placed to create positive social change.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Choose one independent variable for the draft report: socio-economic status OR education level. • The report will need to be well referenced: five academic (peer-reviewed) references (minimum). • It is expected that some of the references that have been provided will be included in the report. 	<p>skills such as time management, self-regulation, effective communication, and teamwork to complete tasks within set timelines.</p>			
	<p>Reflective Video Journal</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Record a 5-minute oral presentation in voice recorded PowerPoint in response to the reflective learning question: "Knowing yourself, your character strengths, and your approaches to learning and developing your academic skills is vital for success at university. Describe yourself as a learner, the areas that require development, and discuss how you plan to grow." • Upload both the PowerPoint file and assignment rubric to the 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Present an original academic argument in both written and oral form. 		<p>5 minutes (+/- 30 sec).</p>	<p>30%</p>

University	Assessment	Outline	Program Learning Outcomes	Unit Learning Outcomes	Length	Weighting
		assignment section of the LMS.				
SCU	Annotated Bibliography	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The annotated bibliography is a summary and critique of three readings provided in a chosen topic. Choose a topic and three readings related to that topic. Write an annotated bibliography for these three sources including full references, a summary of key points, a critical evaluation of the source, and a statement of the relevance or usefulness of the reading to the report topic. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Apply independent learning and self-management strategies to studies. Apply principles of academic integrity to individual academic practices. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Apply independent learning and self-management strategies to studies. Apply principles of academic integrity to individual academic practices. 	750 words.	30%
	Draft Report	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> You are to write a draft report on the same topic you chose for Assessment 2. Part 1: Conducting the Research. Part 2: Writing the Draft Report. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Demonstrate an understanding of the culture of writing in a university context. Apply independent learning and self-management strategies to studies. Undertake and manage guided research and enquiry. Apply principles of academic integrity to individual academic practices. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Demonstrate an understanding of the culture of writing in a university context. Apply independent learning and self-management strategies to studies. Undertake and manage guided research and enquiry. Apply principles of academic integrity to individual academic practices. 	750 words.	20%
UniSQ	Planning Document	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Respond in writing to all questions on the 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use a variety of media to locate, interpret, 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Apply academic literacy, skills, and attitudes 	NA.	30%

University	Assessment	Outline	Program Learning Outcomes	Unit Learning Outcomes	Length	Weighting
		<p>Planning Task document.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Its role is to assist your early preparation for your final essay task. • Planning your thinking, strategy, and organisation before you begin research assignments are critical for success. • This assessment relates to the research essay in Assessment 4 due at the end of the program. 	<p>analyse, and critically evaluate information in a range of genres and modes.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interpret, analyse, evaluate, and use texts to support an academic argument. • Understand and use a wide range of textual features in a range of communication modes and genres. 	<p>required for successful transition into tertiary study.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use self-management competencies required to participate effectively in an academic community. • Apply communicative and collaborative competencies required to participate effectively in an academic community. 		
	Essay (Academic Essay and Reflection)	<p>This assessment includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • an academic essay written in response to a research question (essays are a common form of academic writing and a foundational form of communication in educational and professional settings). • a personal reflection about what you have realised about yourself as a learner (reflecting on evidence of personal progress is what successful learners do to develop and improve. The skill of evidence-informed self-reflection is recognised widely as supporting the development of self- 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use a variety of media to locate, interpret, analyse, and critically evaluate information in a range of genres and modes. • Generate an academic argument. • Interpret, analyse, evaluate, and use texts to support an academic argument. • Communicate and collaborate in a university environment to produce desired outcomes. • Understand and use a wide range of textual features in a range of communication modes and genres. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Apply academic literacy knowledge, skills, and attitudes required for successful transition into tertiary study. • Use self-management competencies required to participate effectively in an academic community. • Apply communicative and collaborative competencies required to participate effectively in an academic community. 	<p>Essay: 800 words.</p> <p>Reflection: 600 words written OR 3 minutes spoken/visual.</p>	50%

University	Assessment	Outline	Program Learning Outcomes	Unit Learning Outcomes	Length	Weighting
		regulatory individuals, organisations, and businesses).				
	Portfolio (Part A & B)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This portfolio includes two parts written in response to a series of practical and authentic tasks relevant to beginning university study. They are: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Written reflection on UniSQ Career Explorer Tool results ○ Written reflection on career development and planning. • This assessment provides opportunities for students to meaningfully engage with authentic self-reflection and career planning tools to support their transition from school to university. • Furthermore, the skill of evidence-informed self-reflection is recognised universally as supporting the development of individuals better able to self-regulate and independently manage their responsibilities. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engage successfully with university systems, processes, programs, policies, and practices relevant to first-year study. • Apply skills, knowledge, and attributes necessary to self-manage in an academic community. • Correctly use a wide range of textual features in a range of communication modes and genres. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Apply academic literacy and numeracy knowledge, skills, and attitudes required for successful transition into tertiary study. • Use self-management competencies required to participate effectively in an academic community. • Apply communicative and collaborative competencies required to participate effectively in an academic community. 	<p>(i) 250 words.</p> <p>(ii) 550 words.</p>	50%

In all four of the benchmarked programs, the assessments ask students to demonstrate the key academic literacies through a range of comparable assessment types encountered in undergraduate studies: draft essays, essays, annotated bibliographies, reports, portfolios, and reflections. A desktop comparison highlights that academic communication skills are prioritised in assessments, regardless of university or assessment type: paraphrasing, summarising, and synthesising literature, along with an understanding of the writing culture within the academic community.

Comparing the different assessment types showed that scaffolding is central to the development of academic literacies in all programs through the provision of linked formative and summative assessments. For example, ECU scaffolds the essay plan to final essay, MU scaffolds the skeleton to essay plan (not included in Table 6), SCU scaffolds the annotated bibliography to draft report, and UniSQ scaffolds the planning document to essay. The scaffolding focuses on building mini mastery, low-stakes assessments that develop skills lower on Bloom's taxonomy hierarchy (Bloom, 1971) to enhance self-efficacy in preparation for the more cognitively demanding assessments such as essay writing. Collectively, these assessments reflect a commitment to cultivating foundational skills, including ethical engagement, information literacy, effective communication, self-management, and critical thinking, essential for thriving in higher education. Additionally, the comparison emphasised that all programs assess students' abilities to locate, analyse, and evaluate information to substantiate their arguments. The comparison also stresses the importance of academic integrity, responsible research practices, and independent learning, alongside proficiency in various textual features across communication modes and genres. Lastly, the recurring theme of critical thinking necessitates higher-order analysis and synthesis of information.

Reviewing the assessment practices demonstrated that explicit grading criteria was articulated in all programs, using rubrics for effective learning. The four universities firstly compared the general spread of rubrics for different assignments to ascertain similarities and differences in the approach to rubric design. The findings from this activity highlighted that the use of simple but explicit rubrics in all programs ensured that students clearly understood the expectations. All assessment instructions identified essential skills necessary for successful assessment and employed structured rubrics to facilitate evaluation. Furthermore, there was a strong focus on assessing mechanics, structures, and evidence of research, as well as elements relevant to reflective assignments. This consistency not only enhanced communication of expectations but also fostered fair and objective grading, contributing to a more effective assessment process.

The analysis also highlighted some variances in rubric design, that is, strict rubrics with no comments (SCU and ECU), rubric with feedback section (UniSQ), and a hybrid rubric combining rubric and marking guides to explain expectations to students (MU). ECU and MU provide feedback throughout the assignments. These differences were due to the pedagogical approaches embraced by the programs. MU's rubrics contained the metalanguage of learning, integrating elements such as growth mindset principles in the descriptors to build enabling learner self-efficacy, as well as the feedback scale of "not Included" to "strong" (this scale was changed to standard grading after the benchmarking in line with new university policy). Whereas ECU included numerical grades on the rubrics, favouring numbering and weighting each key descriptor so students could tangibly understand the grades for each descriptor. The rubrics also differed in presentation, with the use of present tense verbs and the incorporation of visual elements such as colour to boost readability and student engagement. These

distinctions underscored the diverse strategies and pedagogical perspectives employed in crafting rubrics across the sector and university more broadly, and continue the debate surrounding whether there should be standardisation around best practice rubric design. The strength in this analysis was the overwhelming similarities in the processes for providing feedback, with every university committed to making assessment guidelines instructional, explicit, and transparent to aid the student's learning with the most effective enabling strategies possible.

Finding Five: Assessments in all programs were highly scaffolded, shared assignment types, with a common academic skill focus in order for students to demonstrate comparable standards and alignment with common learning outcomes.

A comparative analysis of the range of assessment rubrics—annotated bibliography, essay plan, draft report, and reflective assessments—was undertaken by each member of the benchmarking team to identify similarities and differences between assessment rubrics. Part of the analysis process compared rubrics for like assignments. Analysis included the comparison of rubrics for the following:

- annotated bibliographies from Murdoch University and SCU
- essay plans from ECU, UniSQ, and MU
- reports from MU and SCU
- essays from ECU, UniSQ, and MU.

These were then discussed in a benchmarking meeting and are tabled below (Table 7).

Table 7: Comparative analysis of like rubrics

Assessment	Similarities	Differences
Annotated Bibliography	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explicit grading of referencing. • Explicit grading for evaluating source. • Clearly stated expectations. • Same skills identified. • 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some hybrid rubrics. • Integrated growth mindset, commentary, and instructions. • Comment sections.
Essay Planning (Draft Report)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rubric structures. • Looking for mechanics, structures, and evidence of research. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Growth mindset language utilised. • Performance descriptors. • Comment sections. • Present tense verbs. • Visuals: Colour.
Reflective Assessment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rubric structures. • Elements relevant to a reflection. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Numbered. • Articulation of a reflective genre. • Visuals. • Rubric hybrid.

It was observed that the various rubrics shared numerous commonalities in the attributes that constitute a tertiary level essay, evaluating similar structural, content, and referencing components. This alignment across benchmarking universities underscores the significance of employing well-structured and clear rubrics in assessment feedback. This final part of the comparison included the benchmarking team using the rubrics from each university to blind mark a de-identified assessment. This was to see if the different universities' rubrics could be applied to the same assessment genre. The application of these rubrics to the submissions resulted in consistent grading outcomes with the initial mark.

Finally, to compare and calibrate the grading and feedback type, each university provided two random de-identified assignments from each of the major assessment tasks with a rubric attached for the two units under scrutiny. Random (not pre-marked) assessments were chosen to not pre-load markers' grading expectations, and markers were instructed to mark to the rubrics provided.

The blind marking exercise and subsequent discussion yielded some interesting results. While all markers provided comparable, and sometimes identical, grades for 60% of the assessments, this consistency was observed primarily in those that were either passes or fails. There were large variations between those assignments sitting between a high credit and a high distinction. These assignments were from two different universities. Further scrutinising of the rubric categories for these assessments highlighted very similar language descriptors in assessment level explanations between a credit and a high distinction, which may have contributed to such variations. The grading part of this process highlighted the need for continual moderation and benchmarking of both grading and rubrics between ECU and other In-School Enabling Programs.

Positively, the blind marking highlighted great similarities in feedback including focus on academic writing standards, referencing, structure and flow, grammar and punctuation, analysis, and evidence. Markers commented on the use of rhetorical questions, personal pronouns, and the need for a formal academic tone. Issues with in-text citations, reference lists, and the use of outdated or non-peer-reviewed sources were frequently mentioned. Comments highlighted the need for better structure, coherence, and logical flow in essays and reports. Common issues included grammatical errors, punctuation mistakes, and the need for better proofreading. Markers noted the need for deeper analysis, better integration of evidence, and avoiding mere listing of information. There were differences in the comments, particularly in terms of specific feedback. Some markers provided very detailed feedback on specific sections of the assessments, while others gave more general comments.

Benchmarking and calibration showed that along with a high degree of alignment with assessment type, grading weighting, and rubric, there was also comparability in marking and identification of pass, fail, or low credit assignments between universities. There were greater variances when assessing grades for high credit and above assignments, which signals the need for continued moderation and review of rubrics. Universities agreed to revise and reflect on rubric descriptors as part of annual program reviews. The comments demonstrated a strong commonality in markers identifying issues relating to academic writing standards, referencing, structure, grammar, and analysis, with some variation in the focus and detail of feedback provided by different markers.

Finding Six: All four programs provided scaffolded assessment explanation and rubrics that are clear and explicit for students.

The analysis of practice of four In-School Enabling Programs highlighted that programs are designed for a nuanced cohort that require both academic and social emotional skills development. Generative discussions revealed that these holistic needs should be central when designing a program to be delivered in high schools and that the expansion of the NAEAA CLOs was needed to address this. It was recognised that academics/participants from ECU and MU were employed in their design roles because they were trained high school teachers and held the knowledge of the various secondary school curriculums, recognising that in order to transition students from the secondary to tertiary space, the curriculum must be a hybrid too. While the NAEAA specifically addresses academic knowledge, skills, and applications, it was conceived that the outcomes also must address capabilities as is done in secondary curriculums to ensure alignment with the secondary school environment.

The capabilities in Table 8 were developed with the incorporation of the International Baccalaureate Learner Profiles (2024), recommendations 26 and 27 of the Western Australian Post-School Success Expert Panel Report (Department of Education Western Australia, 2024), and the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority General Capabilities (2024), as well as the expertise developed by different universities over time whilst running their integrated Enabling programs. These capabilities are recommended to be an expansion of the CLOs outlined by NAEAA to be utilised for In-School Enabling Programs, and incorporated by any university that is developing their own In-School Enabling Program,

as they have been found to be important in the ongoing success and development of students in Enabling programs.

Table 8: Expanding on the NAEEA Common Learning Outcomes

Field	<i>Recommended expansion to NAEEA CLOs</i>
Capabilities: Students completing an In-School Enabling Program will:	apply a range of independent and collaborative learning skills such as time management, self-regulation, effective communication, and teamwork to complete tasks within set timelines and nurture their curiosity through research;
	engage in regular reflection on the learning process to build social and emotional capacity and agency;
	analyse, synthesise, and evaluate information to make ethical decisions, express themselves confidently, and appreciate diverse perspectives;
	act with integrity, empathy, and respect, balancing intellectual, physical, and emotional aspects of their lives to positively impact their community.

Moderation Practices

This report examines the moderation practices employed across various universities to ensure consistency and fairness in grading within partner high schools. These practices are designed to uphold academic rigour and integrity throughout the assessment process. By incorporating structured moderation sessions, where teachers and markers collaboratively review and discuss sample assignments, including past submissions and de-identified papers, the practices facilitate the maintenance of grading standards. The use of sample papers that represent a range of grades fosters meaningful discussions about grading criteria and outcomes, promoting a consensus among educators. With a focus on heavily weighted assignments, these moderation practices include pre-mark audits to verify alignment in grading expectations. By leveraging assessment outcomes and student performance data to inform curriculum development, these practices contribute to overall grade equity, transparency, and the enhancement of the educational experience for all students.

Table 9: Moderation practices comparison of benchmarking university's In-School Enabling Program units

University	Unit	Moderation Activity		Purpose
		Pre-semester	During semester	
ECU	UPU0011 – Future Ready Skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> As part of Teacher Training Days, teachers moderate several previous submissions for heavily weighted assignments in each unit. Teachers are provided with annotated and marked samples for 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The UniPrep Schools coordinators ask for samples of minor assignments to cross-mark. The UniPrep Schools coordinators check all submissions for major 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensuring consistency across all assessments, across all partner high schools, and to maintain the academic rigour and integrity of the UniPrep Schools program.

		each grade point for each assignment.	assignments for similarity.	
	UPU0012 – Academic Literacies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> As part of Teacher Training Days prior to the commencement of the program, teachers moderate several previous submissions for heavily weighted assignments in each unit. Teachers are provided with annotated and marked samples for each grade point for each assignment. Moderation meetings with markers and unit coordinators (UCs) for major assessments. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Moderation meetings with ECU markers and UCs of assessments are held throughout the program. It includes three de-identified sample papers that are marked and grades discussed, as well as submissions from teachers of a high and a low sample for moderation comparison by UCs. Additionally, teachers from some schools also moderate between schools. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensure that consistent marks are allocated to a standard of work in alignment of the marking rubric/guide. To check that the standards of marking are being maintained at partner high schools and the marks reflect the standard expected (academic rigour).
MU	UPP011 – Academic Culture and Literacies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A moderation meeting is held before the semester commences and a blind folder of all major assessments (high and low) is created for tutors to mark and discuss. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A moderation meeting is also held with all MU markers and UCs for major assignments in every module. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To ensure assessments are graded and the learning experience is consistent across all partner high schools. To ensure the evolution of the curriculum is informed by student performance.
SCU	UNIP0001 UniStart		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Moderation meeting before marking of each assessment. It includes three de-identified sample papers that are marked by each teacher prior to the moderation meeting and discussed at the meeting. Moderation meeting led by SCU coordinator. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Share and discuss the papers to ensure each marker is within a suitable range and understands why those marks best reflect the standard of work produced. This assists with grade equity and justifying the grade decisions. To check that the standards of marking are being

				maintained at partner high schools and the marks reflect the standard expected (academic rigour).
UniSQ	AEP1111 – Transitioning to University		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Moderation meeting before marking each assessment. Includes all markers, with three papers chosen to each individually mark and discuss and come to a consensus. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Share and discuss the papers to ensure each marker is within a suitable range and understands why those marks best reflect the standard of work produced. This assists with grade equity and justifying the grade decisions.
	AEP1112 – Applied Academic Literacies		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Moderation meeting before marking each assessment. Includes all markers, with three papers chosen to each individually mark and discuss and come to a consensus. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Share and discuss the papers to ensure each marker is within a suitable range and understands why those marks best reflect the standard of work produced. This assists with grade equity and justifying the grade decisions.

All programs incorporate a moderation process where teachers or markers convene to review and discuss sample assignments, including past submissions and de-identified papers, to maintain grading standards. Sample papers covering a range of grades are utilised for comparison during these discussions, which highlight the collaborative nature of the process as teachers work together to reach a consensus on grading criteria and outcomes. The moderation practices primarily focus on heavily weighted assignments, with checks for consistency and comparative grading conducted before final assessments. This pre-mark moderation approach further reinforces alignment in grading expectations, contributing to the overall accuracy and fairness of the evaluation process across different assignments and universities.

Bloxham et al. (2015a) suggest that although moderation is typically viewed as a standard method for ensuring agreement, assurance, and verification of standards, various moderation activities can take place at different points throughout the assessment process. The main distinction between programs was when the moderation practice occurred. For MU and ECU moderation occurred before the start of the program and throughout the program. Some of the ECU partnership school teachers (also markers) undertake inter-school moderation. SCU and UniSQ opt to have a moderation prior to each assessment. While timing was minorly different,

the reviewed practices across the different universities share several key similarities aimed at ensuring consistency and fairness in grading.

Moderation practices in all programs used are designed to promote consistency and integrity in the assessment process across partner high schools. Each practice underscores the importance of upholding uniform grading standards and academic rigour, facilitated by a standardised marking rubric for evaluating student work. Regular audits are performed to maintain these marking standards and ensure that grades accurately represent the expected levels of academic achievement. Collaborative review processes are essential to these practices, enabling markers to share and discuss student papers, which fosters equitable grading and a shared understanding of evaluation criteria. Moreover, there is a strong commitment to leveraging assessment outcomes and student performance data to guide curriculum development, ensuring it meets student needs and upholds high academic standards. Overall, these practices enhance grade equity and transparency by ensuring that all markers understand the rationale behind the assigned marks.

Finding Seven: All programs include moderation practices prior to major assessments that ensure consistency of marking of assessments.

The objective of this benchmarking project was to check alignment and rigour between programs in order to move closer to a standardisation of educational experience for In-School Enabling Programs, including alignment in holistic outcomes and approaches to assessments and the grading of assessments. For other practitioners looking to develop an In-School Enabling Program, the following considerations are provided.

Through the benchmarking project, along with collaborative discussions and comparative charts, it was realised that high school cohorts are nuanced, with students exhibiting distinct features and specific needs. Understanding the learner is crucial for curriculum design and the application of appropriate pedagogies. These students are in a transitional phase, a third space between two educational paradigms (Engeström, 2004). This liminal space of in-betweenness, where they are an enabling student as well as a school student, highlights the importance of designing for complex transition (Nieuwoudt & Jones, 2025). Academics who understand this “third space” can better support students, providing a highly supportive and pedagogically rigorous bridge to acculturation (Olds et al., 2022, p.3). Students often juggle multiple units, leading to heavy cognitive loads. Research indicates that focusing on up to two units at a time over six weeks can improve academic performance and reduce psychological distress compared to traditional delivery models (Nieuwoudt, 2023), demonstrating the careful design that has occurred in the structuring of the In-School Enabling Programs. A strong student-teacher relationship, supported by a well-designed transition pedagogy, can effectively engage and support students, thereby reducing cognitive loads (Jones et al., 2016). Additionally, students from equity groups enrolled in In-School Enabling Programs often experience “imposter syndrome”, have limited understanding of university systems, and require explicit teaching and learning opportunities in these areas (O’Shea et al., 2024). Enabling education grounded in critical pedagogy can enhance retention and success, particularly for students facing educational disadvantages or belonging to targeted equity groups (Syme et al., 2021). To be effective, In-School Enabling Programs must leverage the unique characteristics of their learning communities, uphold social justice and equity ideals, build aspirations, facilitate cognitive transitions, and ensure inclusive teaching and learning

practices (Maclaurin et al., 2025, p.2). One way to ensure such ideals are upheld is through intentional design and aligning holistic outcomes and assessments.

The intentional design of an In-School Enabling Program ensures alignment with outcomes and assessment and a commitment to enacting effective enabling pedagogies. A strong illustration of this enactment in the benchmarking project was evidenced in the assessments. The comparative analysis of the types of assessment revealed a pedagogical commitment to scaffolding. This approach is particularly crucial for students in transitional spaces, as these students often face unique challenges as they adapt to new academic environments, making structured support essential for their success. Strong scaffolding helps to break down complex tasks into manageable parts, providing clear guidance and support at each stage. Martin and Evans (2018) emphasise the importance of chunking and cognitive load reduction to support diverse learners. By breaking down information into smaller, more digestible chunks, educators can help students process and retain information more effectively. This method is especially beneficial for students with varying levels of prior knowledge and learning abilities, ensuring that all students can engage with the material at their own pace. Enabling education curricula focus on several key areas to support student success. These include the development of study and learning skills, fostering university acculturation, enhancing self-efficacy, and building student identity within the academic community. Strong teacher-student relationships are also emphasised, as they provide a foundation of trust and support. Scaffolded learning experiences are integral to this approach, offering students the structured assistance they need to develop independence and confidence in their academic abilities (Davis et al., 2023b). The use of scaffolding in assessments is a strategic approach to support students' transition and learning, ensuring they have the necessary tools and guidance to succeed in their academic journeys, and can also lead to a smoother transition from secondary into tertiary studies.

Another pedagogical commitment revealed through comparison of assessment is the commitment to transparent and explicit instruction. Explicit instruction involves a systematic approach to teaching that prioritises breaking down lessons into smaller parts, continuously assessing students' comprehension, and promoting active and effective participation from every student (Olds et al, 2022). Essential skills for university success, such as ethical engagement, effective navigation of university systems, and information literacy were described in detail using explicit grading criteria. These programs emphasise, through the use of detailed assessment instructions, the skills of critically locating, analysing, and evaluating information, while also stressing effective communication, academic integrity, and ethical research practices. Standardised marking rubrics, used across all programs, upheld academic rigour and accurately represented achievement levels. Rubrics help manage cognitive load and are encouraged by Australia's national education evidence body, the Australian Education Research Organisation (AERO). Teachers and tutors use well-structured rubrics to assess students consistently across universities. As Davis et al. (2023b) state, rubrics facilitate consistency in assessing work along with offering transparency in the grading process. Explicit instruction is also utilised to increase engagement and academic success, proving effective for a range of students, including those with learning difficulties (Hughes et al., 2017). Clear, explicit rubrics help students and teachers understand assessment criteria, making the evaluation process transparent and accessible.

Blind marking also showed a high degree of comparability in the standards expected of students, ensuring all programs maintain a similar level of academic excellence. All

benchmarked programs incorporate direct instruction and utilise rubrics in their assessments, providing clear guidelines and expectations. This approach ensures students understand what is required of them and what successful work looks like, enhancing their ability to meet and sustain academic standards. These practices also enhance grade equity and transparency, ensuring all markers understand the rationale behind assigned marks. Reviewed practices across different universities also emphasised consistency and fairness in grading through a moderation process where teachers review and discuss sample assignments to maintain standards. This collaborative approach involves comparing a range of grades and focuses on heavily weighted assignments, ensuring alignment in grading expectations. Moderation serves the same purposes across all education sectors and governances, emphasising the importance of consistency and fairness to ensure all students are treated equitably. While typically seen as a method for agreeing upon, ensuring, and verifying standards, moderation can occur at various stages of the assessment process (Bloxham et al., 2015b).

The Pathways to Post-School Success Expert Panel Report (Department of Education Western Australia, 2024) underscores the importance of evaluating student learning throughout schooling, especially in the senior secondary years. This helps track student progress, provides feedback for improvement, and supports the recognition and certification of achievements. Moderation practices ensure that assessments are marked consistently, promoting fairness and reliability in grading. The education sector's robust assessment approach, supported by comprehensive moderation, ensures the fairness, integrity, and reliability of the senior secondary education system. Enabling programs offer access to higher education for students without standard entry qualifications, equipping them with the necessary knowledge, skills, and attitudes for success in their first year of undergraduate studies. However, there is limited understanding of the conceptual frameworks used in designing curricula across the sector (Relf et al., 2017). This gap highlights the need for further research and development to enhance the effectiveness and coherence of enabling programs.

Previous benchmarking of Enabling programs found that many share common understandings of curriculum and assessment approaches that support students transitioning to university, as well as the standards required for success. Despite variations in program structures, all programs typically have minimal or no entry requirements and cover key areas such as study preparation and academic communication. A key feature is the focus on familiarising students with the university context, particularly through study preparation units, which should ideally be mapped against the NAEAA's CLOs (NAEEA, 2019). Vernon et al. (2018) highlights that due to the low number of students from low-SES areas graduating high school with an ATAR sufficient for direct university entry, Enabling programs are crucial in achieving targets to increase higher education participation rates in these regions.

This benchmarking project uncovered more depth about curriculum practices, revealing a need for more holistic outcomes, guiding principles, and support structures to cater for the needs of the in-school enabling student. The results of this project demonstrate the effectiveness and consistency of high school-integrated university Enabling programs, even though this is the first initiative of its kind in Australia. They emphasise the importance of these programs in providing equitable, high-quality university preparation, ensuring that all students, regardless of their background, can succeed in higher education. All programs share a unified vision and outcomes, aiming to equip students with the necessary skills and knowledge for university success. Despite being offered by different universities, the programs cover similar

topics and learning outcomes, providing a standardised foundation for students. The assessments, though delivered differently, maintain the same standards of academic rigour and strong similarities in content, allowing students to consistently demonstrate their skills and knowledge across programs. Assessments are designed to help students acquire essential skills and concepts critical for university success, ensuring they are well prepared for higher education. These programs are designed to enhance students' access to and success in undergraduate programs, particularly benefiting those from disadvantaged backgrounds. It is imperative to prioritise enhanced uniformity in program design to bolster the cross-university acknowledgment of programs from other universities (Baker et al., 2020). These programs focus on supporting students from regional and remote areas, low socio-economic backgrounds, and Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander communities, helping to bridge educational gaps and promote equity. The Australian Universities Accord (Department of Education, 2024) states that there should be the introduction of needs-based loadings that would help higher education providers offer additional support to students from targeted groups, addressing their barriers to success. Future higher education should reflect both the discipline and the unique needs of each student to ensure they are well supported throughout their education.

The findings from the benchmarking of these In-School Enabling Programs have several practical implications for educators and policymakers. Educators can design curricula that align with the standardised topics and learning outcomes identified in these programs, ensuring students acquire essential skills for higher education. Implementing clear and effective rubrics, along with consistent moderation practices, can enhance fairness and transparency in grading, maintaining high academic standards across different universities. Professional development for teachers should include training on how to support students from diverse backgrounds, focusing on independent learning, critical thinking, and collaboration skills. Policymakers should prioritise funding and resources for programs that support disadvantaged students, including those from low socio-economic backgrounds and remote areas, to help bridge educational gaps and promote equity.

Building partnerships between schools, universities, and local communities can enhance support systems for students, providing a more holistic approach to education. By focusing on these areas, educators and policymakers can create a more equitable and effective educational environment that prepares all students for success in higher education. Continuous benchmarking and collaboration among universities can ensure a shared understanding of academic standards and design principles that can improve the overall quality of in-school enabling education through regular audits and reviews. However, additional evaluation of in-school enabling cohorts post-transition to university is also required to ensure that programs are not only academically robust and supportive but are also successfully preparing students for undergraduate study.

Finally, through the benchmarking process a number of commonalities and distinct differences emerged across the In-School Enabling Programs. The four programs shared a commitment to equity and the development of an academically rigorous pathway to university that was implemented in partnership between high schools and the university. Similarly, across program design there was commonality in learning outcomes, with a focus on the development of core academic skills as well as the inclusion of curriculum that promoted social and emotional learning to facilitate success within university study. Given the commitment to equity, program design also focused on accessibility and inclusivity. All programs also had

quality assurance mechanisms led by the university to uphold the integrity and quality of program design and outcomes.

Whilst duration of programs varied somewhat, the strongest distinguishing feature was the delivery and teaching. Three types of program delivery were evident across the four programs. The In-School Enabling Programs of ECU and SCU were scheduled into the school timetable and delivered by high school teachers. MU's In-School Enabling Program featured a collaborative model where the program was scheduled at the school, but with a team approach where high school teachers and university tutors shared delivery responsibilities and learning was supplemented by online support from university tutors. Finally, UniSQ offered the most flexible model, with the In-School Enabling Program available online and supplemented by online support from university tutors. In this model, integration with the school timetable varied based on the individual school, and this program also supported students who were in home school to enrol.

These distinctions highlight the contextual nature of In-School Enabling Programs, where universities have been responsive to the needs of their local communities. Additionally, the similarities and variations in program components lead to an emerging typology of In-School Enabling Programs, as represented in Figure 1. Further work is required to build and refine this typology to additional programs that have emerged across the country. Additionally, it provides a way to consider programs and, in the future, explore which types of programs work for which students and communities.

Conclusion

In-School Enabling Programs have typically operated in isolation and are much less recognised compared to traditional, post-secondary Enabling programs wholly offered through the university. This benchmarking project marked the first chance to unite and initiate discussions towards creating a cohesive segment within the education sector. The project highlighted the commonalities in learning outcomes, achievement standards, and best practices across the university's programs. This benchmarking project highlights that the four Enabling programs share similar understandings of curriculum and assessment approaches designed to help students transition to university. An analysis of the units showed a strong alignment in topics, learning outcomes, and assessment methods, indicating a consensus on the knowledge and skills students need to succeed.

In-School Enabling Programs have been designed to enable senior school-aged students from a diverse range of school settings (including regional or remote schools) and involve classroom teachers implementing and facilitating the program of study with support from the different universities. In-School Enabling Programs primarily target Year 11 and 12 students who meet certain criteria, such as coming from low socio-economic backgrounds or being the first in their family to pursue higher education. English proficiency is required, with flexible admission standards. The programs aim to develop essential academic skills for higher education, including effective communication, research abilities, and academic integrity. The programs also emphasise independent learning, teamwork, and critical thinking. Assessments focus on ethical engagement, information literacy, and effective communication. Universities review practices to ensure grading consistency and fairness through collaborative moderation, standardised rubrics, and regular audits, enhancing grade equity and transparency. Ongoing

collaboration is crucial to maintain consistent standards across the sector. While there is an increasing emphasis on quality assurance, benchmarking helps assess whether there is a shared understanding of standards and if students are meeting them. The framework used in this project has proven effective for continued collaboration, which is essential for improving academic practices and student success from In-School Enabling Programs.

Increasing the participation of historically underrepresented groups in tertiary education through inclusive Enabling programs can significantly boost higher education attainment and success. These programs must equip students with lifelong learning opportunities and skills, requiring adequate support for these groups to succeed. In-School Enabling Programs are crucial in this effort, bridging the gap for underrepresented students by providing necessary resources and support for a smooth transition into tertiary education. The programs aim to improve access and success in undergraduate programs, particularly for students from regional and remote areas, low SES backgrounds, and Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander communities. While sharing characteristics with post-secondary Enabling programs, In-School Enabling Programs focus on preparing students for higher education, ensuring a smooth transition and success in their undergraduate degrees. Well-structured and supportive assessment practices help students tackle complex tasks, with a strong emphasis on academic communication through thematic studies and scaffolded assessments, highlighting the importance of explicit instruction in academic literacy for student success.

Recommendations

There were seven recommendations identified at the end of the benchmarking process.

1. **Establishment of Guiding Principles:** Develop a set of guiding principles and Common Learning Outcomes to support institutions and organisations in rationale, design, and delivery to ensure consistency and quality across In-School Enabling Programs.
2. **Strengthening Partnerships:** Define the relationship between institutions and their partner schools, recognising their role in program success.
3. **Development of Adapted Common Learning Outcomes (CLOs):** Create a modified version of the NAEAA CLOs tailored specifically for In-School Enabling Programs to ensure their relevance and applicability.
4. **Cross-Institutional Collaboration:** Continue cross-institutional collaboration to collect data on efficacy of programs, maintain entry and assessments standards through benchmarking, and facilitate resource sharing.
5. **Development of Community of Practice:** Develop an understanding of high school student profiles and target cohorts.
6. **Pedagogy Development:** Further develop pedagogical approaches that specifically address the unique needs and learning styles of high school-aged students.
7. **Transition Processes for Students:** Ensure the inclusion of transition processes for students at critical junctures to provide clear pathways and support mechanisms to facilitate progression into undergraduate programs.

References

- Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority. (2024). *General Capabilities*. <https://v9.australiancurriculum.edu.au/f-10-curriculum/f-10-curriculum-overview/general-capabilities>
- Baker, S., Ulpen, T., & Irwin, E. L. (2020). A viable equity mechanism for all? Exploring the diversity of entry requirements and supports in Australian enabling education. *Higher Education Research & Development*, 40(5), 932–946. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07294360.2020.1801600>
- Bloom, B. S. (1971). *Mastery learning*. In J. H. Block (Ed.), *Mastery learning: Theory and practice* (pp. 47–63). New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.
- Bloxham, S., Hudson, J., den Outer, B., & Price, M. (2015a). External peer review of assessment: An effective approach to verifying standards? *Higher Education Research & Development*, 34(6), 1069–1082. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07294360.2015.1024629>
- Bloxham, S., Hughes, C., & Adie, L. (2015b) What's the point of moderation? A discussion of the purposes achieved through contemporary moderation practices. *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education*, 41(4), 638–653. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02602938.2015.1039932>
- Crawford, N. L., & Johns, S. (2018). An academic's role? Supporting student wellbeing in pre-university enabling programs. *Journal of University Teaching and Learning Practice*, 15(3). <https://doi.org/10.53761/1.15.3.2>
- Davis, C., Cook, C., Syme, S., Dempster, S., Duffy, L., Hattam, S., Lambrinidis, G., Lawson, K., & Levy, S. (2023a). Benchmarking Australian enabling programs for a National Framework of Standards. *Student Success*, 14, 41–49. <https://doi.org/10.5204/ssj.2841>
- Davis, C., Syme, S., Cook, C., Dempster, S., Duffy, L., Hattam, S., Lambrinidis, G., Lawson, K., & Levy, Stuart, L. (2023b). Report on benchmarking of enabling programs across Australia to the National Association of Enabling Educators of Australia (NAEEA). <https://enablingeducators.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/Report-on-Benchmarking-of-Enabling-Programs-Across-Australia-2023.pdf>
- Department of Education. (2024). *Australian Universities Accord: Final Report*. <https://www.education.gov.au/download/17990/australian-universities-accord-final-report-document/36760/australian-universities-accord-final-report/pdf>
- Australian Government Department of Education (2025, 22 January). *Programs of study*. Australian Government. <https://www.education.gov.au/higher-education-publications/higher-education-administrative-information-providers-october-2021/6-programs-study#toc-6-7-fee-free-uni-ready-programs-and-enabling-programs>
- Department of Education Western Australia. (2024). *Pathways to post-school success expert panel report*. <https://www.education.wa.edu.au/dl/l46qpd2x>
- Engeström Yrjö. (2004). New forms of learning in co-configuration work. *The Journal of Workplace Learning*, 16(1-2), 11–21.

- Goode, E., Syme, S., & Nieuwoudt, J. E. (2022). The impact of immersive scheduling on student learning and success in an Australian pathways program. *Innovations in Education and Teaching International*, 61(2), 263–275. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14703297.2022.2157304>
- Hughes, K., Bellis, M. A., Hardcastle, K. A., Sethi, D., Butchart, A., Mikton, C., Jones, L., & Dunne, M. P. (2017). The effect of multiple adverse childhood experiences on health: A systematic review and meta-analysis. *The Lancet: Public Health*, 2(8), e356–e366. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S2468-2667\(17\)30118-4](https://doi.org/10.1016/S2468-2667(17)30118-4)
- International Baccalaureate. (2024, September 2). *The IB learner profile*. <https://www.ibo.org/benefits/learner-profile/>
- Jackson, D., Li, I., & Carroll, D. (2023). Student access to higher education through alternative pathways and differences by equity group and discipline. *Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management*, 45(6), 593–625. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1360080X.2023.2212850>
- Jones, A., & Lisciandro, J., & Olds, A. (2016a). Strategies for embedding socio-emotional learning as part of a holistic enabling transition pedagogy. <https://fabenz.org.nz/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/Angela-Jones-Joanne-Lisciandro-and-Anita-Olds.pdf>
- Jones, A., & Olds, A., & Lisciandro, J. (2016). Understanding the Learner: Effective program design in the changing higher education space. *International Studies in Widening Participation*, 3, 19-35. <https://novaojs.newcastle.edu.au/ceehe/index.php/iswp/article/view/42>
- Maclaurin, A., Sturniolo-Baker, R., Shaw, S., & Monteith, D. (2025). High school enabling programs, learning journeys, and transitions: Measuring effectiveness from the student perspective. *Student Success*, 16(1), 38-47. <https://doi.org/10.5204/ssj.3419>
- Martin, A. J., & Evans, P. (2018). Load reduction instruction: Exploring a framework that assesses explicit instruction through to independent learning. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 73, 203–214. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2018.03.018>
- Morgan, C., & Taylor, J. A. (2013). Benchmarking as a catalyst for institutional change in student assessment. In K. Coleman & A. Flood (Eds.), *Marking Time: Leading and Managing the Development of Assessment in Higher Education* (pp. 25-39). Common Ground.
- National Association of Enabling Educators of Australia. (2019). Common learning outcomes for enabling programs in Australia. <https://enablingeducators.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/2019-Learning-Outcomes-Enabling-Programs-Australia-AB-002.pdf>
- Nieuwoudt, J. (2023). Improving the academic performance and mental health of non-traditional university students through a shorter delivery model: Exploring the impact of the Southern cross model. *Student Success*, 14(1), 35–46. <https://doi.org/10.5204/ssj.2660>
- Nieuwoudt, J., & Jones, A. (in press). Towards a holistic model: Transition pedagogy in high school enabling programs. *Student Success*.

- O'Shea, S., May, J., Stone, C., & Delahunty, J. (2024). *First-in-family students, university experience and family life: Motivations, transitions and participation* (2nd ed). Palgrave Macmillan. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-34451-0>
- Olds, A., Jones, A., Sturniolo-Baker, R., Clark, S., Dawson, J., McGrath, W., Plumb, C., Schwartz, C., & White, C. (2022). In-school enabling programs: Creating opportunity and connection. *Student Success*, 13, 1-10. <https://doi.org/10.5204/ssj.2436>
- Pitman, T., Trinidad, S., Devlin, M., Harvey, A., Brett, M., & McKay, J. (2016). *Pathways to higher education: The efficacy of enabling and sub-bachelor pathways for disadvantaged students*. Australian Centre for Student Equity and Success. <https://www.acses.edu.au/publication/pathways-to-higher-education-the-efficacy-of-enabling-and-sub-bachelor-pathways-for-disadvantaged-students/>
- Relf, B., Crawford, N., O'Rourke, J., Sharp, S., Hodges, B., Shah, M., & Katersky Barnes, R. (2017). Lighting the path (way): *Articulating curriculum design principles for open access enabling programs*. https://ltr.edu.au/resources/SD15-5063_NEWC_Relf_Final%20Report_2017.pdf
- Sadler, D. R. (2017). Academic achievement standards and quality assurance. *Quality in Higher Education*, 23(2), 81-99. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13538322.2017.1356614>
- Syme, S., Roche, T., Goode, E., & Crandon, E. (2021). Transforming lives: The power of an Australian enabling education. *Higher Education Research & Development*, 41(7), 2426–2440. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07294360.2021.1990222>
- Vernon, L., Watson, S. J., Moore, W., & Seddon, S. (2018). University enabling programs while still at school: Supporting the transition of low-SES students from high school to university. *The Australian Educational Researcher*, 46(3), 489–509. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s13384-018-0288-5>

Appendices

Template 1: Program overview

A comparison of program entry requirements, core (compulsory) units, and timeframes.

University	University A	University B...
Program Name		
School Entry Processes and Requirements <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>What are the requirements on the schools for this program?</i> - <i>How is the program promoted?</i> - <i>How are schools added to the program?</i> 		
Student Entry Requirements <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>What are the entry requirements for this program?</i> 		
English Language Requirements <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Minimum entry requirements.</i> - <i>Does the successful completion of program replace high school English competency?</i> 		
Cost <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>What is the cost of the program for schools and/or students?</i> 		
Core Units and Electives <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Title and code for core units</i> - <i>Title and code for electives</i> 		
Time to Completion <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>How long to complete units?</i> - <i>How long to complete the program?</i> 		

Template 2: Curriculum comparison

A comparison of the learning outcomes, topics, and assessment types in the university preparation skills and academic literacies units.

Curriculum Comparison				
University	Unit	Learning Outcomes	Topics	Assessment types, timing, weightings, hours
University A	Unit 1			
	Unit 2			
University B ...	Unit 1			
	Unit 2			

Template 3: Assessment comparison

A comparison of the fundamental assessments for the program units for each of the high school Enabling programs.

Assessment Comparison						
University	Assessment	Outline	Program Learning Outcomes	Unit Learning Outcomes	Limit	Weighting
University A Unit 1	Assessment 1					
	Assessment 2					
	Assessment 3					
University B Unit 2	Assessment 1					
	Assessment 2					
	Assessment 3					

Template 5: Moderation practices overview

Moderation practices comparison of benchmarking university's In-School Enabling Program units.

Moderation Practices			
University	Unit	Moderation Activity	Purpose
University A	Unit 1		
	Unit 2		
University B	Unit 1		
	Unit 2		
University C...	Unit 1		
	Unit 2		