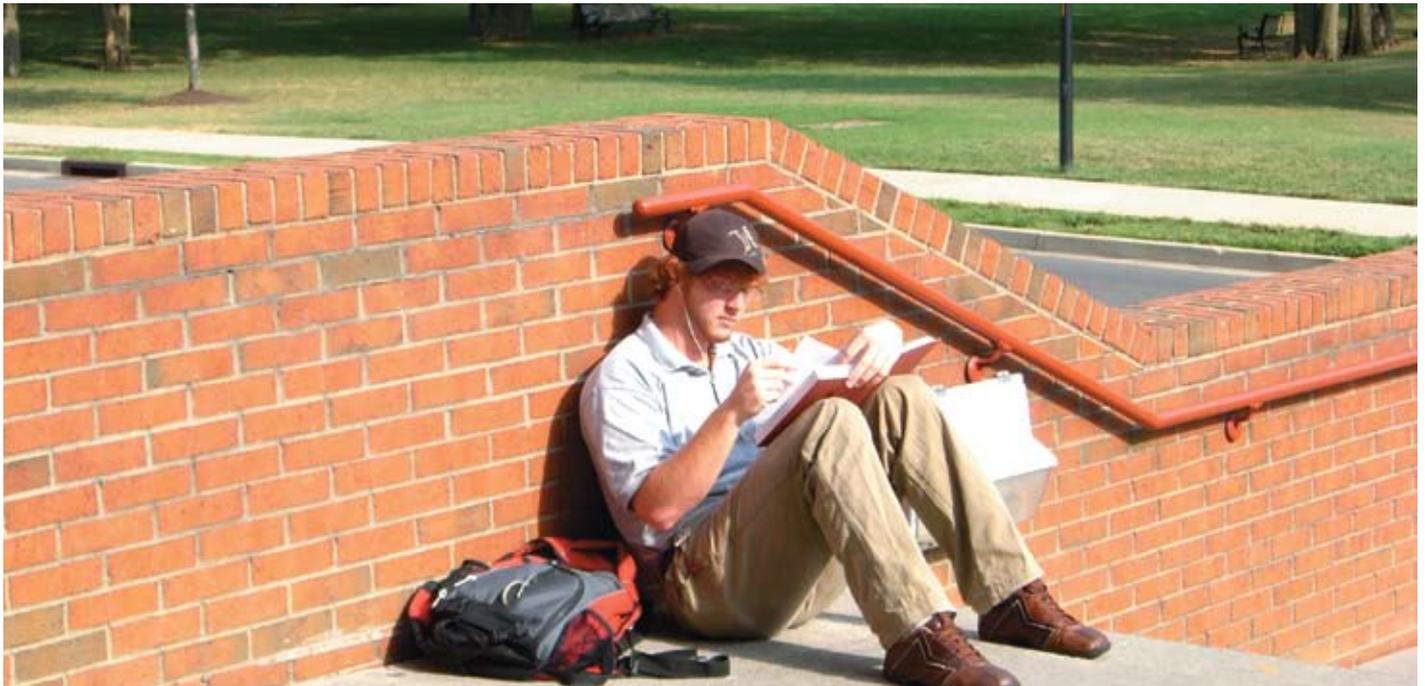


## ABSA Research

### Large-scale Evidence-based Approaches to Better Understanding Boarding School and Its Effects on Academic and Non-academic Outcomes.

Brad Papworth (ABSA), Andrew Martin (University of Sydney) and Paul Ginns (University of Sydney)



**Although there are 172 independent and government boarding schools in Australia, comprising approximately 23,000 students, yielding an estimated \$30m for the sector annually, there is surprisingly little research assessing the effects of boarding school on academic and non-academic outcomes.** Work conducted thus far has been limited to relatively few boarding schools or limited to relatively narrow outcome measures and so findings and conclusions are susceptible to the idiosyncrasies of those individual schools with relatively limited applicability across the sector.

#### QUESTIONS, EVIDENCE, AND ANSWERS

In conjunction with the University of Sydney, ABSA aims to examine the extent to which attendance at boarding school affects

students' academic and non-academic outcomes. In terms of academic outcomes, we aim to consider the effect of boarding on motivation, engagement, achievement and academic resilience. In terms of non-academic outcomes, we aim to consider the effect of boarding on life effectiveness, satisfaction with life, positive and negative affect, self-concept and quality of life. Although there is anecdotal evidence suggesting that students at boarding school benefit from the experience, little large-scale and longitudinal research has been conducted to support this – nor has there been rigorous qualitative work to follow-up the quantitative methods to better understand the processes and phenomena under investigation.

This research project aims to answer important questions concerning boarding, such as: To what extent does the boarding experience play a role in the development of

academic and non-academic outcomes? Do effects vary as a function of boarding house and boarding school? Are there particular stages of school (junior high, middle high, and senior high school) in which boarding school is particularly influential in shaping academic and non-academic outcomes? What happens over time to academic and non-academic outcomes as students move from year to year in boarding school? What is the role of boarding school in assisting students beginning a new academic year? What is the pattern of findings for Indigenous, rural, and other under-studied groups in boarding? Importantly, how do boarders fare on these academic and non-academic outcomes when juxtaposed with day students in the same school and the same classroom?

This project proposes a large-scale evidence-based scoping of boarding school across representative samples of



schools, large numbers of students, over time, and using appropriate multivariate models to most effectively understand the unique effects of boarding school over and above other factors that might explain student outcomes. In short, the project seeks to address gaps in knowledge and research about the effects of boarding with a view to assisting the sector and its many stakeholders.

## THE RESEARCH PLAN

The project consists of three studies, each an important aspect of the larger

open-ended items on: what they like about the boarding experience, what they find difficult about boarding, what they would change about boarding, and what positive and negative aspects of boarding are relevant to their academic and non-academic lives. This qualitative data will be used to further illuminate the perspectives collected via numerical questionnaires.

### Study 2:

The following year, Study 2 will assess the same students using the same measures at a later stage in their schooling. This study will lay the foundation for addressing two

then educational practice and policy must direct attention and resources at the house level as much as or more than at the whole-school level. Or, if the bulk of variance in academic and non-academic outcomes resides at the student level, irrespective of house and school, then practice and policy must adjust to this. No research has ever attempted to assess these vital issues amongst boarding houses and schools. Hence, through appropriate methodology and modelling we propose to evaluate effects at the student, house and school levels.

## YIELDS FOR THE AUSTRALIAN BOARDING SECTOR

We anticipate that there will be many yields from this research to ABSA, participating schools and the broader boarding sector. Knowing in which areas boarders develop more strongly compared to day students will allow schools to tailor processes to enhance the boarding experience. Identifying what causal factors influence outcomes for boarders will allow schools and staff to develop policy and practices to develop the potential of boarders further. Understanding key issues relevant to transitional stages allows early identification and appropriate intervention to settle in new students and develop existing boarders so each child feels safe, cared for and reaches their potential. For boarding schools, in general, knowing where the bulk of effect lies – at the student, house or school level – will allow resources to be targeted proportionally and in the right areas. As a professional organisation, findings from this project may substantiate anecdotal evidence of the benefits of boarding and allow professional development which strengthens skills of boarding practitioners. For the industry, knowing where the bulk of variance resides will assist educational practice and assist staff and students get the most out of their boarding experience.

## EXPRESSION OF INTEREST

Expressions of interest are sought from schools (comprising boarding students) who wish to be part of this research project. Please contact Brad Papworth for further details: [b.papworth@edfac.usyd.edu.au](mailto:b.papworth@edfac.usyd.edu.au) or (02) 9683 8490.

## What is the relative contribution of school, boarding house or residence, and student on key academic and non-academic outcomes?

investigation. Study 1 will compare day and boarding students to establish baseline data at the beginning of the project. Study 2 will assess the same students, but a year later to examine whether these students have changed over time. Study 3 will investigate how the boarding environment (characteristics of boarding houses and schools) influence the academic and non-academic outcomes of individual students.

### Study 1:

The first study will entail systemic, large-scale analyses across boarding and day students of whole school populations. A pivotal aspect of the research design is that most day and boarding students will be situated in the same classrooms and taught by the same teachers. As a result, Study 1 will shed light on the reliability and validity of academic and non-academic measures as well as variance across day and boarding students and key demographics. Participants will include students prior to enrolment and boarding and day students in Years 7 to 12 from approximately 20 schools across Australia (ensuring inclusion of Indigenous and rural students). The large sample of participating schools is needed to gain representation of schools from urban and non-urban areas, independent and government, single-sex and co-educational schools from across Australia. To gain additional insights and context about the phenomena under focus, boarding students will also be administered

key issues: transition and causal ordering. In relation to transition, researchers have found a decline in academic outcomes between junior and middle high school. These declines are of concern to educators and are receiving emerging attention in intervention research. However, much of this research derives from cross-sectional designs and to our knowledge involving only day students – hence, to what extent does boarding school and its component processes affect these transitions? Of particular interest in Study 2, then, are the shifts in academic and non-academic outcomes between pre-boarding and boarding school, between junior and middle high, and between middle and senior high school (with the latter two transitions being assessed against comparable transitions for day students).

### Study 3:

The third and final study seeks to investigate how the boarding environment (characteristics of boarding houses and schools) influences the academic and non-academic outcomes of individual students. Specifically, this study asks: What is the relative contribution of school, boarding house or residence, and student on key academic and non-academic outcomes? Answers to these questions hold substantial implications for policy and practice. For example, if there is greater variance in academic and non-academic outcomes between houses than between schools,