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

The Fast Forward program is a partnership between the University of Western Sydney and Greater Western Sydney schools which helps students to see the value of continuing their education through to year 12 and beyond. It began in 2004 and has continued to grow, offering the opportunity for enhanced academic and personal achievement to a large number of Greater Western Sydney students. By 2011 there were 42 partner schools and around 1300 participants.

The program encourages students to strive for their personal best and to see tertiary study as a realistic and viable post-school option. They participate in experiential learning which develops their skills and fosters familiarity with the university environment.

Fast Forward recognizes the importance of engaging students with the concept of lifelong learning and the benefits of post-school education as early as possible so that they can more knowledgeably plan their pathways in the senior years of schooling and post-school study.

The program gives students the chance to be involved in a range of activities, including:

• **Fast Forward Awards Evening:** students and their parents are invited to attend a UWS campus early in Year 9 to take part in an Awards Evening. This acknowledges the academic and leadership potential that led to students’ selection in the program. As well as welcoming new participants, the evening is a chance for students and parents to learn more about the program and hear from inspirational speakers including UWS student role models.
• **Skills Days**: in Years 9, 10 and 11, students attend skills days on a UWS campus. They see more of the university and learn more about what tertiary education has to offer. There are opportunities to meet UWS students who will share their knowledge and experience; develop leadership skills, study techniques and time/stress management strategies; and find out more about themselves and the career paths that interest them.

• **In-school Mentoring**: students are mentored at school by trained UWS students. Working in small groups, mentors encourage educational aspirations and help students gain skills and confidence.

• **Year 11/12 UniM8s**: students are matched with a UWS student whose course of study relates to their interests and “shadow” that student to classes for a day. They get a taste of university life, become more familiar with a local campus, and can ask an expert what it’s like being a uni student.

• **Support in First Year Uni**: students who go on to study at UWS are offered any additional information or support needed to make the transition to university smoother. Many students become role models for the younger students entering the Fast Forward program, creating further leadership opportunities.

As part of the program, students also receive a Fast Forward workbook, quarterly newsletters, year 12 study tips booklet, and personal invitations to attend UWS events such as Open Day, UWS Day and Parent Information Evenings.

**Fast Forward** is a key program under the UWS Schools Strategic Plan, which focuses on working with schools to improve the educational opportunities and attainment of students in Greater Western Sydney.

For more information contact fastforward@uws.edu.au or visit our website at www.uws.edu.au/fastforward