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# Breaking the Barriers: supporting and engaging first-in-family university learners and their families

Final report 2015

University of Wollongong, lead institution

University of Newcastle and Open Universities Australia,  
partner institutions

Dr Sarah O'Shea, project leader  
Associate Professor Josephine May and Dr Cathy Stone, team  
members

[www.firstinfamily.com.au](http://www.firstinfamily.com.au)

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Office for Learning and Teaching  
Department of Education

GPO Box 9880,  
Location code N255EL10  
Sydney NSW 2001

<[learningandteaching@education.gov.au](mailto:learningandteaching@education.gov.au)>

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## Acknowledgements

We would primarily like to thank all our participants who so generously gave their time and provided such a depth of data through both surveys and interviews. The study participants spanned not only institutions and qualifications types but also age, gender and demographic features. A total of 101 participants engaged in lengthy interviews with our team, some of these included family members who came on campus to participate. In addition, a further 173 surveys were completed by students along with 40 family members; these surveys also provided rich data. Without these responses there would be no project and so we sincerely thank you all.

We also wish to thank the individuals who attended the Forum; we had a total of 113 attendees who were both responsive audience members and also engaged participants in the activities on the day. Aside from the professional and teaching staff who attended the Forum, we had a wonderful panel of students who very generously gave their time to come and talk about their experiences of being a first-in-family student.

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## List of acronyms used

ABS:	Australian Bureau of Statistics
FiF:	First-in-Family
HEFCE:	Higher Education Funding Council of England
HSC	Higher School Certificate
Low SES:	Low Socioeconomic Status
LT&C:	Learning, Teaching & Curriculum
MA	Mature Age
OUA:	Open Universities Australia
UON:	University of Newcastle
UOW:	University of Wollongong

## Executive summary

Universities attract students from a wide range of backgrounds, yet equity of access and participation for all potential students remains elusive. Access and participation is highly differentiated in the United Kingdom, North America and Australia (Abbott-Chapman, 2006; Couvillion-Landry, 2002–2003; Forsyth & Furlong, 2003; James, 2008; Schuetze & Slowey, 2002) and poorer educational outcomes for students who are first-in-family (FiF) are recorded globally (ABS, 2013; Harrell & Forney, 2003; Lehmann, 2009; National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2012). The international research on this group indicates that they are collectively less likely to go to university and also, after arrival, may not perform to the same level academically as their second or third generation peers (HEFCE, 2010; NCES 2012). Within Australia, 26 percent of this cohort is reported as considering leaving university in the first year of university study, a figure that increases to 34 percent for later year students (Coates & Ransom, 2011). These results have been explained in general terms, for example, the FiF students in Coates and Ransom’s Australian study who reported departure intentions, perceived the university as unsupportive or failing to ‘help them cope with non-academic responsibilities’ (p. 14). Despite policy initiatives designed to increase university participation, these types of explanations tell us little about what is needed to improve educational outcomes for FiF students.

This project sought to not only explore the experiences of FiF students but also those of their family members and ‘significant’ others. We know that parental educational background has significant impact on the educational levels of family and dependents (Gorard, Rees, Fevre & Furlong, 1998; Harrell & Forney, 2003; Thayer, 2000; Tramonte & Willms, 2009; Wilks & Wilson, 2012). However, what is unclear is how attending a university as a first-in-family student impacts upon the family and community of the learner. How does transitioning into this environment and enacting a student role or building a student identity translate into the household? With the continuing requirements for higher education institutions to increase the participation of students from a diversity of backgrounds and educational biographies, this is a gap in understanding that needs to be addressed. Exploring how this movement into university is translated at a familial and community level can provide insights into how best to support this student cohort and may also therefore affect attrition rates. It could also facilitate intergenerational educational mobility.

A first-in-family student in Higher Education is the first out of their immediate family, which comprised siblings, parents, main caregivers, life partners and children, to attend university.

To achieve these objectives we firstly needed to define exactly what is meant by this term ‘First-in-Family’. First-in-family or first-generation status has been variously defined, but most definitions refer to parental education levels. Within the United States, the dependents of those with a college level education are regarded as being first-in-family whereas definitions in other countries assume no post compulsory schooling has occurred. Equally, blended family arrangements also mean that it is difficult to define this term relationally. For the purposes of this study, first-in-family was defined as being the first out of their immediate family, which comprised siblings, parents, main caregivers, life partners and children, to attend university.

The data collection was qualitative in nature and involved both in-depth interviewing as well as open-ended survey questions. In recognition of the diversity of the student population, the

project team chose to target three main cohorts, 1) enabling program students (University of Newcastle); 2) undergraduate students in the first year of university, studying primarily in traditional face-to-face, on-campus mode (University of Wollongong) and 3) undergraduate students in the first year of university studying wholly online (Open Universities Australia). All the participants identified as first-in-family and incorporated great diversity in terms of age, gender, social background and geographical context. We also included family members and significant others as participants in order to provide a holistic understanding of this movement into the higher education environment. Including both family members and students as participants also facilitates a unique perspective on this field. The data from this project both generates understanding about how to support FiF students and also, provides insight into how family members engage with this process as well.

In total, the project team collected 173 surveys from students with a further 40 surveys completed by family members (including siblings, children, partners and parents). The project team interviewed 101 students; a small number of these (n=4) included family members (parent, grandparent and children). All the data was imported into NVivo, line-by-line analysis was employed to identify initial codes and emerging thematic categories, and a constant comparative method of analysis (Charmaz, 2006) was utilised in order to deeply explore themes and concepts that emerged from data. This initial analysis revealed how participants drew upon a range of personal and familial resources to move into higher education and also, to survive in this environment. The team was particularly interested in the ways that the university experience was imported into and translated within the household as well as gaining deeper insight into the types of motivations students had for coming to university, the reactions from those closest to them and how they managed to persist and succeed in this environment. The **key findings** can be summarised as follows:

- A strong sense of feeling out of place within the university environment for first-in-family students, which may translate into a sense of being a ‘fraud’ or ‘imposter’.
- A perceived lack of confidence leading to questions about personal skills/abilities meaning that this cohort often requires validation or evidence of belonging much earlier in their studies. Often it is assessment grades that provide the necessary assurance around this choice to come to higher education.
- Older students in particular (but not solely) described a deep level of concern over how their decision to return to university may impact on others, particularly financially.
- We were struck by the range of myths that exist in relation to university. Often these were derived from school or VET settings and largely served to increase the anxiety levels of students and were generally based on stereotypical and dated perceptions of the university environment.
- Regardless of age, participants indicated the need for time to ‘adjust their mindset’ to university participation, this included time to familiarise themselves with the expectations, the language and also, the institutional structures – all of which were largely foreign to this cohort.
- There was an overall perception of being lucky / expressing gratitude for being allowed to attend university. Often university was placed in the discourse of betterment and opportunity, not only for the student but also their families and community. This

perception influences how students engaged in this environment and also managed the highly complex nature of their lives.

The major output from this project is a website, [www.firstinfamily.com.au](http://www.firstinfamily.com.au) targeted at both FiF students and their family members. Since the project encompassed two main foci, *engagement* of FiF students and *support* of FiF students and their families, the website was the main vehicle by which the project team has endeavoured to accomplish both these tasks. With regard to engagement, we mobilised the stories we were told by the FiF respondents as a pedagogical engagement strategy through the power of storytelling (Abrahamson, 1998). The website is premised on the positive promotion of possibilities for FiF in order to promote equity (James, 2008). The project team turned to the students themselves for inspiration and realised that mirroring/reflecting their experience back at them as narratives was the most powerful and effective way to 'engage' and indeed 'support' them. Narrative addresses the cultural, social and individual aspects of FiF student experience at all levels - for example, it encompasses events, beliefs, aspirations, motivations, expectations, compromises and transformations. Each of the six main sections of the website – Home, Stories, Success, Kids, Family and Teaching and Support draws upon narrative evidence from the project participants, both directly and indirectly.

#### **Recommendations:**

- 1. Researching more about the 'Family' in First-in-family:** Research has pointed to the importance of developing social networks within the university (Tinto, 1995, 2002; Wilcox, Winn & Fyvie-Gauld, 2005) however, there is little clarity regarding how social networks outside the higher education environment might assist FiF students from a variety of demographic backgrounds. This is important work that needs to be more deeply addressed and considered.
- 2. Implementing a Strengths-based Approach to Older First-in-family Students:** The skills and knowledges of older FiF students need to be acknowledged and celebrated instead of remaining invisible or under-valued. Rather than focus on what people lack, better understanding is gained from focusing on strengths.
- 3. Recognising the Complexity and Added Workload of First-in-family Student Experience:** There is a need to recognise the significant additional work for these students. This not only includes the need to 'reassure the family that they have "invested wisely"' but also the responsibilities associated with expanding 'the aspirations and horizons of the family and its community' (Thomas & Quinn, 2007, p 59).
- 4. Breaking down the Exclusive and Sacred Ivory Tower Stereotype:** Universities as institutions have to work more actively to dispel perceptions that these are sacred spaces and instead provide opportunities for parents, children, siblings and partners to engage with these institutions in a meaningful way.
- 5. Acknowledging that First-in-family are a Supra Equity Category:** Another key finding is how FiF can be conceptualised and addressed as a *supra category* of students that works across other equity driven categories of low SES, region, gender, disability, linguistic diversity and Indigeneity. Current HEPP policy for example concentrates on engagement of low SES but such funding may be better and more surely deployed to address broad categories of disadvantage by concentrating on first-in-family students, who are what the Americans call 'the New Majority' (Jehangir, 2010).

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## Statement of Achievements

The *Breaking the Barriers* project (University of Wollongong, University of Newcastle and Open Universities Australia) was conducted over twelve months between 2014-2015. In this period, the project achieved both outcomes and outputs beyond those initially promised in the Seed Grant application. One of the **most significant outcomes** from this project is the development of much deeper and holistic understandings of first-in-family students, enabled by the inclusion of both learners and their families in the data collection process. The project team believes that this is the **first** Australian study that has extended the lens of analysis to include the family and significant others of this first-in-family cohort. Another outcome from this project was its success in bringing together equity practitioners, academics, senior university executives and equity policy makers to ‘start a conversation’ around how we can collectively improve the university teaching and learning experience for this particular cohort. This conversation was fuelled by the development of resources that place the student experience and most importantly the ‘voices’ of learners and their families at their core. The project outputs are both authenticated and validated by the inclusion of students’ own words and experiences. Other outcomes from this project include the development of a draft set of **Principles for Supporting First-in-Family Students and their Families** (please see <http://firstinfamily.com.au/teaching-5.php>). Participants at the Forum each brainstormed principles in groups and these have formed the basis for this draft document; further consultation and feedback on these principles will form the basis for the next stage of this project. The **project deliverables** include the following:

**Website:** The project team has developed a website that is targeted at both the students and their family members: [www.firstinfamily.com.au](http://www.firstinfamily.com.au). This site contains an array of downloadable resources such as study hints sheets, books for children (various ages), advice to families and friends, strategies for student success as well as teaching and learning strategies / principles for educators. All the resources are evidence based, the intent being to provide students, their families and practitioners in the field with tangible real-world exemplars that they can draw upon in both personal and professional contexts.

**Forum:** The *Breaking the Barriers* Forum (February, 2015) brought together an eclectic group of academics, equity practitioners, policy makers and university administrators/executives, all of whom shared a passion for understanding and better supporting this first-in-family cohort. The Forum provided a context to both disseminate the findings from this project and also launch the website – the audience provided critical feedback on the day as well as participating in the creation of national principles and strategies for supporting first-in-family learners and their families (<http://firstinfamily.com.au/teaching-5.php>).

**Conference Presentations/ publications:** The project team engaged in dissemination activities throughout the course of the project. The research has also been publicised via newspaper articles and online forums. Additionally, four journal articles are currently being planned for publication in 2015. Please see Appendix L for details of this dissemination and publications.

## Introduction to the *Breaking the Barriers* project

In order to explore the impacts of returning to education for first-in-family (FiF) students who often have family commitments, this project aimed to provide a more nuanced understanding of the university experience from the perspectives of both the students and their family members. Data from interviews and online surveys contributed to the articulation of a framework for supporting both students and their families, particularly how the educational trajectories of family members are impacted by the tertiary participation of ‘second chance’ learners. This narrative will provide an overview of the research process and explain exactly **how the project was undertaken**, the **nature of its progression** and also **identify any challenges or lessons** that were learnt during the year.

### How the project was undertaken

The initial intent of the project was to identify how institutions can **a)** implement targeted support strategies that account for the learning contexts of the FiF cohort, **b)** respond more effectively to student diversity and **c)** explore strategies for connecting with families and community of FiF learners. The project involved three institutions namely, **University of Wollongong** (lead), **University of Newcastle** and **Open Universities Australia** and participants were recruited at each institution at various stages of their programs and studying in both face-to-face and online modes. The following table indicates the sites and target groups upon which the project planned to focus:

Location	Cohort Group	Anticipated Numbers
University of Wollongong (UOW)	Undergraduate students Gender mix / FiF/ Over 25*	40 students plus 10–15 family members
University of Newcastle (UON)	Foundation / Access students Gender mix / FiF/ Over 25*	30-35 plus 8-10 family members
Open Universities Australia (OUA)	U/G students enrolled in a Commonwealth Supported Place (CSP) at university Gender mix / FiF/ Over 25*	40 students plus optional survey for family members

*\*This age range later changed*

**Table 1: Research sites and target groups**

Drawing on students derived from three separate institutions was designed to provide a diverse participant mix, capturing those who were just considering university studies through to those who were more advanced in their studies. Given the multiplicity of the student experience, the project team recognised that it is not realistic to refer to **one all-encompassing** FiF student experience, as this is not a discrete entity but instead is multi-layered. Equally, in order to deeply examine the nature of this experience, we felt that consideration should be given to family and community connections. The project also planned to include family members in the research cycle in order to produce a much deeper analysis of the impacts higher education has on both learners and those closest to them. Participants at both University of Wollongong and University of Newcastle were invited to participate in one face-to-face in-depth interview either individually or with family members; whilst at Open Universities Australia, participants were interviewed individually via telephone.

However, like any research project a number of changes occurred along the way. Firstly, while the original focus was to be older students (over the age of 25) once the recruitment of participants began, the response rate from recent school leavers, particularly undergraduates, resulted in the decision to widen this focus. Hence, the study encompasses all ages, with the youngest student interviewee being 18 years and the eldest 62 years, and interviewed family members ranging from 11 to 67 years. The following table provides an overview of student age ranges amongst the interviewees:

Location	Interviewed cohort groups	Details of student cohort groups
University of Wollongong	TOTAL OF 51 INTERVIEWS (including two with family members – mother and grandmother) Undergraduate students: 45 Postgrads or students commencing a second degree: 6	Age range: 18 to 62 Median age: 25.9 Over 25s: 23 students Gender mix: 3:2 (31 female: 20 male) First-in-family <sup>1</sup> : 47
University of Newcastle	TOTAL OF 7 INTERVIEWS (including two with family members – children of students, aged 11 and 16) Foundation / Access students	Age range: 21 to 47 Median age: 35.3 Over 25s: 6 Gender mix: 5:2 (5 female: 2 male) First-in-family: 7
Open Universities Australia	TOTAL OF 44* INTERVIEWS Undergraduate students ranging from first year to final year of online studies, some enrolled in a Commonwealth Supported Place (CSP) while others were enrolled in unit-by-unit mode with at least one first year unit (*one not transcribed due to bad recording quality)	Age range: 21 to 62 Median age: 38.8 Over 25s: 36 students Gender mix: 11:3 (34 female: 9 male) First-in-family: 36

Table 2: Overview of student interviewees

Secondly, while the project team initially wanted to focus on interviews with both students and family members, the numbers of students and others who were unable to commit to an interview time or get on campus, led the project team to offer a survey option for these cohorts. The survey proved to be very popular and generated a very rich source of qualitative data due to the nature of the open questions and the clear engagement that respondents identified in relation to the project. A total of 173 surveys were completed by the students enrolled in the three institutions and a further 40 surveys were completed by family members. In order to involve family members, we utilised a form of snowball sampling by asking students to indicate if a family member would be interested in completing a survey by including an email for the family member. Table 3 provides a breakdown of the various stages of recruitment and the types of data collection conducted at each institution:

<sup>1</sup> The participant recruitment emails at UOW and OUA were sent to those students who identified on enrolment that neither parent had attended university as this was the only data available to the project team. Inevitably, this meant that some students identified in interviews as having siblings or partners who had attended university and so these participants formed a subset of the final data set

Institution	Potential participants	Ethics approved	Recruitment Stage 1	Recruitment Stage 2	Surveys	Interviews	
						F2F	Phone
University of Wollongong	3500 first year UG students	HE14/029 6 March 2014 Amendment: 30 May	3,500 emails sent from 1 April 2014	3,500 follow-up email(s) sent May 2014	95	44 <i>2 with family members</i>	7
University of Newcastle	approx. 1200	H-2014-0085 7 May 2014	Broadcast emails: to all Callaghan Enabling students	Broadcast emails: to all Ourimbah Enabling students + classroom visits	32	7 <i>2 with family members</i>	0
Open Universities Australia	15000	Students informed of UOW ethics approval	Emails sent from end-April	Reminder email sent end-May	44	0	43
Family member surveys (institution not specified)					40		

Table 3: Summary of data collection activities

## The research sites

### The University of Wollongong

The University of Wollongong (UOW) is a large regional university with a diverse student population (31,500 students total, 24,500 located in Australia). The university is located in an area with comparably poorer educational outcomes and higher levels of unemployment. Traditionally, this region has relied on mining and manufacturing for employment but in recent years both sectors have faltered leading to higher rates of unemployment: 6.2 percent for the region compared to 5.4 percent for the state and 5.2 percent nationally. Whilst there is no available data set on first-in-family students, the latest available statistics (2006) indicates that the total percentages of 25 – 34 year olds holding a degree in areas close to the university vary from 10 percent – 20 percent, which is again lower than state (22 percent) and national (21 percent) figures. In 2014, when this study took place, 14 percent of enrolled students at this university were derived from low-socio economic backgrounds as defined by census collection districts and postcode indicators.<sup>2</sup> Data on first-in-family status relies on student self disclosure on university enrolment forms and for 2014 first year intake, it was approximately a third of the total first year student population (n=3500).

**Recruitment:** Ethics approval was received on 6 March 2014 which allowed the project team to interview / survey students and family members including children as young as eight years (with parental attendance and permission). After seeking permission from the University Academic Registrar, the email addresses of students self-identifying as first in the family were released to the project team. An email invitation to participate in the study (see Appendix B) was sent out to 3,500 students who had identified as first-in-family and who were all in their

<sup>2</sup> Prior to 2010, socio-economic status (SES) was measured in relation to postcodes; low, medium and high SES was calculated by Australian Bureau of Statistics data on factors such as income, educational attainment, employment status and dwelling types. Since 2010, this measurement has been refined by drawing on data within census collection districts, which are more narrowly comprised of 250 households in a common postcode.

first year of study at University of Wollongong. These emails were sent out in batches of 100 from the beginning of April 2014. A follow-up email was sent on 8 May 2014 (please see Appendix C). Interviewing was a mix of face-to-face and phone commencing on 16 April until 16 June, with 51 interviews being completed by two interviewers, including two with family members. A total of 95 surveys were completed by UOW students.

## **The University of Newcastle**

The University of Newcastle (UON) was established in 1965 and is a large regional university with a student population of 39,000. Its main campus is at Callaghan in suburban Newcastle, with a number of other satellite campuses, the largest at Ourimbah on the Central Coast. With a diverse student population, the University is a sector leader in enabling education and the Open Foundation Program, established in 1974, is the largest such program in Australia providing tertiary preparation and access to well over a thousand students each year. While nationally 16 percent of university students come from low SES backgrounds, at Newcastle the average was 26 percent in 2013. In the Open Foundation Program, from which research participants were drawn, the proportion is higher: in 2013, 36.7 percent of enabling students identified as low SES. Furthermore, 64 percent of enabling students identified as first-in-family.

**Recruitment:** The UON Initial Ethics Application had to be re-written for UON protocols even though it had already received full ethical approval from UOW on 6 March 2014. The application was submitted to University of Newcastle Ethics Committee on 13 March 2014. It was approved with conditional approval (minor amendments) on 25 March 2014. As a result of work commitments and conflicting advice from Ethics, a response was not submitted until 20 April 2014 but due to a technical omission, it was not fully submitted until 7 May 2014, and was not approved until 21 May 2014. By that time UOW and OUA were well underway recruiting from their large potential respondent pools. Whereas the Newcastle recruitment and interviewing from its much smaller participant pool of enabling students had not yet begun and, by the time a variation was approved to administer the survey at UON and begin interviews, enabling students were embarked on Semester One completion of their major assessment items and final semester examination preparation. Understandably, this restricted greatly the number of people who responded. In all Associate Professor May had 16 major communications with UON ethics, made eight submissions, and offered 36 separate attachments for ethical consideration in a period from March to August when she sought to canvas Semester Two students. This process was unnecessarily complicated and obstructive to good research while the project had had early and expeditious approvals at all stages of initial application and variations through the lead institution. In the end while the number of participants from UON was disappointing, the seven interview events that did occur were rich as were the 32 survey responses. It should be noted that the only two face-to-face interviews with child participants occurred at UON.

## **Open Universities Australia**

Open Universities Australia (OUA) is an online education company which is owned by seven Australian universities. Its brief is to facilitate enrolment into a range of online courses and individual units offered by a total of 13 Australian higher education institutions. It also provides non-accredited academic preparation courses and other support services to assist students to succeed with their studies. Through providing open-entry into individual higher education



units, OUA assists students from a range of diverse backgrounds and circumstances achieve their educational goals even if they do not have traditional university entrance qualifications. Students can study individual units at their own pace until they have passed enough units to apply for entry into a degree. At the time of recruitment of participants for the project, it was estimated from enrolment data that there were at least 15,000 students enrolled with OUA who were first-generation university students. Enrolment data did not include information on educational qualifications of other family members, only parents.

**Recruitment:** Recruitment commenced after approval of UOW Ethics in March 2014. The first email (see Appendix D) was sent on 22 April to 648 potential participants who were enrolled in degree programs as Commonwealth Supported Place (CSP) students, and who had self-disclosed at enrolment that neither parent had university qualifications, with a reminder sent on 14 May. An email to organise interview times was sent to those who responded (see Appendix E). In order to increase the number of potential participants, the first email was sent out again on 12 June to an additional 2034 students who were enrolled in individual units, with at least one first-year unit, and who had self-disclosed at enrolment that neither parent had university qualifications. The reason for limiting the email to those with at least one first-year unit was to enable closer exploration of the experiences of their transition into university studies. Interviews with those who responded and indicated that they were first-in-family to study at university, were conducted by phone and began on 29 April until 20 May (first batch), recommencing on 23 June until 4 July. In total 44 interviews were completed by four interviewers. A total of 44 surveys were also completed.

## Interview methodology

### The interviews and questions

Interviews were offered as face-to-face at UON and UOW and also by telephone at UOW. Given the online nature of study for those enrolled at OUA, participants were interviewed individually via phone with the survey provided for family members. For interviews that were not face-to-face, verbal consent was recorded and the consent form signed by the interviewer on the participant's behalf with their knowledge.

There were two interview instruments: one for single student participant interviews and another for combined student-family member interviews (Appendices F and G). The majority of interviews were with students only. There were two family interviews (student and mother, student and grandmother) at UOW; and two at UON (both mother and child). The interviews consisted of semi-structured questions, which were designed to be open-ended and flexible. Questions for student-only interviews were structured under the broad themes of:

1. University experience
2. Family and community perceptions
3. Experiences of being a university student

Questions for student-family member interviews included perceptions of the university experience from the standpoint of both the student and the family member.

The semi-structured and open-ended nature of the interviews allowed each participant the flexibility to share their story as they wished. As a result the interviews were conversational in tone with questions that were designed to elicit detailed responses, depending on the participants' experiences.

### UOW Interviews

The interviews at UOW began on 16 April, with the final interview on 16 June. Face-to-face interviews were held predominantly in the researcher's office, with some participants requesting other locations around the campus (e.g. coffee shops, outdoor areas, library etc.). Where possible, participants were encouraged to meet in a quiet place to ensure the quality of the recordings.

Duration of interviews was around 30-45 minutes, with some extending to 60 minutes. Face-to-face interviewees at UOW campus were given a coffee/cake voucher (value \$5.50) as a token of appreciation for attending the interview. Both the project lead (Dr Sarah O'Shea) and project manager (Dr Janine Delahunty) undertook the interviews.

### UON Interviews

The first of the UON interviews conducted by Associate Professor Jo May began on 11 June, with the remaining six taking place over August until 10 October. These included two family interviews, both mothers with sons. The interviews took place across campuses at Callaghan and Ourimbah. It should be noted that the enabling cohort was one of the smallest of the three research sites and this combined with the challenges outlined previously around gaining ethics approval, impacted on the numbers of participants who participated at UON.

### OUA Interviews

The first group of phone interviews at OUA were conducted by Dr Cathy Stone and began on 29 April, continuing until 20 May (n=7). A second recruitment email was sent out on 12 June and a further group of interviews (n=37) began on 18 June, going until 11 July with Dr Cathy Stone and three other interviewers (two from within OUA plus Dr Janine Delahunty). The interviews lasted from 20 minutes up to an hour.

### Demographics of interviewed participants

A total of 102 interviews were conducted across all three sites and the following table provides a breakdown of gender, family / parenting status, children and stage of study:

Interviews (n=102)	UOW	UON	OUA
Total interviews	51* (#2 with family members)	7 (#2 with family members)	44**
Female	31 (plus 2#)	5	35
Male	20	2 (plus 2#)	9
Undergraduates	46	7	44
Postgraduates	5	0	0
Family status	32 single 15 partnered 1 divorced/separated 3 did not disclose	4 partnered 1 divorced 3 did not disclose	13 single 24 partnered 2 divorced/separated 2 widowed 2 did not disclose

Interviews (n=102)	UOW	UON	OUA
Numbers with child dependents	9	4	18
<i>Due to bad recording quality: *two interviews only partially transcribed; ** one interview partially transcribed, another not possible</i>			

Table 4: Breakdown of study participants

## Description of the interviews and questions

Given the interviews were semi structured, there was a conversational tone and further prompting of participants' reasons for returning to education, milestones and challenges, family and community perceptions, family discourse about university, the influence on children when a parent returns to education, and the impact on relationships of family and friends.

## Transcription and analysis

The interviews were transcribed and then analysed for recurring emergent themes. There was difficulty transcribing four of the transcripts: one due to participant accent (UOW) and the others due to poor recording quality with two of these transcribed partially, and one where transcription was not possible (OUA). Initial analysis was conducted by each of the project team members who then met to discuss the emergent themes. Based on these discussions, 15 overarching themes were identified and then each of the interviews was coded in relation to these. However, this analysis was inductive in nature, so as the data was further interrogated, other themes were identified and included. This analysis was iterative and required continual 'dipping into' the data, this process was assisted by the creation of memos, queries and also, a reflective journal which assisted in keeping track of emerging themes.

## Survey methodology

The online survey was designed as an alternative data collection to cater for those students and family members who could not, or preferred not to, attend a face-to-face interview. This was particularly important for participants recruited from OUA. The survey questions were similar to the interview questions. The survey was delivered via SurveyMonkey and included a mix of tick-box options and open-ended questions providing a range of qualitative demographic data. Example questions included: *"What types of expectations did you have before starting?"*; *"Looking back over your time so far as a student, what do you feel were the milestones, or high points?"*; *"What motivated you to start higher education study?"*. The family survey was similarly constructed but asked questions such as: *"Which member of your family is currently undertaking university studies?"*; *"When your family member talked about starting university studies, how did you react or feel about that?"*; *"Before your family member started doing university studies, what did you think about university?"*.

Similar to the interviews, the open-ended survey responses were analysed for emergent themes and the quantitative data was collated for descriptive statistics. Both surveys are located in Appendices H and I. The following sections provide an overview of respondents' demographics and closed question responses, more detailed analysis of the survey findings can be found at: <http://firstinfamily.com.au/teaching.php#6> and will also form the basis of future publications.

## Overview of student survey responses

A total of 173\* surveys were completed (\*two were skipped), with 12 of these indicating that they were not first in their family to undertake university study (i.e. four had children or siblings currently studying, two had partners who had completed, six had children, siblings or a parent who had completed), and three who were unsure. 80.7 percent of respondents were female (n=138) and 19.3 percent male (n=33). The following chart gives a breakdown of gender and age ranges of respondents by institution:

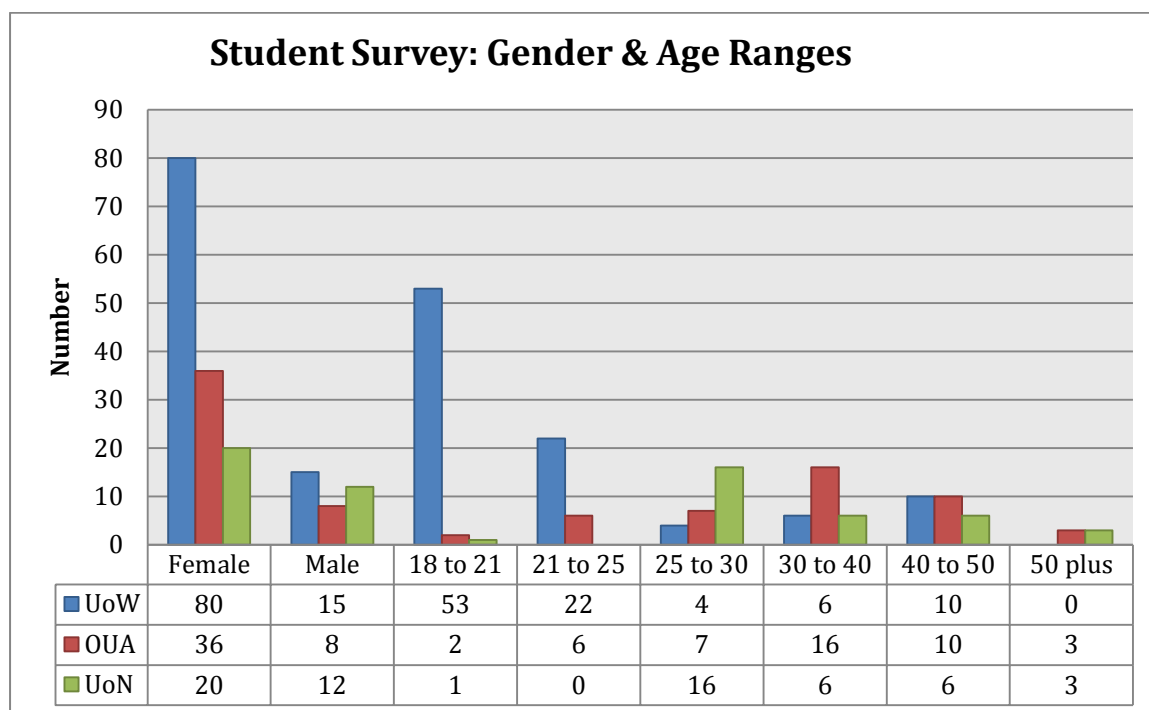


Figure 1: Student survey - gender and age ranges

Figure 1 shows that of the number of respondents from UOW were 95 (55.6 percent), those affiliated with OUA were 44 (25.7 percent) and those enrolled at UON numbered 32 (18.7 percent). Of the 171 completed surveys, more than three-quarters were female (n=136, 79.5 percent) and 20.5 percent were male (n=35). Looking across the three institutions, the younger age range (i.e. under 25) was by far represented by UOW respondents - this age group accounted for one third (n=56, 32.7 percent) of total respondents, but almost 90 percent of these were UOW students (n=53). At the other end of the scale those aged 50+ were all from OUA or UON (n=3 each, 3.5 percent of the survey totals). Half of the UON respondents were in the 25-30 range (n=16), the largest proportion across the three institutions. In the 40-50 range, 10.5 percent of respondents were from UOW (n=10), but this range was more representative of OUA (n=10, 22.7 percent) and UON (n=6, 18.75 percent) respondents.

The highest level of education attained by those who answered this question (n=166) was predominantly Year 12 with a Higher School Certificate (HSC) (n= 93, 56 percent). However 12 percent (n=20) did not complete a HSC, with education levels ranging from Year 8 (n=2), Years 9 to 11 (n=2, 7, 4) and Year 12 with no HSC (n=5). The remainder of respondents indicated their highest level of education was a post-secondary certificate (n=42, 25.3 percent), or a trade or work qualification (n=11, 6.6 percent).

The HSC was the major pathway\* for the majority of respondents (n=79, 40.7 percent), however a significant number also entered via open entry (n=61, 31.4 percent). Entering university via an access or enabling program was reported by 12.4 percent of respondents (n=24), and 7.7 percent (n=15) gained entry through a TAFE qualification. (\*Note: some respondents provided more than one answer to this question as they may have used a variety of prior educational experiences to gain entry to university).

The majority of respondents were in their first year of study (n=104, 62.7 percent). There were 22 students in their second year (13.3 percent), 17 students each in their third and fourth years of study (10.2 percent each), and six (3.6 percent) who were in their fifth year or more of study. Of the 166 who answered this question, 106 were studying full time (63.9 percent) and 60 (36.1 percent) were part time.

A substantial number of respondents indicated they had children (n=56). Of the 51 who provided ages of their children, 17 had children under five, 12 had children under ten, while 15 had teenage children and seven had adult children in their 20s. Some families had a mix of under-10s, teens and 20s, and two indicated the imminent birth of babies. Fifteen of these families were single parent.

Financial support (see Figure 2) often came from more than one source, indicated by the total of 274 responses to this question. Those who indicated support from Centrelink benefits numbered 70 (25 percent), closely followed by part time work (n=66, 24 percent) or support from partner or family (n=62, 23 percent). Those indicating they were self-supporting numbered 34 (12 percent) and 28 were full time workers (10 percent). Scholarship holders accounted for five percent (n=14) of respondents.

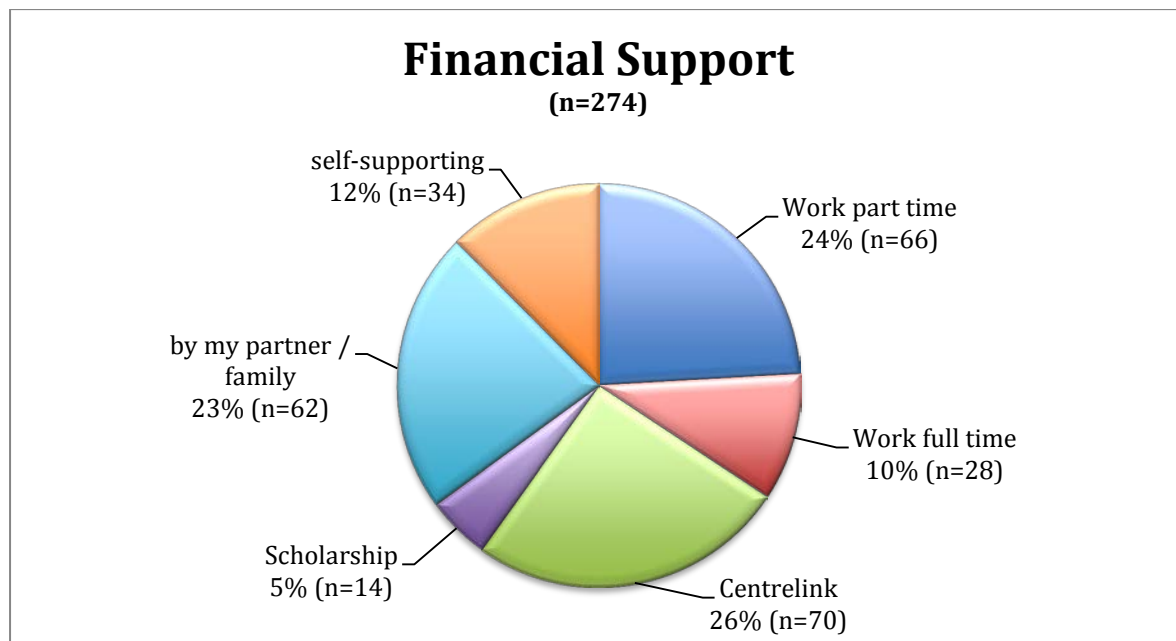


Figure 2: Financial support

We asked students to identify the types of obstacles encountered (Question 28) with respondents able to select more than one option. The total number of responses was 319.

Obstacles encountered to date were attributed mainly to financial difficulties (n=87, 27 percent), academic difficulties (n=73, 23 percent), and family obstacles (n=68, 21 percent). To a lesser degree respondents indicated relationship issues (n=46, 15 percent), and communication difficulties (n=25, 8 percent) as obstacles, as well as other (n=20, 6 percent), such as health issues (physical and mental), having to relocate, and negative family attitudes.

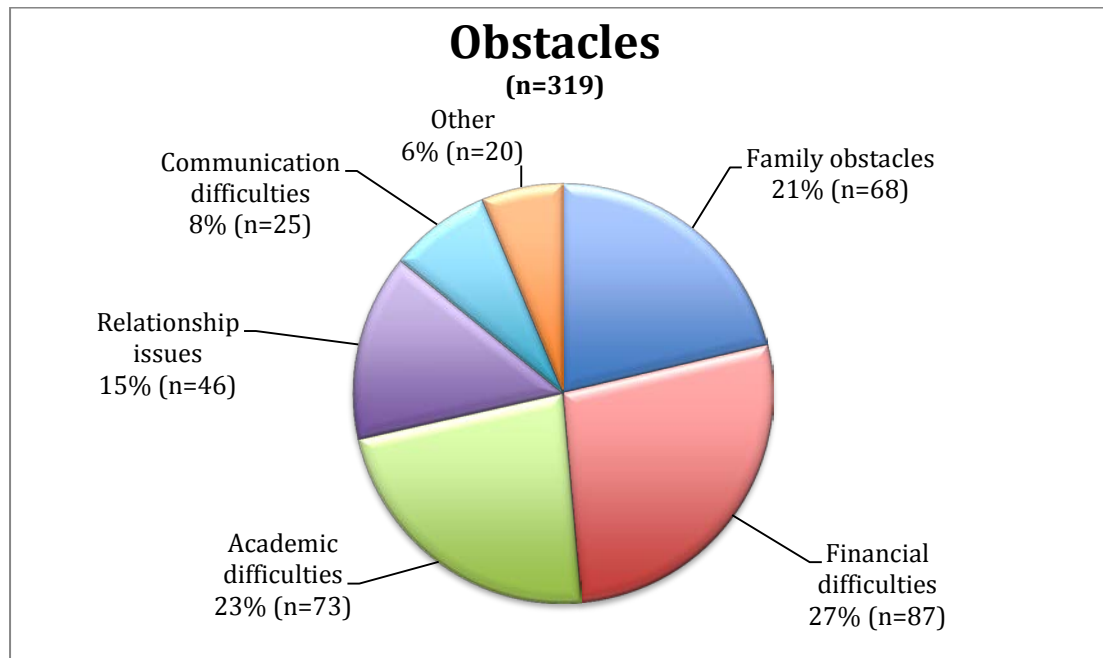


Figure 3: Obstacles

## Overview of family survey responses

Family members completed a total of 40 surveys. Of these, 26 (65 percent) were female, and 14 (35 percent) were male, with ages ranging from minors (six respondents aged between nine and 17) up to age 69, with the bulk of responses from those aged 40 and up. Family members whose daughters were studying numbered 15 (37.5 percent), while those with sons were less represented (n=4, 10 percent). Family members whose mother was studying were eight (20 percent), with a similar number for partners (n=7, 17.5 percent). Sisters, brothers and grandchildren accounted for the remaining 15 percent of responses (n=4, 1, 1 respectively). Interestingly, no family members of fathers returning to education completed the survey. Family members reported that their highest educational qualification was HSC (n=12); a TAFE certificate or equivalent (n=12) and a trade or workplace qualification (n=8). Eight family members indicated that there were others in their family considering university, while 15 indicated none, and six were unsure.

## The nature of the project’s progression

This project was designed to have multiple stages and the Seed Grant formed the second stage of a three-stage process. The following figure provides an overview of each of the stages:

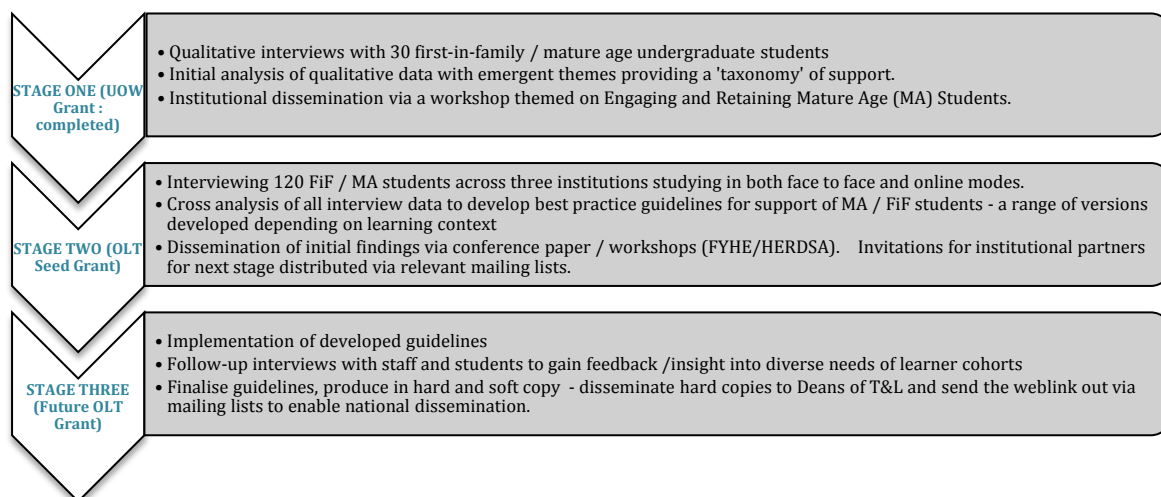


Figure 4: Planned Stages of the project

As mentioned, grant activities were carried out over a twelve month period and Table 5 (below) provides an overview of how the project activities occurred throughout the year:

ACTIVITY	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar
Appoint Research Assistant (s)													
Conduct preliminary planning meeting													
Complete and submit Ethics at UOW and UON													
Develop survey instrument and administer													
Recruit participants at the UOW and OUA													
Recruit participants at UON													
Interview participants at all three locations													
Review of international literature on support mechanisms for mature age & first-in-family students.													
Dissemination of findings at: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• First Year in Higher Education (July, Aus)</li> <li>• Forum of Continuing and Adult Ed (July, UK)</li> <li>• Researching, Inspiring &amp; Advancing Student Engagement (Sept, UK)</li> <li>• Gender &amp; Ed (Dec, Aus)</li> </ul>													
Import data into NVivo to complete cross-analysis from Stage (1) and Stage (2). Comparative analysis of survey data													
Development of website for FiF students													
Planning and delivery of dissemination Forum													
Final reporting													

Table 5: Timeline for the completion of the project

The progress of the project largely followed the timeline as indicated above but the timeline was revised from the original submitted to the OLT in June, due to delays experienced at UON in relation to gaining full ethics approval (this has been detailed on page 16). However, once the interviews had been completed the data analysis and deliverables proceeded to schedule. This process was assisted greatly by the Project Manager (Dr Janine Delahunty) who oversaw the website development and also the Forum planning. The project team met as a team on four occasions, two meetings occurred in a face-to-face environment (UOW and UON) with a further two meetings organised via teleconference. In addition to team meetings, the Project Lead (Dr Sarah O' Shea) and Project Manager met regularly (weekly or fortnightly) to review progress and check activities/outputs against two project GANTT charts (Appendices J and K).

## Project outputs and findings

The initial OLT Seed Grant application promised to deliver a 'draft series of guidelines that institutions can refer to when developing strategies that better support mature age students returning to higher education and their families'. However, as the project evolved this deliverable evolved into a more comprehensive array of resources housed under a website that was targeted at FiF students from a diversity of backgrounds and age groups, as well as their families. To complement this website and launch its development, the project also organised a national Forum that attracted participants from all over Australia from a range of discipline and professional backgrounds. Dissemination has been ongoing and to date has included four conference presentations, both national and international (Appendix L provides details). The data is currently being analysed for journal publications with a planned output of four articles over the next six months and the team has also received invitations for further dissemination in 2015 (Appendix L). The following sections highlight the development of the website and also provide an overview of the *Breaking the Barriers* Forum held on 12 February 2015.

### First-in-Family website

One of the most significant outputs from this Seed Grant has been the first-in-family website ([www.firstinfamily.com.au](http://www.firstinfamily.com.au)) which was formally launched on 12 February 2015 at the *Breaking the Barriers* Forum. The website was developed by the University of Wollongong's Learning, Teaching & Curriculum (LT&C) web team over a six month period (September 2014 – February 2015). Initially, the project team considered developing the website independently using one of the free website programs available. However, under advisement from the LT&C team, it was decided not to pursue these free options due to **a)** product instability and also, **b)** the need for ongoing maintenance to ensure the website remains current and functional. The project was also fortunate enough to buy the domain name 'firstinfamily' so if searched, this site is the **first** landing page listed (Google: firstinfamily).

### Website content

The project team decided that all the website content should be replete with student voice in order to ensure both the authenticity and immediacy of the resources. Once all the survey and interview data had been collected, the data was initially analysed for recurrent themes under the following broad areas that form the focus of the website:



- First-in-Family stories of success
- Student Resources for success
- Stuff for kids
- Stuff for Family and Friends
- Teaching and supporting first-in-family students

In order to keep the development costs down and also, minimise the complexity of the site, the number of page levels were limited to three. The project team was also mindful of keeping the site relatively simple so that fast download speeds or large data downloads were not required by those accessing the site. Resources are available to be downloaded in plain pdf form but can also be viewed in text rich format on screen. Appendix M provides an overview of the levels and content for the website in the initial plan. However, as the project team coded and explored the data this content did increase to include additional stories from students, extra content for children and also, additional teaching and learning resources.

The mode and level of study informed how the project team presented the various resources. For example, *Top Tips* from the enabling students' narratives concentrated on the challenges of the transformative aspects of the enabling experiences. For enabling students the *Top Tips* coalesced around *transformative aspects* of their enabling experiences as follows:

- Top Tips for Enabling Students (1): Be Ready For Changes
- Top Tips for Enabling Students (2): Stay Focused
- Top Tips for Enabling Students (3): It's Okay To Ask For Help

Whilst for the online and on-campus undergraduate students, more emphasis was placed on managing work and life together, and persisting. The project team also constructed a list of quotations for all of the students around *What I Wish I'd Known* as well as a *Let's Celebrate!* list that gives support for first-in-family students to embrace the positive possibilities, ambitions, and transformative potential of higher education in their lives. The web design team also suggested including rotating quotes and photos on the site to provide a fresh look each time someone arrived on the homepage. The quotes are all derived from the participants in the study and were chosen on the basis of their placement within the site and relevance to other content (please see Figure 5 below):



Figure 5: Examples of quotes and photos from the website

## Website launch

The site was launched at the *Breaking the Barriers* Forum and was met with critical acclaim. In the Forum evaluation participants made frequent references to the usefulness of the site in response to the question: *What aspects of the Forum did you find most useful?*

*The website is a great resource that I will be able to refer students, and their families to [and] ...will allow me to offer more targeted support and help when students ask what they can do to be successful in their studies.*

(Respondent #50, Academic Staff Member)

*The website is great - provides me with something to point people to if they need support/understanding.*

(Respondent #45, Professional Staff Member)

*The website, the website, the website! The usefulness of personal narrative in engaging students, particularly in accessing support services.*

(Respondent #34, Professional Staff Member)

Since launching the website, there have been numerous requests for permission to list the website as a link on other organisations' websites, these have included:

- Charles Sturt University's First Degree website
- Enabling students page at CQ University
- The Aspiration Initiative (TAI) at the Aurora Project website
- UOW In2Uni website
- The National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education (NCSEHE)

The website development is ongoing and receptive to feedback from users. For example, based upon feedback from Forum participants, the project team organised for one of the children's books (*Emily and her mummy go to school*) to be translated into a range of languages that include: Chinese, Spanish, Hindi, Arabic, Vietnamese, Indonesian, Italian as well as the local Aboriginal language in Wollongong, Dharawal (Please see: <http://firstinfamily.com.au/kids.php#kids2>). The project team has also included other resources that have been requested such as a list of common university terms.

### ***Breaking the Barriers* forum**

The Seed Grant application had also promised a 'dissemination workshop', which the project team had envisaged as being a relatively small event held at one of the research sites. However, as the project evolved and the project team engaged in other dissemination events, it became clear that interest in this topic was widespread. The idea of hosting a one-day Forum was decided upon and plans were made to use existing professional networks and social media to broadcast an invitation to attend across Australia. Given the limited funds that had been allocated to this event, the team needed to be both creative and thrifty in planning and execution.

The project team utilised a free application called Eventbrite to manage the Forum registrations, website and also to maintain a database of participants. The Eventbrite application provided an online registration facility and a basic web space, which was populated with text and images: <https://firstinfamilyForumuw.eventbrite.com.au> This link was sent out through a range of networks that each of the project members had contacts with, which included (but were not limited to) the Enabling Educators Forum, Australia and New Zealand Student Support Association (ANZSSA), First Year in Higher Education (FYHE) and the National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education (NCSEHE). The latter (NCSEHE) not only publicised the event on the centre's webpage but included it in the NCSEHE newsletter for the months leading up to the event. There was a noticeable increase in registrations after each of these newsletters were released. Additional funding for food and beverages was obtained from the host institution, with morning tea funded by the Project Lead's Research Institute (ESRI) and the costs of lunch shared by the School of Education and Faculty of Social Sciences at University of Wollongong.

By the date of the Forum there were 113 confirmed attendees, these were from a range of backgrounds and included representation from nineteen higher education providers across



**Figure 6:** *Breaking the Barriers* project team at the Forum: Dr Cathy Stone, Dr Sarah O'Shea and Associate Professor Jo May

seven states of Australia. In addition, there were representatives from other government and non-government organisations. The following table provides a breakdown of participants and their professional affiliations:

**113 Attendees: By State and University/Organisation:**

<b>ACT</b>		<b>NSW</b>	
2	Australian National University	1	Australian Institute of Prof Education,
2	University of Canberra	1	Macquarie University
3	Dept Education & Training (Canberra)	15	University of Newcastle
<b>Queensland</b>		7	University of Sydney
2	Central Qld University	11	University of NSW
1	Griffith University Qld	37	University of Wollongong
3	University of Southern Qld	9	University of Western Sydney
1	University of the Sunshine Coast	2	The Aurora Project, Sydney
<b>South Australia</b>		<b>Victoria</b>	
1	University of Adelaide	1	Federation University
3	University of South Australia	2	Monash University
		4	Open Universities Australia
<b>Tasmania</b>		1	Deakin University, Melbourne
2	University of Tasmania	<b>Western Australia</b>	
		2	National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education

Table 6: Attendees at *Breaking the Barriers* forum: professional affiliations by State

There was a mix of academic staff, student support staff, equity and outreach personnel, researchers, policy makers and higher education executives. Academic titles included twenty-three ‘Doctors’, three ‘Associate Professors’ and five ‘Professors’.

## Forum delivery

The Forum was designed to both provide an overview of the key findings from the project and enable participants to walk away with some tangible strategies and information that could be applied immediately to various professional and teaching contexts. The project team also wanted to provide a much-needed opportunity for participants to network on the day and provide space for students’ perspectives to be heard. To achieve all these goals the project team planned for three presentations on the main study’s findings in the morning, generous time at lunch and morning tea for socialising, a student panel and finally a group activity designed for participants to consider the day as a whole and put forward one principle for supporting first-in-family students and their families.

The Forum was planned as a one-day event. This was regarded as being both cost and time effective for the project team and for attendees. Appendix N provides the final program for the day and details of each of the presentations. Five people contacted the project team and explained that they were unable to attend but would appreciate resources from the day so each of the main presentations can be accessed via downloadable pdf on the first-in-family website



Figure 7: Dr Cathy Stone (OUA), Dr Sarah O'Shea (UOW) with Prof Sue Trinidad (NCSEHE)

([www.firstinfamily.com.au](http://www.firstinfamily.com.au)). Sections of the Forum were also video recorded and each of these segments will also be available via the website once editing has been completed.

## Forum evaluation

In total, there were 113 attendees on the day, not including the four members of the research team and two other student helpers. Immediately following the Forum, all participants were sent an anonymous Survey via SurveyMonkey (Please see Appendix O) soliciting their feedback on the usefulness of the day. The survey consisted of eight questions, one with multiple areas to rate, and three seeking qualitative responses. At the time of writing **51 attendees**, excluding the Research Team, have responded. They represent the broad sweep of sector personnel who have some ownership of the equity mission of universities with an interest in first-in-family students. The breakdown of survey respondents is as follows:

Respondents identified as:	Numbers
Academic staff members	18
Professional Staff	18
Student Support Staff	8
Equity practitioners	4
Current student	2
Researcher	1
Policy Maker	1

Table 7: Breakdown of forum attendee survey respondents

The initial questions asked for respondents' feedback on the actual Forum with 43 out of 47 or **92 percent rating the Forum as 'excellent' or 'very good'**; the other four respondents thought it 'fairly good'. No one thought it 'mildly good' or 'no good at all'. A further 21 people provided commentary on their overall evaluation of the day. The following are examples that show that the Forum was useful and a welcomed opportunity to network:

*Thank-you for organising this great event. The content was current, relevant and interesting and I enjoyed the different components of the proceedings, especially the opportunity to network with like-minded others across Australia.*

(Respondent #28, Professional Staff Member)

*The access to all of the people from a range of universities across Australia was simply amazing. Their calibre of professionalism was high, but their understanding and their want to be proactive so that more FiF students can succeed and get through uni has taken me aback in the best possible way. It can be a little overwhelming when such a large group of people are willing to help.*

(Respondent #4, Current Student)

One academic staff member (Respondent #21) commented on the relevance of the day to their and others' work:

*It was a relaxed (well provisioned) day. The other delegates were switched on to the topic and conversation was productive. The input*

*from speakers and panel was well targeted and very helpful. I found places that I could make links to your website and have already spoken to three people about what I heard.*

Question three asked for a rating on a range of topics and the results overall were very positive:

Item	Agreed	Strongly Agreed	Total (Out of a possible 51)
The Forum was well organised	11	40	51
My expectations of the Forum were fulfilled	23	25	<b>50</b> (2 disagreed)
The Forum was useful to my work	21	26	<b>50</b> (3 =no opinion)
I plan to collaborate with people I met today.	19	13	<b>32</b> (16 = no opinion & 1 = disagreed)
The information presented has increased my knowledge of this area	25	19	<b>44</b> (2 = no opinion, 3 = Disagreed, 1 = Strongly Disagreed)
I will use information and resources from this Forum in my work or research	21	24	<b>45</b> (3=no opinion)

Table 8: Forum attendee survey: summary of Survey Question three responses

Question four sought open replies to the question ‘*What aspects of the Forum did you find most useful?*’, there were a total of 46 responses. The overwhelming majority commented that the website was the most useful thing about the day, although many also commented on the usefulness of the student panel. One FiF student also found many aspects useful – this person wrote:

*From the perspective of FiF student panel individual: To be blunt: ACKNOWLEDGING AND LOOKING AT WAYS TO OVERCOME THE FACT THAT THERE ARE FIRST IN FAMILY INEQUITIES. The most useful aspect for me personally, was the simple identification of the fact that I am FiF. This allowed the relevant people to approach me throughout the day to offer their contact details and organise further communication, and for them to promote their support service that I had otherwise not heard of. Also, the ability to meet more students that were first in family, and listen and learn about their experiences to add to my own knowledge, especially when it comes to talking to other students from all ages and backgrounds really helped. Note: The website looks amazing, and the content is beyond awesome. Please pass on all thanks to people involved, as this is a barrier-reducer (breaker even?) from the inequities that exist between FiF and non-FiF students.*

Question five addressed the corollary of Question four asking ‘*What aspects of the Forum did you find least useful?*’. This was also an open response question to which 36 responded. While seven wrote that they enjoyed the entire Forum, there was little agreement among the rest of the responses. A few liked the group work at the end of the Forum, and a few did not. A small theme that emerged from four participants was that they thought there were too many quotations used in the presentations.

Question six asked respondents to rate the usefulness of the Forum, no one described the usefulness as poor or very poor whilst four people described its usefulness as 'Average' and a further 47 described it as either above 'Above Average' (30) or 'Outstanding' (17). Question seven asked, how likely was it that respondents would implement ideas from the Forum in their professional contexts? Of the 51 who answered, **41 said that they were most likely (19) or likely (22)** to do so. Some expanded on their rating. For example, a University professional staff member (Respondent #34) said: *'I will be directing colleagues and students to the website, and also trialling a number of initiatives inspired by this forum. Also made some great contacts with other people.'* An Academic Staff Member (Respondent #29) commented that he/she: *'Will promote the website to students at our university and also highlight as a link in staff resources to increase their awareness.'* And a University professional staff member (Respondent #28) said: *'We are working to support FIF students and normalising their experience with the research presented will 'break barriers' we experience engaging with this cohort.'* Finally another Academic Staff Member (Respondent #13) said:

*I will be mindful of making community members aware of the supports available for students who are unfamiliar with the culture of higher education. I will invite people from the rural communities to visit me at university when they are in town to breakdown the mystique.*

Four respondents were unsure if they could apply what they had learned at the Forum, and only one said it was unlikely they would implement the ideas they gained explaining how:

*[I] don't work in student outreach or support and have no control over implementation of practices. HOWEVER, I can definitely share the resources with colleagues who can.*

The final question of the survey, Question eight, was an open question asking: *'Is there anything else you'd like to share about the Forum?'* The responses to this question were overwhelmingly positive. As one Equity Practitioner (Respondent #44), reflecting on the day, stated:

*As a First in Family student and an equity professional, it was valuable from both perspectives. I was surprised by the number of academics who identified as FIF students (including Eeva) and would be interested to somehow follow these students through to see where they are now and if their experience impacts on their future profession. The quotes were most useful in capturing the shared thoughts and observations of parents and family members as they witness the student evolving. I believe it is the beginning of a very important cycle and you did a wonderful job capturing that and deconstructing the core messages. Thank you!*

Finally, a university professional staff member (Respondent #6) summed up the overall enthusiasm for this event stating how:

*Today was fantastic. I think the OLT got excellent value for money in this project and the team are to be commended. We can't wait to see where the research goes. UoW were excellent hosts and Janine's organisation was exceptional. Well done to you all!*

## Project impact, dissemination and evaluation:

This Seed Grant was funded in 2014 and as such was not required to provide a project impact plan. However, the project team has included a retrospective impact plan as a means to gauge the success of the project and also to chart how the project team intends to carry forward the outcomes and deliverables.

		<b>Anticipated changes at:</b>			
		Project completion	Six months post-completion	Twelve months post-completion	Twenty-four months post-completion
<b>1. Team members</b>	Apply research to practical and strategic use. Develop leadership and management expertise	Continue to develop resources that guide universities in supporting first-in-family students	Further develop activities in this field by way of an OLT Innovation and Development Grant with key stakeholders		
<b>2. Immediate students</b>	Access to a well-resourced website that supports both students and their families	Development of National Principles for Supporting First-in-Family Students	Increased activities and opportunities for family members to be involved in on-campus activities		
<b>3. Spreading the word</b>	Raise the profile of the website through continued networking in the field.	Present at the UK Forum on Access and Continuing Education Conference in July 2015	Publish a total of four articles on the research and continue to respond to invitations to present work related to the research		
<b>4. Narrow opportunistic adoption</b>	The website is listed on institutional websites and also broader student support agencies.		A second Forum on first-in-family students is hosted at another institution	Strategies targeted at the First-in-family cohort are embedded in the institutions where the research took place	
<b>5. Narrow systemic adoption</b>	Uptake of first-in-family website and utilisation of this with prospective students and their family members – for example university staff referring students to the website etc.		Systematic institutional activities targeted at the First-in-family cohort across the state and the country		
<b>6. Broad opportunistic adoption</b>	The broader educational environment (such as schools, preschools and equity program utilise the first-in-family website)		A national networking framework of professional staff passionate about this area		
<b>7. Broad systemic adoption</b>	Research is cited as key evidence for changing the equity categorisations of students		Changes to equity categorisation to include first-in-family as a 'supra' category within policy and government funding models		

Table 9: Retrospective impact plan



While the project has only just been completed there are already indicators that there is a 'climate of readiness for change'. These are largely manifested through the interest and response to the website that we have already recorded. To date, the project team has had five requests for permissions to add the website link to existing websites and have also unsolicited requests for more information about the project and its outcomes (see Appendix P).

The project team continues to employ strategies to engage with stakeholders, this has included:

**Institutional articles to showcase the research and the project:**

- UOW: <http://media.uow.edu.au/releases/UOW187635.html>
- UOW: In2Uni parent newsletter (1,400 parents of school age children) <http://us10.campaign-archive2.com/?u=1c51aebf173dcb6cbcc01894e&id=676ee527f9>
- UON: <http://www.newcastle.edu.au/about-uon/governance-and-leadership/faculties-and-schools/english-language-and-foundation-studies-centre/resources-for-staff/elfs-link-newsletter/march-2015>

**National features on the research:**

- NCSEHE: <http://ncsehe.createsend1.com/t/ViewEmail/r/4EA6FCA831FEF7562540EF23F30FEDED>
- The Conversation: <http://theconversation.com/why-first-in-family-uni-students-should-receive-more-support-38601> (Please see Appendix Q)

**Newspaper articles on the research:**

- Illawarra Mercury: <http://www.illawarramercury.com.au/story/2884588/first-at-uni-face-learning-barriers/?cs=12>

All of the above were published after the Forum (held on 12 February) and complement other dissemination activities planned for the next six months that include:

- One accepted paper at the Forum on Access and Continuing Education Conference (Wales, UK, July 2015).
- One invited workshop for University of the Sunshine Coast on supporting first-in-family students (invitation issued by Prof Karen Nelson, PVC, Students)
- One invited workshop for Open Universities Australia (Melbourne, May 2015)
- One paper presentation at the National Association of Enabling Educators (UWS, Sydney, Nov 2015)
- Four articles to be drafted at the writing retreat planned for June 2015.

These activities also enable transfer of project outcomes and this momentum will be maintained through planned additions to the first-in-family website. The impact of the website is already been tracked via analytics which will not only simply indicate website hits but will

gather accurate information including the source of these hits and the length of time that visitors spend on the site.

Finally, the project team intends to continue work in this field and will also be exploring additional sources of funding in the next 12 months. However, regardless of additional funding the website has been funded for basic maintenance for the next 24 months.

## Conclusions

Overall, the project team believes that we have managed to make an impact on the educational landscape with this OLT Seed Grant. The Forum and the website both seemed to ‘fill a gap’ in our current understandings about the first-in-family cohort and also, provided much needed resources and networking opportunities for higher education practitioners. However, no project is without its limitations and challenges and so, some of this project’s have been detailed below:

## Limitations

- This study is limited by time and place; the research was conducted at three sites only and also occurred at a particular point in time. Having said that, deliberately targeting different student cohorts (online undergraduate, enabling and on-campus undergraduate) did enable a more nuanced understanding of this field.
- Like any project, time constraints featured strongly in this study – all three project members are employed in demanding roles and so finding the time to engage in both research activities *and* in the ongoing dissemination of the project has been challenging.
- Far more data was generated about the experience of female first-in-family students than that of men, particularly from the survey data. More research targeting specifically male first-in-family students is needed to try to address this imbalance.
- Interviews with more family members, and particularly children, would have added greater depth to the findings. However, the project team acknowledges that for busy households, the logistics of organising this could have been a deterrent. Considering ways to make it more convenient for family members to participate would be beneficial for future work.
- There was only a small number of participants who self-identified as Indigenous and there were no explicit questions to elicit this. The experiences of Indigenous first-in-family students add another dimension to our understanding of the unique challenges faced and strategies to support these students and their families. It may be beneficial for future research to consider how interview and survey questions could be modified to draw out the stories of Indigenous participants.

## Challenges

- A key challenge for the project team related to obtaining ethics for the project at University of Newcastle; the difficulties involved in obtaining this delayed the project by four to six months.
- Another challenge related to the disbursement of project funds amongst all three institutions, as this required particular agreements from all the institutions. As the project members were using the funds to employ research support or as teaching relief, this also delayed the data collection phase of the project.
- As mentioned earlier, men are under-represented in both the interviews and the surveys, but particularly in the surveys. It is an ongoing challenge to encourage men to participate in such surveys to the same degree as women.

Overall, this project has contributed to learning and knowledge both within the project team and also within the broader higher education environment. Each of the project members has gained a much deeper understanding of the field and also, the rigours of running a multi-institutional study that seeks to engage with students at a deeply descriptive level. Across the higher education field, the project outcomes have been received with predominantly positive feedback and also, more importantly have been immediately implemented within programs, institutions and classrooms. We feel that this project has provided an immediate and notable impact, yet the work in this field is not complete. The next stage of this project will involve more institutional partners as the project team endeavours to disseminate findings and also further research this field. We hope to continue to work towards a more equitable educational landscape and importantly contribute to *'breaking the barriers'* to education for those who are first in their family to attend university.

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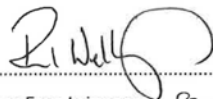
# Appendices

## Appendix A: Certification by Vice-Chancellor

### Appendices

#### Appendix A: Certification by ~~Deputy~~ Vice-Chancellor

I certify that all parts of the final report for this OLT grant provide an accurate representation of the implementation, impact and findings of the project, and that the report is of publishable quality.



Date: 31/3/15

.....  
Professor Eeva-Leinonen    PROF PAUL WELLINGS  
Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic)    VICE-CHANCELLOR  
University of Wollongong

## Appendix B: UOW Invitation to participate

### INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH STUDY

Dear UOW Student

I am writing to you in order to invite you to participate in a research project that is exploring the experience of first in family university students. Your involvement would include either participating in one 30–40 minute interview or completing one online survey (approximately 30 minutes)

We are seeking students who are the first in their immediate family (i.e. siblings /parents/children/partner) to come to university. In order to obtain a deeper understanding of this experience, we would also like to invite a significant family member (i.e. sibling, parent, partner or child) to participate in the interview with you or complete the survey. The interview and the survey will simply ask you (and your family member) to respond to some questions about your university experience and how this attendance has impacted upon yourself and your family/community. Examples of questions include: *What do the other members of your family feel about you attending university? What kinds of attitudes do people in your family or community express about university? What do you feel have been the milestones during this time at university?*

We can come to you for the interview, or arrange a location on campus if you prefer. If you are interested please reply to this email with:

- (i) three days / times that you are available
- (ii) your contact phone number; and
- (iii) where you would prefer to meet on campus

If you would prefer to complete the online survey, please just reply and we will forward the link.

If by chance you have any friends who you think might be able to participate we would be very grateful if you could let them know about the study. If you have any questions or require further information about the study please do not hesitate to contact me on [saraho@uow.edu.au](mailto:saraho@uow.edu.au).

Warm Regards

Sarah

**Dr Sarah O' Shea**

Senior Lecturer, Social Sciences  
Graduate Research Convenor  
School of Education  
Faculty of Social Sciences  
McKinnon Building (67), Room 308  
University of Wollongong 2522

## Appendix C: Follow up email from UOW

Dear UOW Student

Recently I emailed to invite you to participate in a UOW research project that is exploring the experience of first-in-family university students. Your involvement would include either participating in one 30–40 minute interview or completing one online survey (approximately 30 minutes).

Thank you to all those who replied but we are still seeking volunteers particularly interview participants (who will receive a coffee and cake voucher as a small thank you!)

So if you are the first in their immediate family (i.e. siblings /parents/children/partner) to come to university and would be happy to participate please reply to this email with:

- (i) three days / times that you are available
- (ii) your contact phone number; and
- (iii) where you would prefer to meet on campus

If you would prefer to complete the online survey, please just reply and we will forward the link.

If you have any questions or require further information about the study please do not hesitate to contact me on [saraho@uow.edu.au](mailto:saraho@uow.edu.au)

Warm Regards

Sarah



## Appendix D: OUA Invitation to participate

# An invitation to participate in research

Dear Fiona,

I'm writing to invite you to participate in a research project that is being conducted by Open Universities Australia in partnership with the University of Wollongong and the University of Newcastle.

We're seeking students who are the **first in their immediate family to undertake university studies** (i.e. your siblings, parents, children and partner didn't complete study before you). If you believe that you fit this category and would be willing to spare half an hour for either a phone interview or to fill out an online survey, we would greatly welcome your involvement.

This research is important as it will help us to know more about the student experience and how universities can improve the ways in which students are taught and supported.

### **What's involved**

Ideally, we would like to speak with you on the phone, but if you would prefer to complete the online survey that would also be a great help to us.

We're also looking for family members (e.g. partners, spouses, children, parents) who would be willing to complete a very short online survey about what it's like to have a close family member studying. This is certainly not essential, but please let us know if you think someone in your family might be willing to do this.

### **If you're interested**

**If you're interested, please reply to this email** and let us if you would be willing to be interviewed by phone, at your convenience, or would prefer that we sent you a link to the survey.

If you have any questions about the study, please feel free to send them through to me by reply email.

Many thanks for considering this.

We look forward to hearing from you,

## Appendix E: OUA Recruitment email

Thank you so much for agreeing to participate in this research we are conducting with first in family students.

I would very much like to arrange a phone interview with you, to be conducted either by myself or by my colleague Janine Delahunty.

Janine or I will be back in touch with you over the next couple of weeks, either by just calling you, or by an email to arrange a suitable time.

I have attached a participant information sheet (one for you and one for your family member if needed), please read this carefully and let me know if you have any questions.

The interview will take a little time to complete (we estimate about 30-40 minutes) as we are really interested in learning about your experiences of university.

If you should decide that you would prefer to do the online survey instead, the link for the student survey is below. If the link does not work directly from the email please copy the link into your browser and it will open up:

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/firstinfamilystudents>

Also, if a member of your family would be willing to participate in this research I would be very grateful for their participation. The direct link to the family survey is below.

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/family-members-survey>

Thanks again and we look forward to speaking with you!

Cathy Stone  
Director , Student Success

## **Appendix F: Student interview schedule**

### **Pre-Interview Questions**

Name:

Age:

Course enrolled in (or for OUA subject enrolled in / intended degree?)

Family particulars:

### **Questions: University Experience**

1. What events or people brought you to university?
2. What types of expectations did you have before coming?
3. Did any person in your life play an inspirational role in your decision to come to university?
4. Can you describe to me your reasons for applying to a university course?
5. What were your reasons for choosing this particular campus and your particular course?

### **Friends / Family reactions**

1. Have your friends or family expressed any feelings / opinions about your decision to attend university?
2. Do you have any ideas why people / individuals have said / done / suggested (or not as the case maybe) these things?
3. Have these reactions / feelings changed over time?
4. How are you managing to fit university into other aspects of your life?
5. How has studying impacted upon your family life?
6. Have your relationships with others close to you changed since you started at university? For example, do you still feel the same about close friends or family members or has the nature of your relationship changed in any way?

### **Family Perceptions of university**

1. Are your family (immediate or extended) involved in university in any way for example, does anyone in your extended family attend university or plan to attend?
2. Before attending this university did you ever come on-campus with friends or family? Why / Why not?
3. Since attending university has the opportunity arisen for your family to come on-campus? If yes, what were their impressions of university
4. How is university spoken about in your household?
5. How have these conversations changed over time?
6. What kinds of attitudes do people in your family or community express about university? Have these changed since you started to attend university?

## **Student Experience**

1. Looking back over your time as student, what do you feel were the milestones?
2. If you were to draw parallels between this period of life and another period or occasion what would it be?
3. Some older students have mentioned that they have overcome a number of obstacles to come to university – what obstacles have you encountered to date?
4. During your time at university, what would you consider were the crisis points?
5. At these crises, what people / things assisted you in continuing in your studies?
6. Has any particular person done anything that 'stands out' as an aid or help in your transition to university life? Can you describe this?
7. What do you wish you had known prior to commencing university?
8. Do you think you are knowledgeable about the university environment? If yes, how did you gain this knowledge? If no, what knowledge do you feel you are lacking?

## Appendix G: Student and family member interview schedule

### Pre-Interview Questions

Student Name:

Student Age:

Course enrolled in (or for OUA subject enrolled in / heading to what degree?)

Family member particulars:

Name:

Age:

Relationship to the student:

### Questions: University Experience

#### Student Questions:

1. What events or people brought you to university?
2. What types of expectations did you have before coming?
3. Did any person in your life play an inspirational role in your decision to come to university?
4. Can you describe to me your reasons for applying to a university course?
5. What were your reasons for choosing this particular campus and your particular course?

#### Family Member Questions:

1. What was your reaction when (name of student) talked about coming to university?
2. What types of expectations about university did you have before (name of student) came here?
3. In what ways have these expectations changed overtime?
4. Have you ever considered coming to university? Why / Why not?

### Friends / Family reactions

#### Student Questions:

1. Have your friends or family expressed any feelings / opinions about your decision to attend university?
2. Do you have any ideas why people / individuals have said / done / suggested (or not as the case maybe) these things?
3. Have these reactions / feelings changed over time?
4. How are you managing to fit university into other aspects of your life?
5. How has studying impacted upon your family life?
6. Have your relationships with others close to you changed since you started at university? For example, do you still feel the same about close friends or family members or has the nature of your relationship changed in any way?

#### Family Member Questions:

1. How have others in your immediate family reacted to (name of student) attending university?
2. Why do you think individuals have reacted in this way?

### **Family Perceptions of university (Both Student and Family Member)**

1. Are your family (immediate or extended) involved in university in any way for example, does anyone in your extended family attend university or plan to attend?
2. Before attending this university did you ever come on-campus with friends or family? Why / Why not?
3. Since attending university has the opportunity arisen for other family members to come on-campus? If yes, what were their impressions of university
4. How is university spoken about in your household?
5. How have these conversations changed over time?
6. What kinds of attitudes do people in your family or community express about university? Have these changed since you started to attend university?

### **Student Experience**

1. Looking back over your time as student, what do you feel were the milestones?
2. If you were to draw parallels between this period of life and another period or occasion what would it be?
3. Some older students have mentioned that they have overcome a number of obstacles to come to university – what obstacles have you encountered to date?
4. During your time at university, what would you consider were the crisis points?
5. At these crises, what people / things assisted you in continuing in your studies?
6. Has any particular person done anything that 'stands out' as an aid or help in your transition to university life? Can you describe this?
7. What do you wish you had known prior to commencing university?
8. Do you think you are knowledgeable about the university environment? If yes, how did you gain this knowledge? If no, what knowledge do you feel you are lacking?

### **Family Member Experiences**

1. Looking back over (name of student) as a student, what do you feel were the milestones for him / her ?
2. Some older students have mentioned that they have overcome a number of obstacles to come to university – what obstacles have you witnessed (name of student) encountering?
3. In what ways has (name of student) changed during his/her time at university?
4. How have these changes impacted upon the family?
5. What words would you use to describe (name of student) time at university?

## Appendix H: Student survey

### Research Description and Consent

This survey is part of a study conducted by researchers in the Faculty of Social Sciences (School of Education), University of Wollongong in collaboration with researchers in University of Newcastle and also, Open Universities Australia. The purpose of the research is to investigate the impacts of university attendance on students who are first in family to come to university.

#### **1. In completing this survey, I understand that (please tick ALL of the boxes below):**

presentations, reports), and I consent for it to be used in that manner.

al publication, conference

If I have any enquires about the research, I can contact the Project Officer, Janine Delahunty ([janined@uow.edu.au](mailto:janined@uow.edu.au)) or Chief Investigator, Sarah O'Shea ([saraho@uow.edu.au](mailto:saraho@uow.edu.au)). If I have any concerns or complaints regarding the way the research is or has been conducted, I can contact the Ethics Officer, Human Research Ethics Committee, UOW on 4221 4457 ([rso-ethics@uow.edu.au](mailto:rso-ethics@uow.edu.au)) or I can contact the Research Integrity Officer, UON on 4921 8999 ([human-ethics@newcastle.edu.au](mailto:human-ethics@newcastle.edu.au))

# FIRST IN FAMILY STUDENTS AND THEIR UNIVERSITY EXPERIENCE

## Participant Information

**\*2. I am the first in my immediate family to undertake higher education studies—that is I am the first from my siblings, parents, partner and children to participate in university studies**

- Yes  Not sure  
 No

If you answered 'no' or 'not sure', can you provide details below:

**\*3. What is your gender?**

- Female  
 Male  
 Other

**\*4. Please indicate your age range**

- 18 -21  30 -40  
 21 -25  40 -50  
 25 -30  50+

**\*5. Which of the following institutions are you enrolled in or affiliated with?**

- Open Universities Australia (OUA)  
 University of Newcastle  
 University of Wollongong



# FIRST IN FAMILY STUDENTS AND THEIR UNIVERSITY EXPERIENCE

## PARTICIPANT INFORMATION

### \*6. What is the highest level of education you completed prior to undertaking university studies? (Please choose from the list below)

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| <input type="radio"/> Did not attend school | <input type="radio"/> Year 11   |
| <input type="radio"/> Primary Level         | <input type="radio"/> Year 12 (no HSC)                                |
| <input type="radio"/> Year 7                | <input type="radio"/> Year 12 (with HSC)                              |
| <input type="radio"/> Year 8                | <input type="radio"/> Post Secondary Certificate (TAFE or similar)    |
| <input type="radio"/> Year 9                | <input type="radio"/> Trade Qualification                             |
| <input type="radio"/> Year 10               | <input type="radio"/> Work Qualification (professional certification) |

Please provide further details (name of qualification or details of prior education)

### 7. How did you gain entry to your current program of study? A combination of answers may be required

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Higher School Certificate (HSC)                            | <input type="checkbox"/> Open entry (no prior qualifications necessary) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> TAFE Qualification   | <input type="checkbox"/> Professional qualifications                    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Trade Qualification  | <input type="checkbox"/> Professional experience                        |
| <input type="checkbox"/> STAT test (Special Tertiary Admissions Test) or equivalent | <input type="checkbox"/> Access or enabling program                     |

Please provide further details of your entry pathway

### 8. What area do you study? Please include the name of the degree / units or foundation program if you know it

## FIRST IN FAMILY STUDENTS AND THEIR UNIVERSITY EXPERIENCE

### \*9. Current Course Load

- Full time
- Part time

### \*10. Length of study

- This is my first year of study
- This is my second year of study
- This is my third year of study
- This is my fourth year of study
- I have been studying for more than five years

Other (please specify)

### 11. Do you have children?

- Yes
- No

If yes, can you provide their ages

### \*12. Are you currently

- Partnered
- Single

### \*13. What are your sources of financial support? (more than one answer is possible)

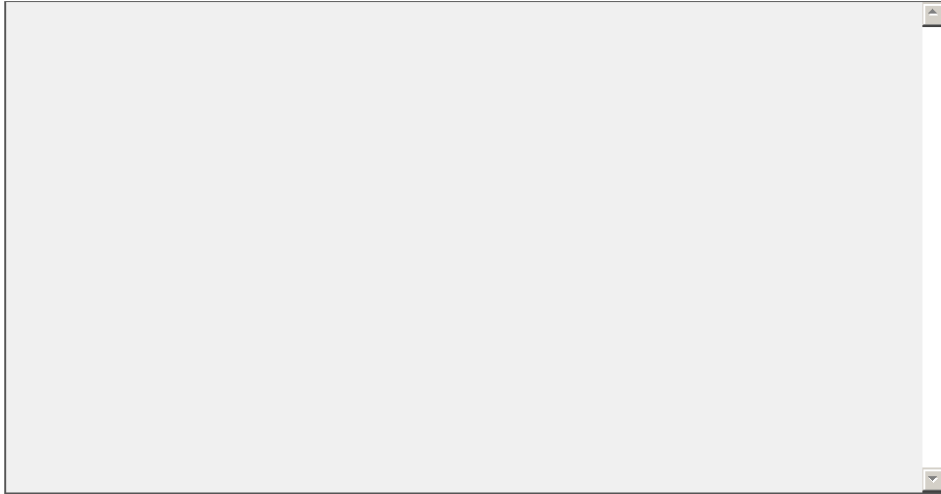
- Self-supporting
- I work part-time
- I work full-time
- By my partner / family
- Centrelink benefit(s)
- I am a scholarship holder

Other (please specify)

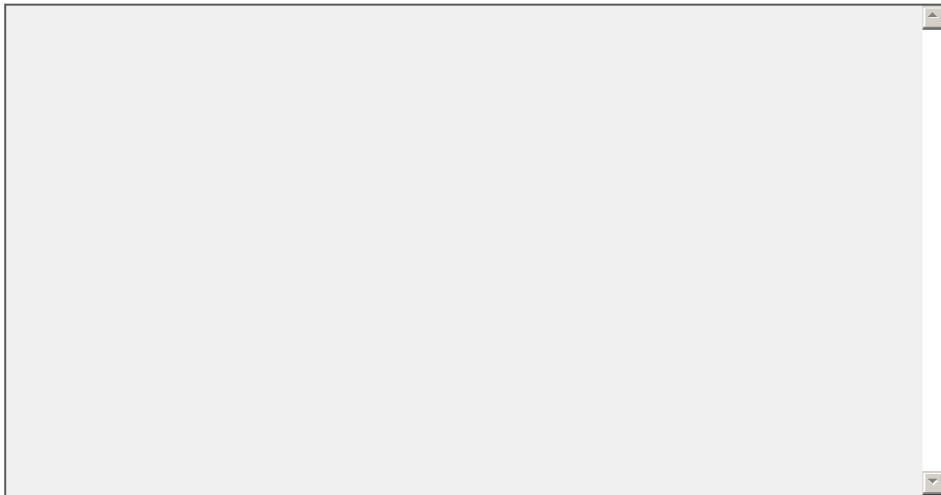
## FIRST IN FAMILY STUDENTS AND THEIR UNIVERSITY EXPERIENCE

### University Experience

**14. What motivated you to start higher education study ?  
(for example, was there a person / persons who inspired you? Any particular circumstances? A defining event or experience? etc)**



**15. What types of expectations did you have before starting? (Describe how you imagined studying at a university level and what you expected to be doing as a student)**



## FIRST IN FAMILY STUDENTS AND THEIR UNIVERSITY EXPERIENCE

**16. What were your reasons for deciding to study at this point in your life?**

**17. Since commencing, what are some things you've (re)discovered about yourself?**

## FIRST IN FAMILY STUDENTS AND THEIR UNIVERSITY EXPERIENCE

### Friends / Family reactions / perceptions

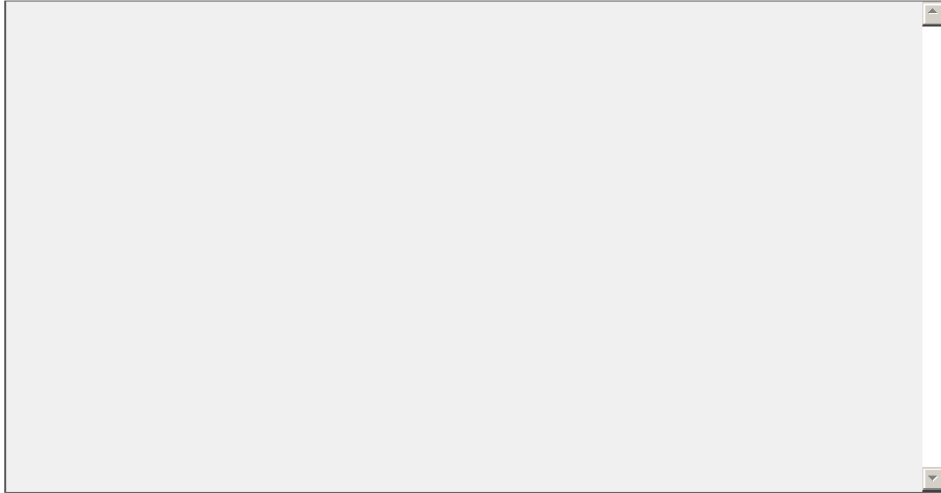
**18. Can you describe some of the feelings /opinions your friends or family expressed about your decision to start university study?**

**19. Do you have any ideas why people / individuals have said / done / suggested (or not, as the case maybe) these things?**

**20. In what ways have relationships with others close to you changed since you started your studies?**

## FIRST IN FAMILY STUDENTS AND THEIR UNIVERSITY EXPERIENCE

**21. In what way(s) has studying impacted upon your family life? For example, what kind (s) of adjustments have you and your family/children had to make? How are you managing to fit your studies into other aspects of life?**



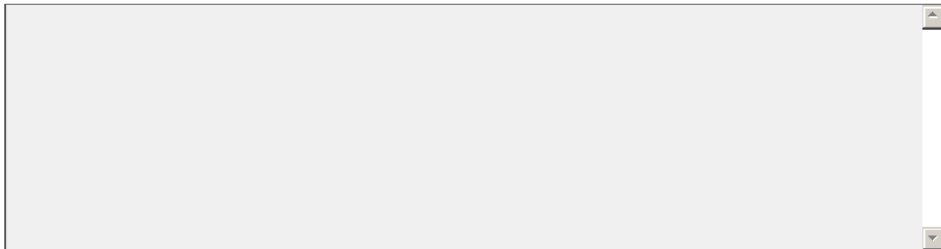
**22. Is your family (immediate or extended) involved in university in any way? For example, is there anyone in your extended family doing university studies or do they plan to?**

- Yes
- No
- Not sure

If yes, can you describe their involvement below:



**23. Can you describe some of the conversations that you have had about your university studies with your family? If you do not discuss your studies, can you tell us why?**



## FIRST IN FAMILY STUDENTS AND THEIR UNIVERSITY EXPERIENCE

### Student Experience

**24. Looking back over your time so far as a student, what do you feel were the milestones, or high points? For example, academic high points, high points related to time management / organisation / preparation, relationship high points, personal high points such as self-confidence, etc**



**25. How do you think your future might be different as a result of undertaking university studies?**

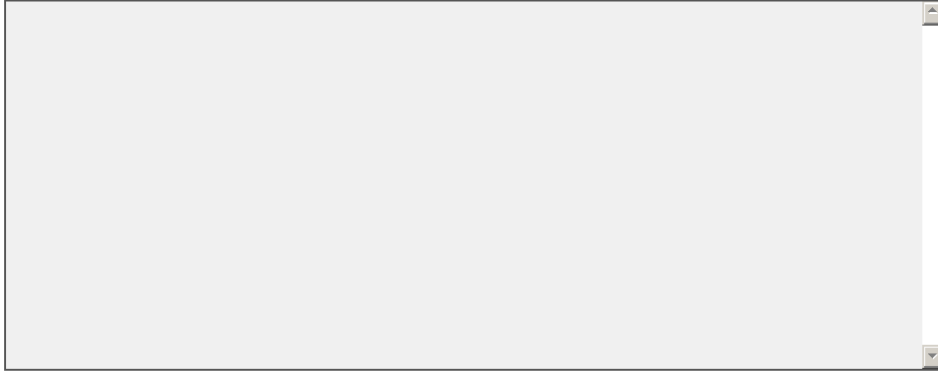


## FIRST IN FAMILY STUDENTS AND THEIR UNIVERSITY EXPERIENCE

**26. Some first in family students have mentioned that they have overcome a number of obstacles to undertake university studies – what obstacles, or crisis points have you encountered to date?**

- Family obstacles
- Financial difficulties
- Academic difficulties
- Relationship issues
- Communication difficulties
- Other

Please explain your selection (if possible using examples). Feel free to add additional thoughts or ideas about your interpretation of the question.





## FIRST IN FAMILY STUDENTS AND THEIR UNIVERSITY EXPERIENCE

**27. At these crisis points, what or who has assisted you to keep going with your studies? Please tick all relevant boxes**

- Family members
- Staff (UON, UOW or OUA)
- Support services provided by UON, UOW, OUA
- Other support services
- Myself
- My friends at university
- My friends outside of university
- Other (can you provide further details below)

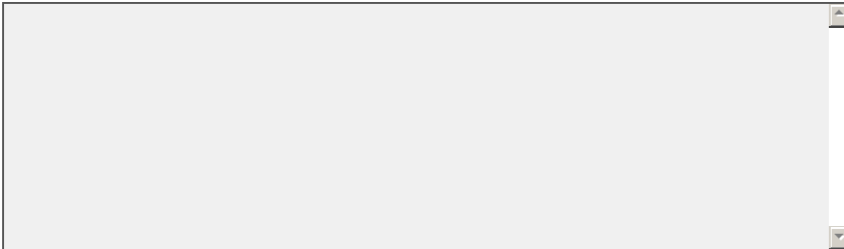
Can you provide further detail about your choices above



**28. Have you ever considered giving up your studies?**

- Yes
- No

If yes, can you describe why you were considering leaving?



## FIRST IN FAMILY STUDENTS AND THEIR UNIVERSITY EXPERIENCE

### In conclusion

**29. Is there anything else you'd like to say about your experience of being a student so far?**

**\*30. We are also very interested in hearing from your family members about your decision to undertake university studies. This includes children (over 8 years), partners, parents, grandparents, siblings etc. Would a family member be prepared to complete a similar online survey?**

- Yes  
 No

If yes, please provide an email address we can send the link to or copy the weblink below into your browser.

PLEASE COPY THE FOLLOWING WEB LINK ADDRESS INTO YOUR BROWSER FOR ANY FAMILY MEMBERS INTERESTED IN THE STUDY

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/family-members-survey>

**31. Finally, we are also conducting interviews - now that you have a sense of what the research is about would you consent to be being contacted for an interview (phone or face to face?)**

- Yes  
 No

If yes, can you provide an email address so we can contact you - thanks!

That concludes the survey, thank you very much for your participation

# Appendix I: Family survey

**FAMILY MEMBERS' PERCEPTIONS OF UNIVERSITY**

**Research Description and Consent**

This survey is part of a study being conducted by researchers in the Faculty of Social Sciences (School of Education), University of Wollongong in collaboration with researchers in University of Newcastle and also, Open Universities Australia. The purpose of the research is to investigate the impacts of university attendance on students and their families

**\*1. In completing this survey, I understand that (please tick ALL of the boxes below):**

- My contribution will be voluntary and confidential in that I will not be identified in publications
- I am free to withdraw from the research at any time
- Refusal to participate or withdrawal of consent will not impact upon my relationship with the University of Wollongong
- The data collected from my participation will be used for publication / presentation purposes (journal publication, conference presentations, reports), and I consent for it to be used in that manner.

If I have any enquires about the research, I can contact the Project Officer, Janine Delahunty (janined@uow.edu.au) or Chief Investigator, Sarah O'Shea (saraho@uow.edu.au). If I have any concerns or complaints regarding the way the research is or has been conducted, I can contact the Ethics Officer, Human Research Ethics Committee, UOW on 4221 4457 (rso-ethics@uow.edu.au) or I can contact the Research Integrity Officer, UON on 4921 8999 (human-ethics@newcastle.edu.au)

**\*2. What is your gender?**

- Female
- Male
- Other

**\*3. What age are you?**

**\*4. Which member of your family is currently undertaking university studies? (Please nominate the family member who suggested you complete the survey)**

<input type="radio"/> partner	<input type="radio"/> daughter
<input type="radio"/> mother	<input type="radio"/> son
<input type="radio"/> father	<input type="radio"/> neice/nephew
<input type="radio"/> sister	<input type="radio"/> grandchild
<input type="radio"/> brother	<input type="radio"/> cousin

Other (please specify)

## FAMILY MEMBERS' PERCEPTIONS OF UNIVERSITY

**\*5. Your educational level – please indicate all the levels you have completed or are currently completing**

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Primary School                                   | <input type="checkbox"/> High School Certificate          |
| <input type="checkbox"/> High School: Years 7-10                          | <input type="checkbox"/> TAFE Certificate (or equivalent) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> High School: Year 10 Certificate (or equivalent) | <input type="checkbox"/> Trade Qualification              |
| <input type="checkbox"/> High School: Year 11 – 12                        | <input type="checkbox"/> Workplace Qualification          |

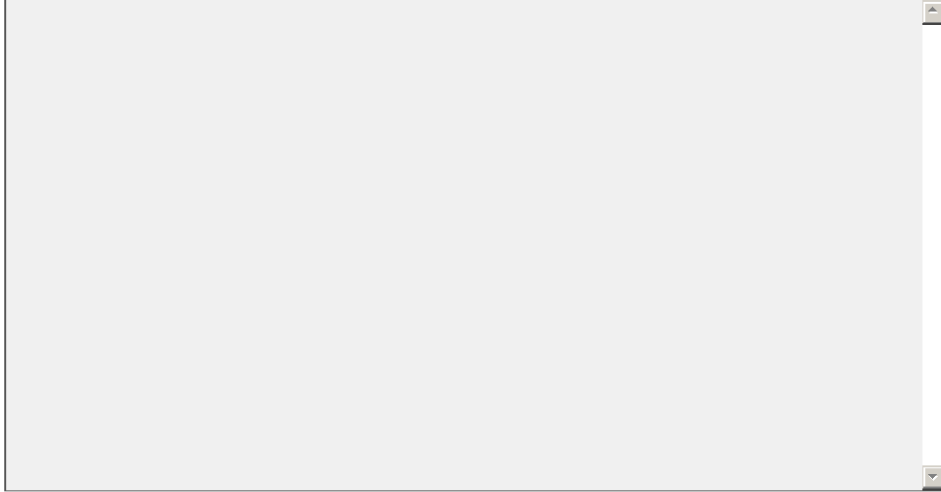
Further details or other (not listed above)

### Family reactions and perceptions

**6. When your family member talked about starting university studies, how did you react or feel about that? What kinds of things did you think about?**

## FAMILY MEMBERS' PERCEPTIONS OF UNIVERSITY

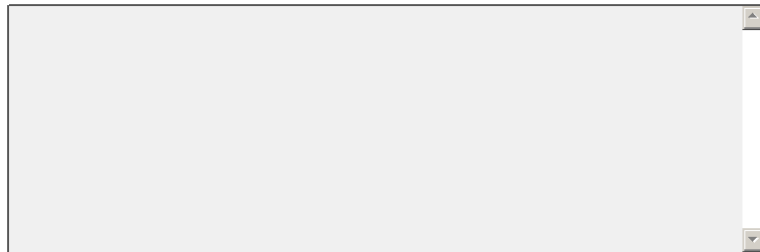
**7. Before your family member started doing university studies, what did you think about university?**



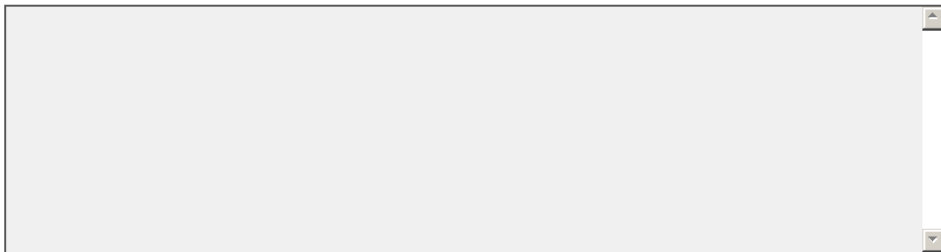
**8. Have these thoughts / feelings changed for you over time?**

- Yes
- No
- I am not sure

If yes, can you describe these changes?

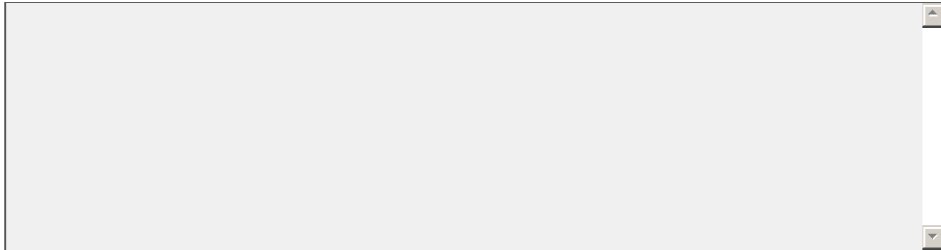


**9. Have you ever thought that you would do university studies? Why / Why not?**

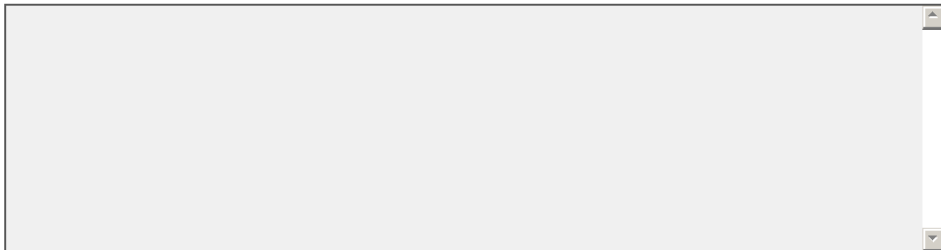


## FAMILY MEMBERS' PERCEPTIONS OF UNIVERSITY

**10. What kinds of things have others in your family, or friends, said about your family member undertaking university studies?**

A large, empty rectangular text area with a vertical scrollbar on the right side, intended for the respondent to provide their answer to question 10.

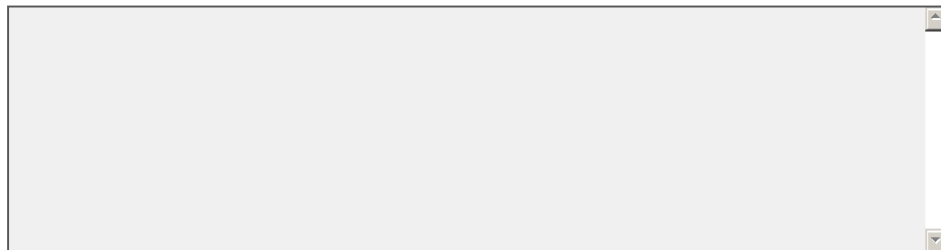
**11. Why do you think they have said these things?**

A large, empty rectangular text area with a vertical scrollbar on the right side, intended for the respondent to provide their answer to question 11.

**12. Are others in your family thinking about doing university studies?**

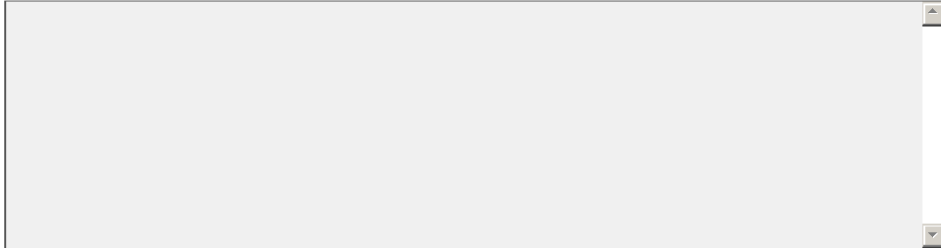
- Yes
- No
- Not sure

Why / Why not?

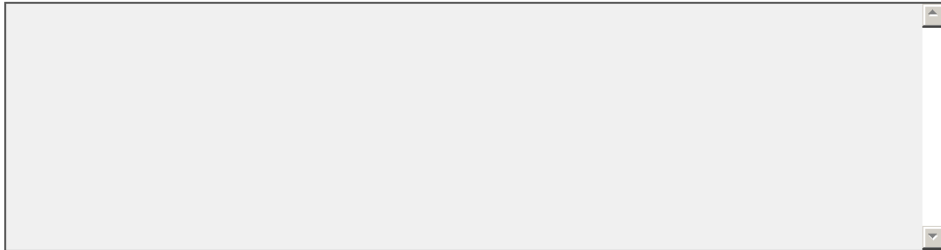
A large, empty rectangular text area with a vertical scrollbar on the right side, intended for the respondent to provide their answer to question 12.

## **FAMILY MEMBERS' PERCEPTIONS OF UNIVERSITY**

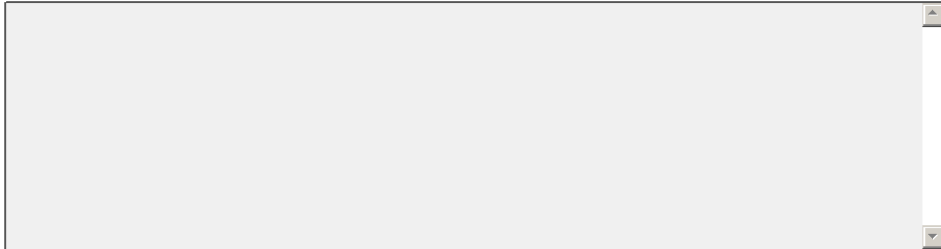
**13. Have you ever visited a university campus, attended a lecture, looked at any formal online study resources, completed free online studies (such as MOOCs) etc? If yes, what did you think about this experience?**

A large, empty rectangular text input area with a vertical scrollbar on the right side, intended for the respondent to provide their answer to question 13.

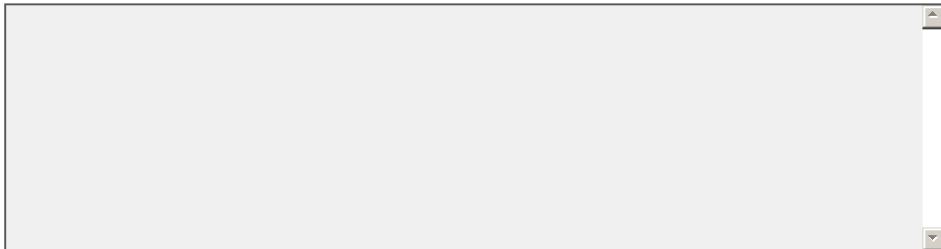
**14. Since your family member started studying, can you describe some of the changes that have occurred for you or your family?**

A large, empty rectangular text input area with a vertical scrollbar on the right side, intended for the respondent to describe changes for question 14.

**15. What do you think have been the 'high points' for your family member (i.e. the achievements that they are proud of in their university work)**

A large, empty rectangular text input area with a vertical scrollbar on the right side, intended for the respondent to describe high points for question 15.

**16. What do you think are some of the difficulties that your family member has encountered since starting to study?**

A large, empty rectangular text input area with a vertical scrollbar on the right side, intended for the respondent to describe difficulties for question 16.

## FAMILY MEMBERS' PERCEPTIONS OF UNIVERSITY

**17. Have you noticed any changes in your family member since they started doing university study?**

- Yes
- No
- Too early to tell
- Not sure

If yes, can you describe the changes below

**18. How have these changes and/or the decision to continue studying made a difference to you or your family?**

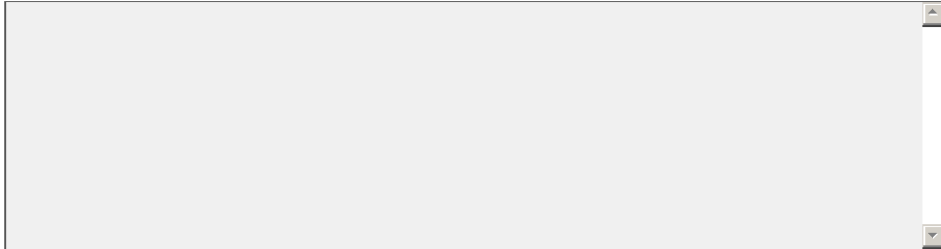
**19. What types of questions have you asked your family member about their university studies?**



## **FAMILY MEMBERS' PERCEPTIONS OF UNIVERSITY**

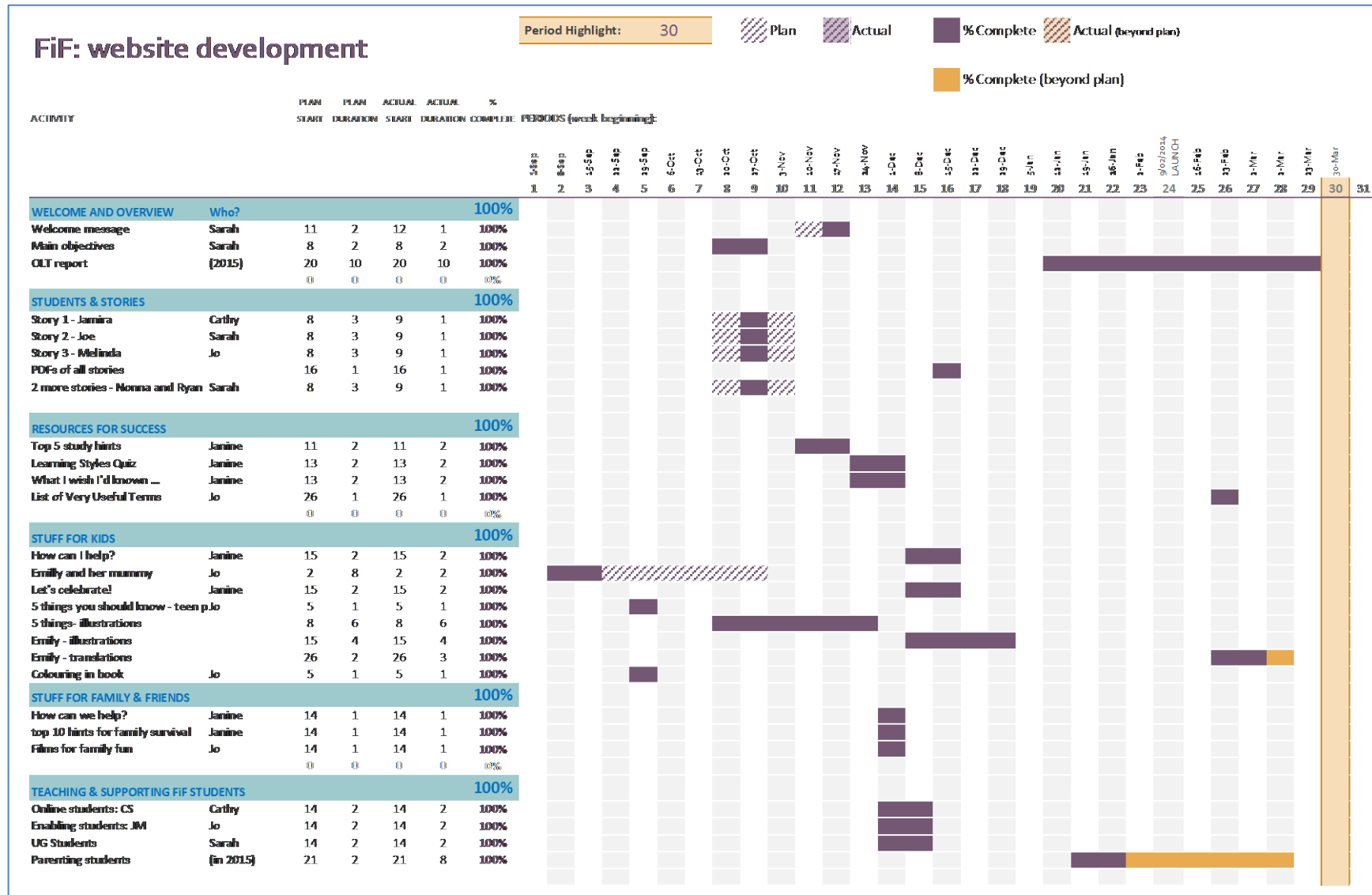
**20. Is there anything else you'd like to say about how this has felt for you (that is, your mum / dad / other family member doing university studies)?**

**Perhaps you could describe the positive and negative things about this decision to continue studying?**

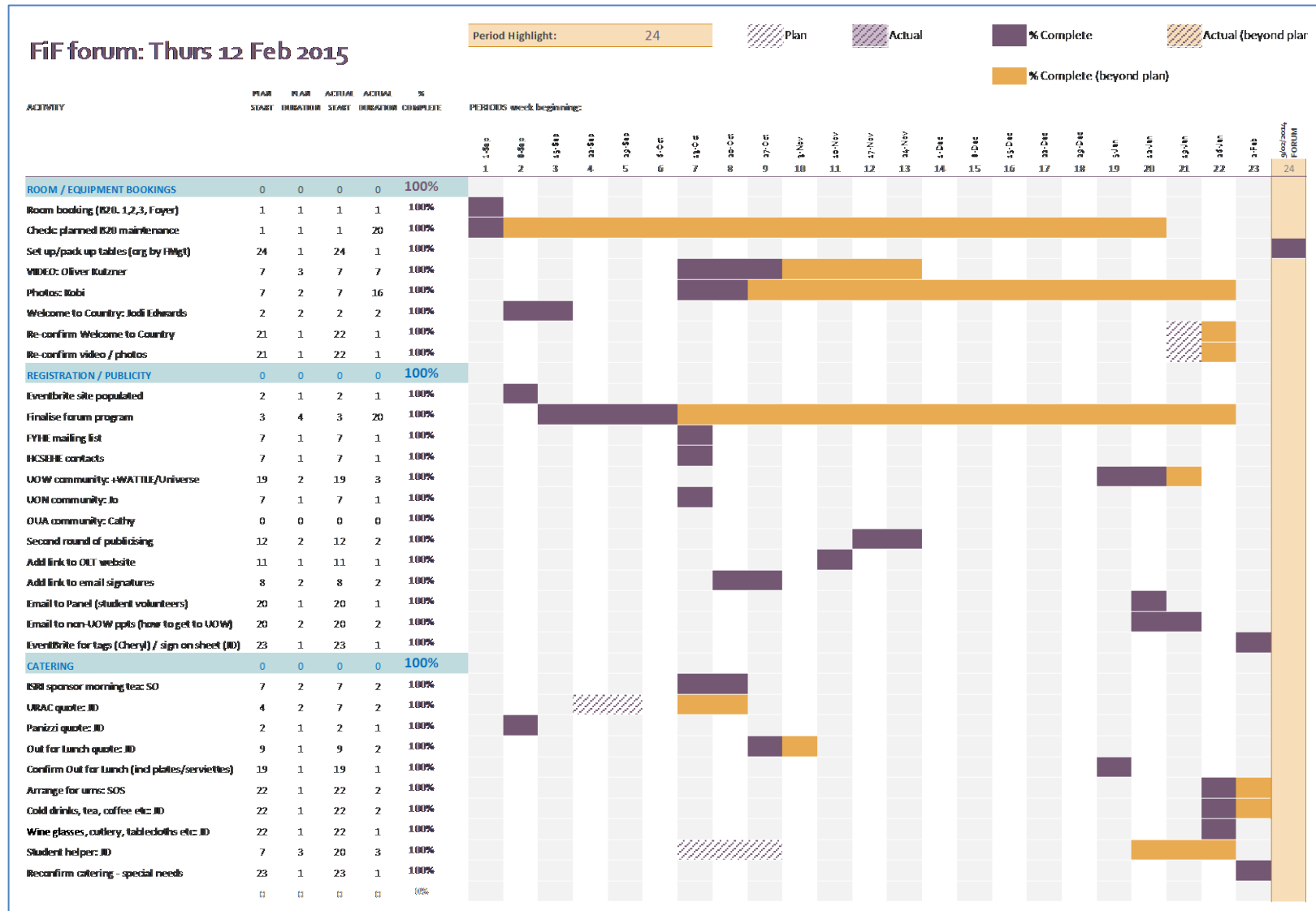


That concludes the survey, thank you very much for your participation

# Appendix J: Gantt chart planner for FiF website development



# Appendix K: Gantt chart planner for FiF forum



## Appendix L: Details of dissemination

While data was being collected on the project, a number of dissemination activities were carried out and these included presentations in both the UK and Australia. In addition the project lead was invited to the present a workshop at the First Year Forum hosted by Flinders University where she spoke about the project outcomes. Reference details for each of these are outlined below:

- Harwood, V & O’Shea, S. (Nov, 2014). *Supporting the first year students from a diverse range of backgrounds*. Flinders Centre for University Teaching 2014 First Year Forum.
- O’Shea, S (July, 2014) *Exploring the participation of first in family students in university with particular reference to how this impacts upon intergenerational choices around, and perceptions of, higher education*. Paper presented at the Forum for Access and Continuing Education, University of Salford, Manchester.
- O’Shea, S., Stone, C., & May, J., (July, 2014). *Breaking the Barriers: supporting and engaging mature age first-in-family university learners and their families*. Workshop presented at the First Year in Higher Education, Darwin.
- O’Shea, S., May, J., & Stone, C., (Dec, 2014). *Ripples of learning –higher education participation, familial habitus, gender and first-in-family female students*. Paper presented at the Gender and Education Conference, University of Melbourne.

**Planned Dissemination:** In addition to the presentations above, findings will also be presented in 2015 as follows:

- O’Shea, S., Stone, C., & May, J., (July, 2015). *“It’s a good life going to uni isn’t it?”* Problematising perceptions of opportunity and betterment for first-in-family learners attending university. Forum on Access and Continuing Education, University of Wales, UK.
- May, J., Stone, C & O’Shea, S (Nov, 2015). *First-in-Family students and experiences on an enabling program*. National Association of Enabling Educators, University of Western Sydney.

Since the Forum, the following invitations have also been received:

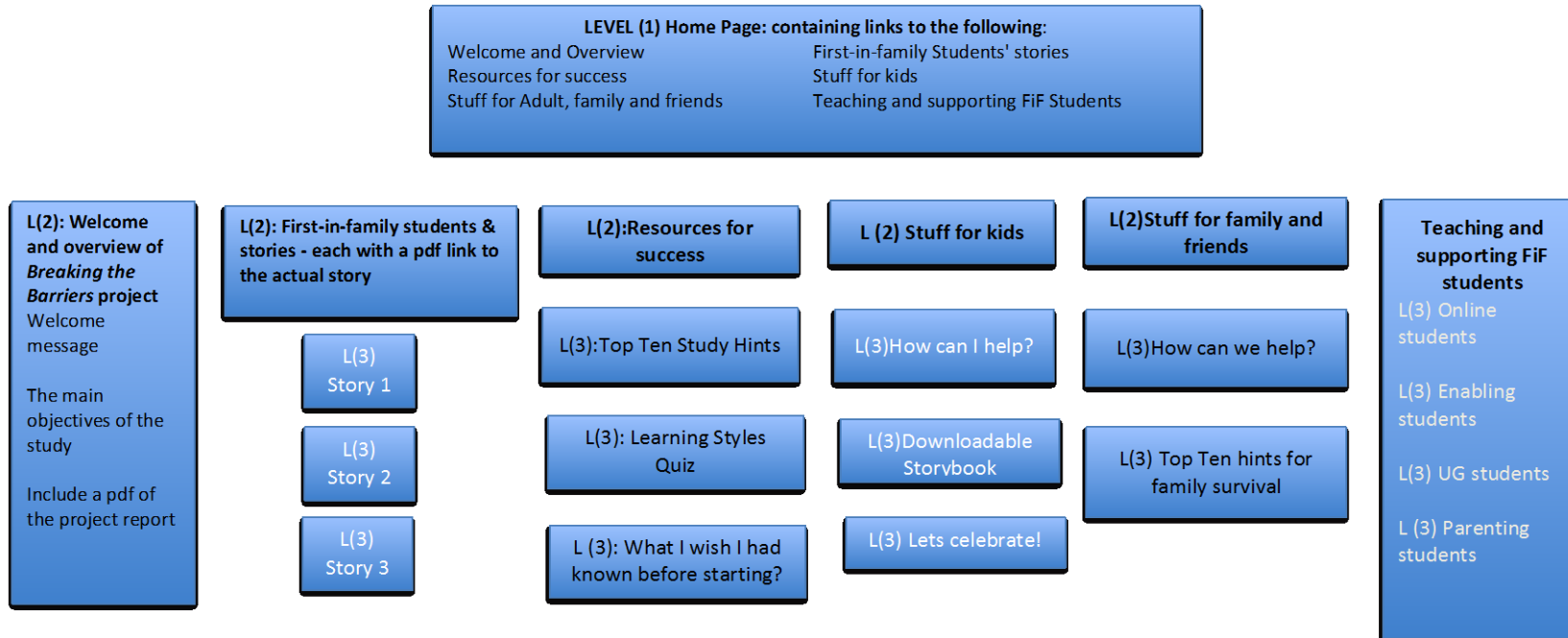
- Presentation on First-in-family students for staff at University of the Sunshine Coast, Queensland
- Presentation on first-in-family students for Enabling program staff at UOW college.
- Workshop for Open Universities Australia on research findings
- Continuing professional development workshop for all staff at University of Wollongong.

Finally, the project team is currently working on the following publications:

Working Title	Target Journal
<i>“What am I waiting for?”</i> The motivations & transformations of online learners who are first in family to come to university	Distance Education
<i>“So how was big school today?”</i> Exploring the role of family in higher education participation for first-in-family students.	Australian Journal of Adult Learning
Intersectionality and first-in-family status	Higher Education
First-in-family and Aboriginal student experience	The Australian Journal of Indigenous Education

## Appendix M: Web map for *Breaking the Barriers* project

(OLT – O’Shea, May & Stone)



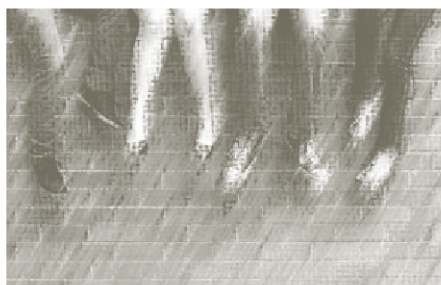
**Key:**

The Level (1) is the main landing page

The Level (2) will contain more generic information related to the specific topic, this may include some pdf downloads (or embedded links to external pages) as well as links to Level (3) pages.

The Level (3) content will be provide very detailed information related to the specific topic, this will be complemented by pdf downloadable resources so that the information can be extracted and used.

## Appendix N: First-in-Family forum program



## PROGRAM

Thursday 12<sup>th</sup> February, 2015  
Building 20  
University of Wollongong  
8:45 to 3:00 pm

# Forum on First-in-Family Students in Higher Education

### Forum schedule

8:45 to 9:15	Registration (Building 20) Refreshments
9:15	Welcome to Country (Ms Jodi Edwards)
9:30	Welcome from DVC(A) Professor Eeva Leinonen, University of Wollongong
9:45	Introduction and Icebreaker Panel Presentation: Outline of the project and vision for the day
10:45	Morning tea
<hr/>	
11:15 to 12:45	<b>Presentations:</b> 11:15: "What am I waiting for?": Motivations and Transformations (Dr Cathy Stone, OUA) 11:45: "So how was big school today?" Exploring the role of family in higher education participation for first- in-family students (Dr Sarah O'Shea, UOW) 12:15: First-in-Family Students' Strategies for Success: "the juice is most definitely worth the squeeze" (A/Prof Josephine May)
<hr/>	
12:45 to 1:30	Light lunch (Building 20)
1:30 to 2:15	Panel: Q&A (including FIF students)
2:15 to 3:00	Round table discussions: Where to from here? Close: drinks and networking



Thanks to ESRI, Faculty of Social Sciences and School of Education at University of Wollongong for funding food and refreshments

This forum is part of an OLT funded project: *Breaking the Barriers: supporting and engaging mature age first-in-family university learners and their families*



University of Wollongong, in conjunction with University of Newcastle and Open Universities Australia

PROJECT TEAM: Dr Sarah O'Shea, A/Prof Josephine May, Dr Cathy Stone, Dr Janine Delahunty

Web: <http://firstinfamily.com.au>

Support for this project has been provided by the Australian Government Office for Learning and Teaching. The views presented in this forum do not necessarily reflect the views of the Australian Government Office for Learning and Teaching.

## Appendix O: *Breaking the Barriers* forum evaluation instrument

### Breaking the Barriers Forum Feedback Form

#### 1. What best describes your current professional role

- Academic Staff Member
- University professional staff member
- Researcher in the area
- Equity practitioner
- Current student
- Student Support staff member
- Policy maker

Other (please specify)

#### 2. Overall, how would you rate the *Breaking the Barriers* forum?

- Excellent
- Very good
- Fairly good
- Mildly good
- Not good at all

Please explain your choice

#### 3. Please respond to the following questions

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	No opinion	Agree	Strongly Agree
The forum was well organised.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My expectations of the forum were fulfilled.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The forum was useful to my work.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I plan to collaborate with people I met today.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The information presented has increased my knowledge of this area	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I will use information and resources from this forum in my work or research	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

# Breaking the Barriers Forum Feedback Form

## 1. What best describes your current professional role

- Academic Staff Member
- University professional staff member
- Researcher in the area
- Equity practitioner
- Current student
- Student Support staff member
- Policy maker

Other (please specify)

## 2. Overall, how would you rate the Breaking the Barriers forum?

- Excellent
- Very good
- Fairly good
- Mildly good
- Not good at all

Please explain your choice

## 3. Please respond to the following questions

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	No opinion	Agree	Strongly Agree
The forum was well organised.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My expectations of the forum were fulfilled.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The forum was useful to my work.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I plan to collaborate with people I met today.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The information presented has increased my knowledge of this area	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I will use information and resources from this forum in my work or research	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>



## Appendix P: Unsolicited feedback on firstinfamily.com.au website

### DISSEMINATION: SUMMARY OF FEEDBACK RECEIVED ON FIRST-IN-FAMILY WEBSITE

The following provides a summary of the feedback received by the project team members via emails, specifically regarding the firstinfamily.com.au website (**bold** not in original):

- CQU, Senior Lecturer, email: “... I’ve had some time to have a really good look at your FIF website and it made me all goosy reading the students’ stories as they replicate so much of what we hear day in day out here. **Congratulations on a wonderful resource** and investigation into a very real and neglected space in the HE arena ... I have shared your site with the head of STEPS and also with the STEPS campus coordinator.... I will also be sharing it with my Enabling students when they commence STEPS next week”
- UON, Senior Academic (Professor) – email response to a BtB team member’s invitation to view the website: “Thanks very much for sharing this with me. **It’s very impressive.** If you haven’t done so already, please also share it with [name of colleague], who is joining UoN as co-director of CEEHE ... “
- CSU, Project Officer: “ ... **Your website looks fantastic!** I hope the launch was a great success ... We have linked to yours on our about page ...” see <http://www.csu.edu.au/firstdegree/about>
- UON, ELFS (English Language and Foundation Studies) March Newsletter: <http://www.newcastle.edu.au/about-uon/governance-and-leadership/faculties-and-schools/english-language-and-foundation-studies-centre/resources-for-staff/elfs-link-newsletter/march-2015>
- UOW, In2Uni, Program Manager: “ ... We have the newsletter scheduled to be sent out in 2 weeks to the **400 teachers on our mailing list.** I’ll send you through a copy as soon as we have it. Just putting the final touches on it this week ...”
- Curtin University, WA, National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education (NCSEHE) newsletter *Roundup 23 February 2015*: “ ... On Thursday 12 February, we visited the University of Wollongong for the OLT-funded Breaking the Barriers: Forum on supporting and engaging first-in-family (FiF) university learners and their families ... the forum presented findings on FiF university students and their families. ... **A key takeaway ... was the new First in Family website,** which offers students, families and higher education staff evidence-based resources developed to support FiF students ...”
- The Aspiration Initiative (TAI), Research Assistant, Aurora Project, Sydney: “ ... I was hoping to continue our conversation about how we might collaborate in the way of cross promotion. I may have mentioned that TAI operate a website ... specifically targeted at Indigenous students looking to create pathways to higher education. Our main aim is to help demystify the university experience ... It would once again, be hugely appreciated if this were something you might share the link for on your website – just as **we would be happy to promote the First in Family website** throughout our media platforms!”
- UON, Co-Director of Centre of Excellence and Equity in Higher Education: “ ... I have just had the pleasure of looking at your website – **it is fabulous!** Really looking forward to meeting you Jo and discussing your work in more detail ...”

## Appendix Q: The Conversation Article

Full text available at: <http://theconversation.com/why-first-in-family-uni-students-should-receive-more-support-38601>


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20 March 2015, 6:28am AEDT

### Why first-in-family uni students should receive more support

**AUTHOR**  
 **Sarah O' Shea**  
Senior Lecturer in Adult, Vocational and Higher Education at University of Wollongong

**DISCLOSURE STATEMENT**  
Sarah O' Shea receives funding from Office for Teaching and Learning

**UNIVERSITY OF WOLLONGONG AUSTRALIA**  
Provides funding as a Member of The Conversation AU. [uow.edu.au](http://uow.edu.au)



Completing university is difficult for students who are the first in their family to enrol. They should be listed as one of the equity groups to receive more support. Flickr/Sarah R, CC BY-SA

Many university students fall into one of the six "equity groups" that receive targeted funding. However, there is one group that has for too long been ignored as a group that needs extra assistance in making it through university.

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