

An Evaluation of The MOORoopNA AGRICULTURAL SCIENCE EXPERIENCE (CAMP DOOKIE)

A report for Greater Shepparton Lighthouse Project

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Introduction

‘The Mooroopna Agricultural Science Experience’, aka Camp Dookie, was a residential educational initiative designed to provide regional Victorian Year 9 secondary students with a variety of hands-on-learning and careers-related activities at the University of Melbourne’s rural Dookie campus.

A partnership between the Greater Shepparton Lighthouse Project, the Shepparton Better Together Schools Alliance and the University of Melbourne, the three day program responded to concerns that many of Shepparton’s young people are both unfamiliar with the local agri-business sector and unaware of the diversity of career paths accessible within that sector. In specifically targeting a cohort of disadvantaged young people who might not otherwise have been able to access school camps, the ‘Mooroopna Experience’ has drawn on research highlighting positive linkages between residential extra-curricular learning and the enhancement of participants’ social, leadership, team and life skills. The ‘Experience’ likewise has acknowledged the value in broadening school students’ education and training aspirations by exposure to a university setting.

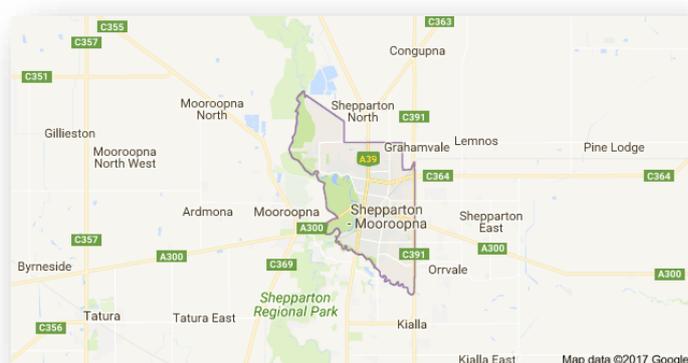
The initial delivery of the Experience to 31 young participants from Mooroopna SC, in March 2017, was intended as the first of its kind, i.e. as a Pilot, the aim of which was/is:

To support vulnerable middle years students while alerting students and staff to the variety of jobs on offer in the agribusiness sector.

It has been anticipated that learnings from the Pilot will inform further deliveries of Camp Dookie, targeting other Shepparton schools. On that basis, the Youth Research Centre at the University of Melbourne has been invited to provide the current formal evaluation of the initiative.

Context – Greater Shepparton

Approximately 180 km north-east of Melbourne, in the heart of the Goulburn Valley, Shepparton is a



historically significant agricultural and manufacturing district in regional Victoria, and (since 1994) the administrative centre of Greater Shepparton LGA. Greater Shepparton covers some 2420 square km, encompasses the towns and townships of Tatura, Merrigum, Mooroopna, Murchison, Dookie, Toolamba and Grahamvale, and is home to some 62,000 residents. Its diverse

multicultural mix includes recent arrivals from India, Sudan, Afghanistan and Iraq, together with the largest Indigenous community in the State.

Once dubbed “the food bowl of Australia”, Shepparton reaped the benefits of interwar and post-war prosperity for much of the 20th century, as waves of extensive immigration supported and expanded

a strong agricultural economy, and as strong tourist and recreational industries evolved. In recent decades, however, in addition to sharing the social and economic problems of regional areas across Australia, Shepparton has had to confront the long-term effects of sustained drought. The impacts of changes to the landscape on the state of the district's agricultural industries and water usage have, in turn, impacted on the local population.



According to a recent study (Aberdeen, Chesters & Torun 2016)¹:

- 27% of the population of Greater Shepparton are aged under 20 (compared to a state average of 25%)
- Nearly 20% of middle school-age young people have unemployed parents.
- One third of students have parents with low levels of education.
- Almost one third of Shepparton households have a weekly income of \$600 or

less.

- ICSEA (Index of Community Socio-educational Advantage) rankings of 874 to 954 identify all government secondary schools in Greater Shepparton as disadvantaged.

On one hand, erosion of the regional manufacturing base has helped triple Shepparton's youth unemployment rate during the ten years to 2015 (5.1% to 15.1%, as compared with 5.5% to 13.6% nationally). On the other, claims that some local businesses are having difficulty filling jobs has led to the perception that schools are failing to facilitate pathways into the employment opportunities that do exist.²

The Greater Shepparton Lighthouse Project (GSLP) & its partners

Greater Shepparton Lighthouse Project is an umbrella entity that brings together most of the community's philanthropic, not-for-profit and State, Local and Federal Government organisations. A product of philanthropic summits convened by the Shepparton CEO community with the Sir Andrew & Lady Fairley Foundation and other philanthropic funders in order both to analyse the limited impact of traditional funding approaches on entrenched social issues and to raise awareness of those issues, GSLP was formally incorporated in 2015.

GSLP describes itself as *"a community of change ... united by a common purpose and shared goals"*. Its



¹ Aberdeen, L., Chesters, J. & Torun, F. (2016) Successful transitions from education to employment: a focus on Shepparton, Report #1. P.6

² Aberdeen, L. & Chesters, J. (2016) Successful transitions from education to employment: a focus on Shepparton, Report #2. P.6

'shared goals' are identified as: happy, healthy, safe and [educationally] successful children/young people; supported families; and *"vibrant communities"*. The project (hereafter the GSLP) is the collective's strategic response to strong concern at the persistence of the indicators of disadvantage listed above, a situation notwithstanding considerable Federal and State Government investment over two decades. While the Best Start and Communities for Children projects, in particular, had gone some way towards tackling the issues confronting children 0-8 years old in Shepparton, there is general agreement (a) that much more could be done, and (b) that significant and lasting change will depend on greater community engagement and collaboration.

With its origins in the Dookie Agricultural College (founded in 1886), and history of collaboration with the **University of Melbourne's** Faculty of Agriculture since 1910, the **Dookie Campus** was formally established in 1997 through a merger amalgamation of that Faculty with the multi-campus Victorian College of Agriculture & Horticulture (VCAH). The setting, which describes itself as *"a focal point for key research, training and technology development"*, is a working farm, situated on 2240 hectares of farmland, and providing students with residential accommodation, and access to a range of on-the-ground learning experiences.

Commencing in 2015, the Dookie Campus began providing residential 'tasters' for State and Private Secondary students through the Conoco-Phillips Agricultural Science Experience, as well as a program for Mentone Grammar School. Positive responses to these deliveries of the Experience at Dookie prompted GSLP, in line with its current six priority areas, to explore the possibility of a similar live-in program specifically targeting young people at Shepparton's four State secondary schools (McGuire College, Shepparton High School, Wanganui Park Secondary College and Mooroopna Secondary College).

The third partner in the Camp Dookie pilot is the **Better Together Alliance** which, as the name implies, aligns these four schools in a collaborative bid to maximise educational opportunities across the student population. Set up in 2015, the Alliance connects the schools through resource and information-sharing, professional interaction and promotion of each setting's individual strengths, in order to enhance the quality, diversity and breadth of learning options on offer. To date, in seeking to improve student access to pathways into local business and other employment, the Alliance has helped each school gather information, knowledge and research contacts on one of four key sectors of the local economy, i.e. Manufacturing, Agriculture, Retail and Allied Health. As one of the school Principals has noted: *"We want our students to understand the economy, to understand the possibilities for careers after more study post school in the local area and we want employers to have a one-stop-shop with their information, ideas and opportunities for input into making all our programs informed and accurate"*.³

Having signed a Memorandum of Understanding with Latrobe University and GOTAFE, and currently in the process of exploring further connections with Goulburn Valley Grammar School, Notre Dame College and the local Turkish and Christian school, the Alliance is committed to the view that by *"working strategically together ... we will do better for [our] young"*⁴

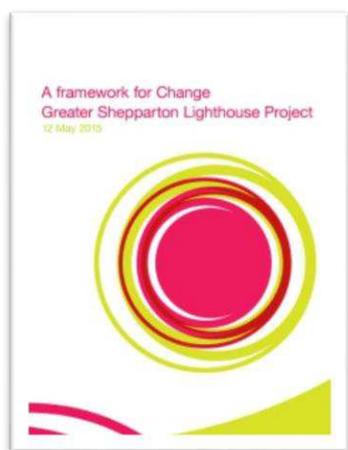
³ Lee, D. (2015) Schools align for better future, Shepparton Adviser, 25 February

⁴ See www.facebook.com/BetterTogetherAlliance/

The Greater Shepparton Lighthouse Project (GSLP)

The GSLP subscribes to the Collective Impact model developed at Stanford University. Accordingly, its structure comprises four core elements: general oversight and governance provided by a Steering group, advice and advocacy provided by a champions' group; development and monitoring of sub-projects by Working groups; and engagement, measurement and sub-program facilitation 'at the coalface' by the GSL 'backbone'. The organisation's patrons include the Vice-chancellors of both Latrobe University and the University of Melbourne.

The GSLP is a 20-year whole-of-community undertaking, launched formally in 2013 with the overall aim of improving the well-being and educational outcomes of children and families within the Goulburn Valley region. It is a 3 stage undertaking. Its initial – and preliminary - 'Exploring' phase (2015-16) comprised widespread fact-finding, community consultation, information gathering and



establishment of process. A sequence of research reports (a) drew on major statistical sources to tabulate baseline data on the situation of Shepparton's youth, (b) identified and mapped current service systems, and (through multiple consultations and conversations) documented the community's point of view as to what was needed to improve young peoples' life chances and options.⁵

Having tabled these reports and having compiled its formal Strategic and Collective Action plans, the GSLP moved into its second - and current - 'Action' phase.⁶ This phase of the project is framed by 18 Priorities for Action that range from the engagement of Shepparton's professional community in Collective action, to cross-sectoral data collection processes, Mentoring opportunities and creation of Primary school hubs).

Implementation of the Action phase has commenced by focusing on an initial six priority areas:

- Healthy & Ready for school,
- Learning & Thriving in Primary School
- Transitioning Successfully & Thriving in Secondary School
- Transitioning Successfully to Work or Study
- Healthy Families & Vibrant Communities
- Using Data & Research to Lead Change

⁵ See Greater Shepparton City Council (2014) *The state of Greater Shepparton's Children Report*, Sexton Consulting (2015) *Greater Shepparton Lighthouse Project. One thousand conversations: Project Report*, August 2015;

Fiona Johnson Consulting (2015) *GSLP: Youth Services Mapping Final Report*, August 2015 ;

Nous Consulting (2015), *A framework for change. Greater Shepparton Lighthouse Project*;

See also: Luscombe, M (2016) *Falling through the cracks: stories of youth disengagement in Shepparton*, November 2016.

⁶ The third phase of the collective action initiative will be 'Sustaining' phase. .

Research Design

Both Latrobe University and the University of Melbourne have been identified as partners in addressing GSLP priorities, in particular in the establishment of an alternative Year 9 experience and the development of program-related research initiatives. (The Vice-chancellors of both universities are Patrons of the GSLP). University of Melbourne support to date has included a Vice Chancellor's Grant to enable the Youth Research Centre to complete both a short status update on the 'Exploring' phase of the GSLP⁷ and the current Evaluation Report. With a view to forwarding the initiative, the evaluation has been undertaken to inform the three partnering organisations.

Delivery of the Camp Dookie pilot has been guided by the general aim:

To support vulnerable middle years students while alerting students and staff to the variety of jobs on offer in the agribusiness sector.

Desired outcomes of the Pilot have been identified as:

The Dookie Camp will have provided students with

- ***A greater understanding of the diversity of jobs available within the rural sector***
- ***A greater understanding of the connection between subject selection and employment pathways within the region***
- ***Opportunities for the development of personal, life and work-ready skills***

The evaluation examines the success or otherwise of the Pilot in (a) engaging the young people, and (b) achieving its aim and facilitating its desired outcomes.

Timeline

Evaluation of the program has been conducted in March-June 2017

Evaluation Activities

Data has been generated by

- (a) Interviews with Karen Edwards (University of Melbourne Dookie), Fiona Smolenaars & Lisa McKenzie (Greater Shepparton Lighthouse) and Sandy Gunn (Better Together Alliance)
- (b) A Focus group with six student participants in the Pilot (conducted by Sandy Gunn, and analysed by the YRC)
- (c) A post-program survey (delivered and collected by Dookie staff, analysed by the YRC). 29 of the 31 student participants, and two teachers, completed and returned the survey.

⁷ Stokes, H. & Turnbull, M. *The Greater Shepparton Lighthouse Project: a Summary of initiatives and activities undertaken during the project's phase*, unpublished report, tabled in October 2015.

The Pilot

Background

(a) History of the pilot.

The Mooroopna pilot has drawn on the expertise and familiarity of Dookie campus staff with short-term residential programming for schools developed through three deliveries (in 2015-16) of the Conoco Phillips Science Experience and delivery of a similar experience to students from the Mentone Grammar school.

Sponsored by the multi-national energy corporation of that name, and organised by the Science Schools Foundation, the CPSE provides high school students with the chance to engage in a range of science and technology-related activities (laboratory work, site visits, short lectures/demonstrations, interactions with practising scientists, social events, careers advice, etc) while familiarising them with a campus setting. To date, more than 65,000 young Australians have participated in the Conoco Phillips Experience at more than 35 universities or other academic institutions. Three deliveries at (and by) the Dookie campus brought together students from State and Independent schools across the state in 2014-16.

Having observed and noted the success of the CPSE at Dookie, the GSLP recognised the potential of adapting the program to cater for local Secondary students, and successfully approached Dookie with the suggestion of conducting a Pilot.

As noted above, the Mooroopna Agricultural Science Experience addresses TWO of the GSL's current six Priorities for Action: Development of both a Careers Pathways Program and a Middle Years Experiential Learning Program. Both priorities seek to address the 'disconnect' between education and the needs of local business and industry by facilitating greater understanding/awareness of jobs and opportunities available within the agriculture sector. The latter initiative also aims to enhance Middle Year connections to education and careers preparation through a residential 'taster' at Dookie. As one interviewee has observed:

"We live in the country, yet a lot of the kids are quite urbanised ... many of them don't leave Shepparton, don't get away from home And their life experiences are pretty limited ... some of the schools don't have camps ... or, if they do, parents can't afford to send them ... The kids tend to see agriculture as just picking fruit, milking cows ... when the reality is it's much more than that ... With the camp, the kids are also getting a bit of a university experience – demystifying what a Uni is ... not a big, scary place ... even, maybe, something they can think about for the future".

Karen Edwards has noted that the pilot was:

"... made possible through the University's Equity Innovation Grant program. The Federal Government's Higher Education Participation and Partnerships Programme (HEPPP) provides the funding for the grant and aims to increase access to and participation in higher education by domestic undergraduate students from a low socio-economic status (low SES) background, and to support the retention, success and attainment of those students. It provides funding to assist universities to undertake activities and implement strategies that

improve access to undergraduate courses for people from low SES backgrounds, as well as improving the retention, success and completion rates of those students. This initiative aligns strongly with the University's commitments to the Goulburn Valley; to growth in agricultural education; and to supporting school retention, building aspiration and enabling access to tertiary study amongst students who might not otherwise consider these pathways".

(b) Participant profile

Thirty-one Year 9 students from Mooroopna Secondary College attended Camp Dookie; 29 completed the program (one student went home ill, another left early because of a pre-arranged medical appointment). Several teachers also took part, two of them for the full three days, others (thanks to Dookie's convenient proximity to Shepparton) attending for particular sessions. Mooroopna's Principal and Assistant Principal also visited during the camp.

Mooroopna SC was specifically targeted to pilot the program because of its ranking (904) on ICSEA (Index of Community Socio-educational Advantage value); the significant challenges it faces (including a drop in enrolments from 772 in 2008 to 374 in 2016)⁸, and the likelihood that many of its middle years students would not otherwise have been able to enjoy such an experience. (At present, the school only has capacity to run one combined Year7/8 camp each year). As was noted:

"Mooroopna has some of our most disadvantaged families ... Many of the kids can't afford to do things like school camps ... some have never been away from their families. Some never leave Shepparton ... A high percentage of them are kids from welfare backgrounds ... with relatively low educational backgrounds, low aspirations ... many have experienced trauma ...". The pilot was "about giving them an opportunity ... some idea of the careers out there in Ag Science plus a bit of a Uni experience ... that's Uni's not a big, scary, horrible place".

While careful to stress the diversity of the Mooroopna cohort (and while noting that the student mix did include several young people with clear and considered educational and career aspirations), stakeholder interviewees have highlighted an essential difference between the group from Mooroopna and previous participants in the Conoco Phillips Experience at Dookie. Where program content designed for young people with a pre-existing interest in the sciences is generally the chief drawcard, it is apparent that the social and 'over-night vacation' aspects of the experience were at least as important in the present instance. (Only 23% of the Mooroopna participants felt that the learning activities had been relevant to their interests; 72% reported having no interest in Agricultural Science before attending the Camp).⁹ This fact needs to be taken into consideration when examining survey and student interview data, and it should be emphasised that the results presented below reflect a particular cohort rather than the broader school population. It could be argued, for instance, that limited vocabularies (based on a lack of life experiences and exposure to language) may have impacted on the richness of the data.

"The data reflects the kids and where they're at ... [It's] a highly vulnerable cohort – compared with other kids, they're less engaged, less enthusiastic, less exposed to agriculture [etc], less open to new experiences".

⁸ Martin, D. (2017) Call for a fix, *Shepparton News*, 13 March 2017

⁹ Admittedly, 38% declared themselves 'undecided' as to the relevance of the program content.

Based on the success of its “test run”, GSLP hopes to be able to offer the experience to other Shepparton schools in the future.

(c) Program Content & Delivery

Framed by three broad foci – World, Industry and Farm - the three day experience provided the young participants with a mix of agricultural science-related and personal development workshops and activities, and leisure and social options. As documented in the Appendix to this report, Day 1 commenced with a Team building ice-breaker: an Animal science demonstration at which the lecturer utilised her pet dog to demonstrate how senses can assist in the detection of grapevine and other agricultural diseases. The afternoon included a 40 minute climb up Mt Major to examine the suitability of particular soils for different purposes. On Days 2 and 3 students were divided into three groups, rotating through

- a Sheep Science module (learning about sheep breeds and types , and learning to handle the animals (“*We had the students herding the sheep, seeing the sheep sheared and touching the actual wool fibre*”))
- a Dairy block (studying the composition of milk in a laboratory, cheese-making and touring the Dookie Robotic Dairy), and
- an Animal Science activity (that looked at issues such as meat quality and animal digestion).

Whole group lectures focused on the use of technology in agriculture and bigger-picture issues including Food production and security.¹⁰

Discussion

Overall enjoyment of the Camp

An extensive literature, emergent over many decades, has demonstrated and confirmed the all-round educational benefits for young people of residential camping experiences. At one level, there is general acknowledgement of a strong nexus between participation in camps and increased self-esteem and independence, and improved interpersonal and social skills among student participants (Quay et al 2003, Henderson et al 2007).¹¹ The ‘vacation quality’ of overnight camps, including the experience of “being away” from parental or schoolroom pressures, have been cited as a strong facilitators of group bonding, enhancement of peer relationships and the setting of personal goals (Frumkin 2001; Readdick & Schaller 2005; Dresner & Gill 1994).¹² It has also been argued (and demonstrated) (a) that camp experiences address an urge to affiliate with the natural environment that is innate and inherently health-giving, and (b) that opportunities to be drawn into a relationship

¹⁰ Lee, D. (2017) ‘Students get the real ‘ag’ experience’, *Shepparton Adviser*, 16 March 2017

¹¹ Henderson, K., Whitaker, L., Bialeschi, M., Scanlin, M. & Thurber, C. (2007) Summer camp experiences: parental perceptions of youth development outcomes, *Journal of Family Issues* 28(8): 987-1007

12 Readdick, C. & Schaller, G.R. (2005) Summer camp and self-esteem of school age inner city children, *Perceptual and motor skills*, 101: 121-130;

Dresner, M. & Gill, M. (1994) Environmental education at summer camp, *Journal of environmental education* 25(3): 35-41

Frumkin, H. (2001) Beyond toxicity: Human health and the natural environment, [*American Journal of Preventive Medicine* 20 \(3\):234-40](#) .

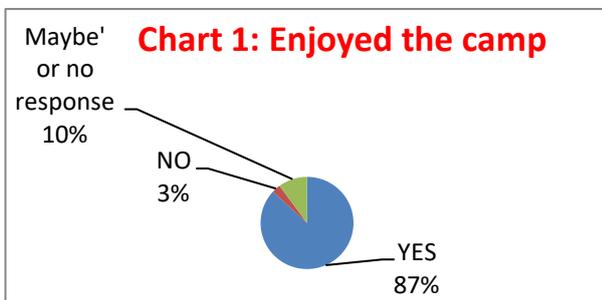
with nature can have particular impact for children who are unaccustomed to rural settings and/or are from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds. (Readdick & Schaller (2005). (As Kellert [1997:87] has observed: *“Discovery in the natural world continues to offer an unrivalled context for physical, emotional and mental growth and maturation”*).¹³

Elsewhere, extensive research has highlighted the potency of outdoor educational experiences in offering a learning milieu that is different to the generic classroom, just as small group or individualised hands-on learning activities provide an alternative to traditional teacher-student interactions (Quay et al 2003; Black 2007; Stokes & Turnbull 2009).¹⁴

Qualitative and quantitative data collected on the Camp Dookie pilot echoes these key research findings as to the socio-educational and personal development benefits of rural residential living and learning experiences. For example: agreement by student interviewees that *“we would have liked it to go on longer”*, and their enthusiastic recommendation of the experience for future participants, underline (a) the overall success and enjoyability of the “vacation” aspects of the Experience (i.e. as a variant on the traditional “school camp”); and (b) the capacity of the content to engage the young people and provide them with provocative and practical learning experiences.

This positive response was echoed and confirmed by survey results. As Chart 1 indicates:

- 87% of the cohort reported having enjoyed the experience; a further 10% either conceded that they may have enjoyed it (*“maybe”*) or did not respond to the question. 3% (i.e. one student only) reported **not** enjoying the camp. (It should be noted, however, that **all survey respondents** stayed for the full three days).



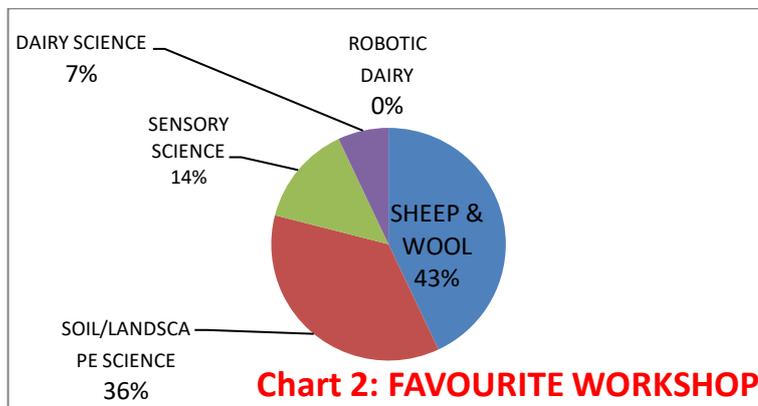
Comments made by students in the Survey highlighted those aspects of the camp that they most enjoyed. These were:

- **The Catering** – 90% of participants rated the ‘food’ either Good or very good and/or highlighted it as *“what they enjoyed about the camp”*.
- **The Opportunities for socialisation** - 57% of students reported their enjoyment of *“hanging with friends”, “Being with or hanging out with friends” “Getting involved ... getting to know people and making friends”, “Food and friends”, “Fun and free time”, “Food & fun”*.
- **Opportunities to work with animals** – More than a third of the students offered such comments as *“I love sheep”, “[enjoyed] the dogs”*. (As indicated in Chart 2 below, almost half the young people nominated the sheep & wool session as the most enjoyable).
- **The Setting & Rural environment** - While several students (i.e. 28% of the cohort) found the Soil Science excursion tiring or challenging (*“don’t like exercise”* and *“it was hot”* were typical comments), others (36% - see Chart 2) found it the most rewarding of the activities.

¹³ Kellert, S. (1997) Kinship to mastery: biophilia in human evolution and development, cited by Readdick & Schaller, ibid.

¹⁴ Quay, J., Dickinson, S. & Nettleton, B. (2003) Students caring for each other: Outdoor education and learning through peer relationships, *Australian Journal of Outdoor Education* 7(1): 45-53

Individual Survey comments testified to enjoyment of “The view from the top of Mt Major, with one respondent deeming walking up the mountain “the most funnest thing I’ve done at camp”.



These comments were reinforced by interview feedback. All focus group participants spoke enthusiastically about “the food”, while individual young people nominated free time spent with friends and/or the experience of climbing Mt Major as the best parts of the camp. When asked how the experience might be improved, one suggestion was “more work with the animals”.

Minor concerns were expressed in both survey and interview as to the lack of air conditioning in the cabins (the camp coincided with a burst of hot weather), and there were a couple of grumbles about the beds or [small] room size. In general, however, the young people seem to have understood that the accommodation was part-and-parcel of university residential living, 72% rating the facilities as either ‘satisfactory’ or ‘good’.

The two teachers who stayed throughout the camp endorsed the accommodation and catering as having been “very good”. In their view, highlights of the camp had been the hospitality of Dookie staff, the well-maintained facilities and the (relatively) stress-free nature of the experience.

Interview and survey data likewise suggests that the young people responded, in varying degrees, to the Contrast between Dookie and ‘back at school’, specifically:

- **the ‘difference’ of the setting.** Students highlighted their enjoyment of “learning new things” while being outdoors. While one young woman reported difficulty sleeping because of being in an unfamiliar single room, another student welcomed the novel opportunity of having a room to himself. For others, simply “being outside” was seen as a pleasant change. As program co-ordinator Karen Edwards observed: “For many of them this was their first time being out on a farm.”
- **the difference in instructional style.** The students’ preference for the ‘practical’ over a more formal teaching approach was apparent in both interview and survey. That preference probably explains
 - the relative lack of enthusiasm for one workshop, the Robotic Dairy demonstration. (As Chart 2 indicates, no students nominated that demonstration as their favourite workshop; 36% nominated it as their least-liked).

- Reports of having enjoyed “not being lectured at” in other workshops.
- The response (by several students and one teacher) that the camp could have been more ‘hands on’, when asked ‘Did the camp meet your expectations’. (As the participating teachers observed:

“This is a very young Year 9 group and they struggled with some of the lecture-type activities”).

“They were unsure [at the start] but it was amazing to see how quickly they became engaged through all the hands-on activities”¹⁵

In the view of at least one respondent, it was the contrast between experiential learning at Dookie and traditional classroom learning that had rendered the three days “really memorable”.¹⁶



Desired Outcome 1

(a) Success of the Camp in facilitating Desired Outcome 1: greater understanding of the diversity of jobs available within the rural sector

The student interviewees reported (and agreed) that they had come away from the camp with both new skills and new knowledge about the rural sector. Pointing to engineering openings or the role of computer technology in developing and running the farm’s robotic dairy, one student acknowledged that “There are more jobs [out there] than I thought”. “I understand I bit more” was another comment.

Interviewees confirmed that they now knew more about

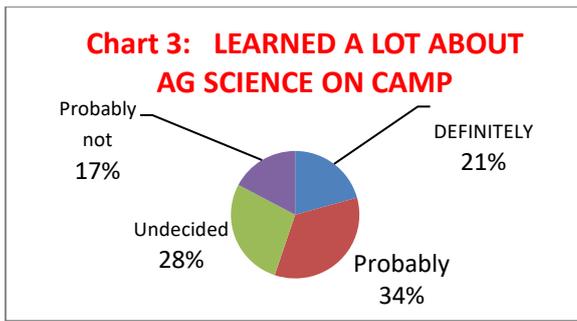
- (a) agricultural science (citing such aspects of protective behaviour with dogs, wrangling sheep, grading wool)
- (b) such big picture issues as biodiversity and food security, food production (including “producing enough food for other people”). In this regard, the students clearly had a greater understanding of Shepparton’s importance as the nation’s “food bowl”

While they conceded that some of these skills might well have been ‘learnable’ through youtube, they recognised that activities such dog-training (as just one example) were “much better hands on”.

Again, interview comments were reinforced by survey responses. As highlighted in Chart 3, more than half the young people (55%) reported having definitely or probably “learned a lot about ag science”.

¹⁵ ‘Education on the farm’, *Country News*, 22 March 2017, www.countrynews.com.au

¹⁶ Ibid.



The two teachers who completed the full camp reportedly “loved what was offered to the kids”. Responding to the post-program survey, both teachers confirmed the overall enjoyability of the program and highlighted the excellence of program content and its delivery, agreeing that they too had learned a lot about Agricultural & Environmental Science.

Desired Outcome 2

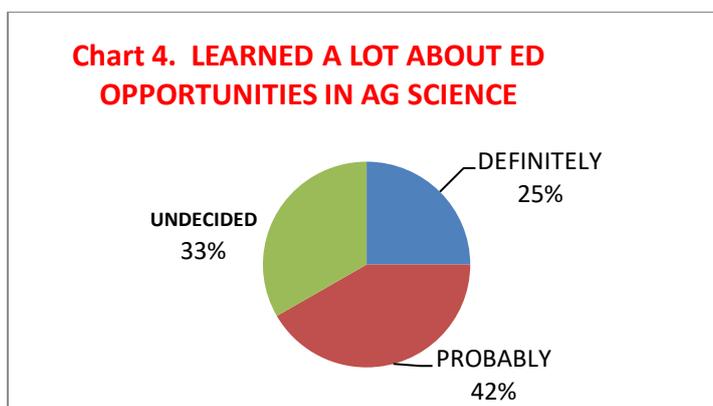
(b) Success of the Camp in facilitating Desired Outcome 2: *greater understanding of the connection between subject selection and employment pathways within the region*

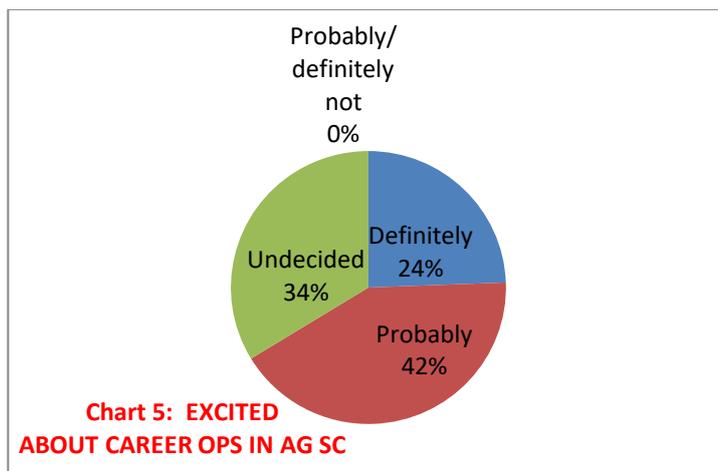
As demonstrated in Charts 4 and 5 (below), a majority of participants reported having left Camp Dookie with more understanding of the “educational” and “career” possibilities and/or opportunities in the Agricultural Science domain. The two teachers likewise reported greater awareness of educational pathways/ options within the discipline.

Student Interviewees were somewhat non-committal (reflecting the ‘undecided’ bloc in the survey data) but passing reference was made to their being able to relate the workshops to Science subjects back at school. Stakeholders subsequently expressed optimism that the experience had “planted seeds” and that that further reflection would undoubtedly help students

- identify linkages between Year 10 Science subjects (for instance) and learnings at Camp Dookie, and deliberate more meaningfully on their pathways.

As one stakeholder observed: “These experiences play out over years as they are making further decisions: ‘Oh that’s right we did that at Dookie”, “We had to walk up that mountain”. In this regard, it should be noted that the proportion of students who had no interest in Agricultural Science decreased from 72% **before** the Camp to 59% **afterwards**.





Desired Outcome 3

(c) Success of the Camp in facilitating Desired Outcome 3: Opportunities for the development of personal, life and work-ready skills

While conceding that, compared with previous Conoco Phillips participants, “*this lot was more unruly*” and more in need of “*pulling up to our general expectations*”, stakeholder interviewees cited evidence of a “*lot of personal growth*” over the course of Camp Dookie. BTA co-ordinator Sandy Gunn suggested that completing three days of university-style activities went some way to countering the entrenched (albeit often well-meant) contention that “*a lot of these kids can’t listen for long*” while Program co-ordinator Karen Edwards highlighted a number of specific successes and breakthroughs.

“Seeing the group interact at dinner, you could clearly see differences between well-functioning kids and the less mature ones ... 6-10 of the kids seem to come from different backgrounds and were more like our usual [cohorts] ... but there were real changes [across the cohort] over the three days ... For example: The first night a lot of the kids had real trouble settling ... all in separate rooms ... they were much better the second night ... learning how to self-settle was a big thing in itself... One kid was pretty challenging and unco-operative, used to monopolising the teacher back at school ... [yet] he lasted the distance, we didn’t have to send him home and the other kids were able to navigate how they dealt with him differently ... There was a rift between two of the girls on the last day ... but they sorted out strategies to not be together ... find a safe space ... School can be a negative place for some of these kids ... [so] getting a bit of a Uni experience, different to school, exposes them to a new opportunity In general, the kids rose to the occasion; paid attention, took directions, followed instructions in the Science lab, they were able to focus on an activity ... they were tired out the end of each day ... there were a few complaints about walking up Mt Major but others really liked the view ... they got by cheerfully without technology ... there was a level of respect to staff ...” [Karen Edwards, Program co-ordinator]

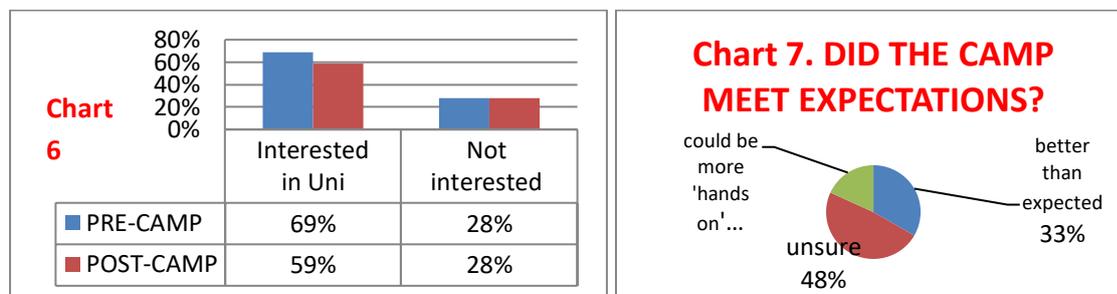
Stakeholder feedback was reinforced by student Interviewee agreement that the camp had been confidence-building. One young woman acknowledged that, while “*awkward to begin with*”, she had found her confidence increasing through interactions with a range of people (including some of the

university students also in residence at the time) over the three days. One young man noted that the experience had provided the group with opportunities to both “get to know other people” and to develop team skills through “working with people you don’t know”. While there were mild waivers (“some people you just don’t want to know” or “it depends who they are really”), there was agreement among the interviewees that the camp was helpful “in the friendship area” and that “hanging around [together] for the three days, you learn more stuff about them”. These comments were endorsed by Sandy Gunn who reported the perpetuation back at school of friendships developed between Camp Dookie participants, and strengthened relationships between student and teacher ‘veterans’ of the Camp.

Conclusion & Recommendations

In looking at the critical role of ‘Imagining’ in young peoples’ decisions about their futures, Fleming & Grace (2015) have noted inequities in the ability of social groups to construct imaginary futures. This finding, a view shared by one of the stakeholder interviewees (“The imagination about futures may not be there. Some of the kids don’t know what they don’t know”) seems pertinent when examining apparent anomalies in some of the survey data, notably a 10% decline of interest in going on to university before and after the camp. (See chart 6). It has been suggested that, notwithstanding their own or their parents’ lack of lived experiences in this regard, young people still tend to absorb the message from schools that they should be aiming at university.

“Schools constantly promote Year 12. The constant message is Uni uni uni. [Therefore] a lot of Kids have high aspirations but they’re not grounded in reality. They like the concept but have no idea of subjects they might need ... the pathways can be full of pitfalls. That sometimes includes kids who do go off to uni and find it’s not what they expected”. [Stakeholder interviewee]



In providing Year 9 students with a ‘taster’ of university life, Camp Dookie may have served as a useful reality check in some cases.¹⁷ Fleming & Grace’s findings may likewise help amplify the data in Chart 7. The likelihood that some of the students simply did not know what to expect from Camp Dookie possibly explains the significant (48%) ‘undecided’ response to the survey question ‘Did the camp meet your expectations?’.

It should be noted, however, that several of the young people indicated in their survey responses or interview that they do have clear ideas about what they want to do in the future, and that these ideas include strong – and well-deliberated – plans for university. Interview comments included:

¹⁷ Fleming, M. & Grace D. (2015) Beyond aspirations: addressing the unique barriers faced by rural Australians contemplating university, *Journal of further & higher education*, 41 (3) 351-363

“Two nights is not enough to get a really good idea of what’s going [at universities]”

“It would be good to do a tour of a Uni in Melbourne to see what a lecture theatre might be”.

“The Uni camps are good because they give you insight into what it will be like if you decide to go to uni ... decide whether you want to live on campus, go to Uni, not go to Uni”.

It should be noted also that a third of the students reported finding the experience better than anticipated.

Almost unanimous agreement as to the enjoyability of the Camp, reports of positive social and interpersonal outcomes, agreement (by both students and teachers) as to improved knowledge and understanding of both the sector and of educational and career options within that sector, and (above all) enthusiastic endorsement for redelivery of the program to future cohorts appear to confirm the overall success of the Pilot in achieving its aim of **supporting vulnerable middle years students while alerting students and staff to the variety of jobs on offer in the agribusiness sector.**

In view of that success, it is recommended that:

- Greater Shepparton Lighthouse seek funding to continue the partnership and extend delivery of Camp Dookie to other school groups. (This recommendation acknowledges requests by student participants for *“another camp”, “we need lots more camps”*)
- While maintaining the integrity of the program, further deliveries of the program increase the level of hands-on learning activity where possible.¹⁸ Several young people expressed enthusiasm (a) for more interactions with animals, (b) access to Dookie’s swimming pool during free time, and (c) more breaks during lectures or demonstrations. (The university has agreed to look at the possibility of allowing future student’s access to calves, and employing a lifeguard sessional, thereby enabling use of the pool).
- The partnership explores strategies for familiarising Shepparton’s teachers with Dookie and the Agribusiness sector. (“A lot of teachers don’t understand what an agricultural science degree is”). Suggestions included a PD day at Dookie, guest speakers from the sector visiting school staff forums, or a possible training course through GOTAFE. at schools
- Further deliveries of the program include a preliminary information session, setting out the schools’ and university’s expectations beforehand, eg. *“You will be exposed to situations where you have to be a bit resilient ... you’re expected to be in a room on your own, the weather could be hot and there’s no air-conditioning ... there’ll be a hilltop walk involved ... You can’t bring your mobile phones so you’ll have to talk to each other face to face ...”*

¹⁸ Stakeholders noted that this recommendation creates an interesting tension – i.e. *“Do we modify the content because the kids might have a short concentration span ... or do we raise the expectation [through lectures] ... get across the message that you need to concentrate and hear before you do ... This is not Disneyland ... this is for life”*. There was general agreement that raising the expectation was more productive.

Appendix

Chart 1: University of Melbourne Dookie Agricultural Experience Schedule Timetable¹⁹

Time	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday
Topic	Welcome/Landscapes	Animal Science	Animal Science
7.00		Wake-up call	Wake-up call
8.00		Breakfast	Breakfast
9.00	Students arrive Welcome	Animal Science ²	Dairy Science ⁴
10.00	Team Building/Personal Growth		
11.00			
12.00	Lunch	Lunch	Lunch
1.00	Landscapes ¹	Sheep science ³	Team Building/Personal Growth
2.30			Depart Dookie
4.00	Amazing race around campus	Technology use in Agriculture	
5.00	Free time	Free time	
6.00	Dinner	Dinner	
7.00	Let's discover the bushland reserve	Night Activity	
8.00	Night Activity	Night Activity	
9.30	Students to dorms		
10.00	Lights out		

¹⁹ Timetable and details of program content courtesy Karen Edwards.