First-in-family learners and higher education participation:

Exploring ways to support, engage and retain students who are the first in their families to come to university.

Presentation for Australian Council of Deans of Science

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What we know...

Equity groups are entering university at unprecedented levels (Universities Australia, 2016)

However attrition rates remain high (Department of Industry, 2012)

Certain groups are more at-risk of attrition with multiple disadvantage being an indicator of risk (Edwards & McMillan, 2015)

The term ‘first-in-family’ is gaining currency and allows students to be identified in a positive and celebratory sense (O’Shea, May, Stone & Delahunty, 2015)
Why first-in-family/ Why now?

- The first in family cohort cuts across various demographics, is not currently defined as an equity category and within Australia, does not necessarily have targeted support.

- Most recent OECD (2012) figures suggest that approximately half the university student population in Australia (51%) is derived from first in family backgrounds (defined on parental educational levels) which is close to the OECD mean average of 53%...

- This student cohort reported internationally as not achieving to the same level academically compared to peers...
Who are first in family learners?

No one universal definition – based on parental levels of education

For the purposes of this research, first in family status was defined as:

\textit{no-one in the immediate family of origin including siblings, children, partners or parents having previously attended a higher education institution or having completed a university degree.}
Why are first-in-family regarded as being ‘at-risk’?

• Lack of access to an ‘educational memory’ within the family

• No ‘other’ to guide and advise

• Ball, Davies, David and Reay (2002) refer to the lack of ‘transgenerational family scripts or “inheritance codes”’ (p57)

• Such gaps in understanding can contribute to individuals having a ‘lack of entitlement to be there, which may have a negative impact on […] self-confidence’ (Thomas & Quinn, 2007, p77).
One Focus Group

Mike – First in Community: “I got a pretty big family – all the [name of family] from up north…”

Evan - First in Community: “Growin’ up in a small Aboriginal community – 50 people located 20ks from the nearest town.”

Phillip – First in extended family: “But then what family do I belong to?”

Joanne – “I’m actually first in my family to complete year 12″
Mike  yeah. I’ve got two personas – Mike home and uni home – just  got that …

Evan  … as we were saying before if you start talking flash words and stuff  people not gonna understand unless you’re talking to a normal educated  man, you know. I speak in a way that people can understand … that’s  just me …

Mike  yeah, you can’t go home and talk to mum and dad about biomedicine

Phillip  yeah, mum’d go ‘you’re alienating me’ [all laugh]

Mike  mum would just go ‘why don’t you go and get sage in the garden’ it fixes  everything. Got a headache? Go and pick sage …

Joanne  that makes me think of something that came up in my first year and when I looked at it  reflecting on it – the way they talk, the language at uni – it’s like a code, right? And if  you can speak that language you pass! On more than just the assessments – you pass if you can speak fluent academic. And I remember we got this thing about mortality  salience – in a nutshell it’s about knowing that you’re going to die, right?  That’s in a nutshell! And they’re saying ‘that is salient’ ‘this is salient’ and I’m looking  at them going ‘doesn’t salient mean salt?’ and I’m like ‘dead salt? What are they talking  about?’ I couldn’t get it and no-one … this when on for weeks … and they’re trying to use  this word and I finally stuck my hand up and …the guy who was a lecturer, he was a bit  rough, like no-one asked him a question … and just barked back at me ‘it means  awareness, Joanne!'
Key Themes around Transition to HE

(O'Shea, May, Stone & Delahunty, 2015)

False Expectations
‘it was a bit of a heavier workload than I thought because, you know, you see movies and uni’s just like partying....’(Ellen, 19, Single, B. Bio-Science, 1st year)

Managing a new culture
‘when you’re first in the family so you don't have those kind of conversations at home where you can just ask in the safety of your home...’
(Abbey, 22, Single, BArts, 3rd Year)

Lack of confidence
“Probably the first semester I passed law, cos I guess I kind of felt like I was a legitimate uni student then”.
(Ashleigh, 21, Single, B Law, 4th Year)
Fellowship Overview

The Fellowship includes the following activities:

Workshops / mentoring offered to higher education providers to assist in the development of contextualised resources, particularly as these relate to retaining FiF learners.

Development of National Principles for engaging with the family and community of first-in-family students.

Design and implementation of a suite of outreach activities targeted at the family/community of learners and contextualised to the individual needs of outreach practitioners at case study sites (UOW and UNSW)
National Principles and Strategies for supporting FiF students and their families.

*Family* is being used in its broadest sense: conceived as anyone who is regarded as being significant to the learner.

Based on consultation with 330 stakeholders in the field who both contributed ideas and perspectives to this evolving list.

This continues to be a ‘work in progress’ and so feedback is welcomed.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key Principles</th>
<th>Principle 1</th>
<th>Changing conversations: Engage with family and community</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Principle 2</td>
<td>Take the mystery out of university</td>
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<tr>
<td>Principle 3</td>
<td>Make no assumptions</td>
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<td>Principle 4</td>
<td>Build a sense of community</td>
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<td>Principle 5</td>
<td>Adopt a strengths-based approach</td>
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<td>Principle 6</td>
<td>Model authenticity: draw on first-in-family student experience</td>
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<td>Principle 7</td>
<td>Institutions: commit to resources and policy</td>
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Introducing the First in Family Website: firstinfamily.com.au
Conversations about retaining and engaging first-in-family learners in HE

Pre-Forum Workshop schedule: Thursday 24 November, 2016

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Session</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1:30 pm</td>
<td>Registration (Building 20) and refreshments</td>
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<tr>
<td>2:00 pm</td>
<td>Welcome to Country (&gt;)</td>
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<tr>
<td>2:15 pm</td>
<td>Focus on AIME Mentoring</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3:15 pm</td>
<td>Best Practice in Online Remove Mentoring: iSee online mentoring with young people in remote settings</td>
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<tr>
<td>4:15-4:55</td>
<td>Implications for Practice</td>
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Forum schedule: Friday 25 November, 2016

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Session</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8:45 am</td>
<td>Registration (Building 20) and tea/coffee</td>
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<tr>
<td>9:15 am</td>
<td>Welcome to Country (&gt;)</td>
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<tr>
<td>9:30 am</td>
<td>Opening Address</td>
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<tr>
<td>9:45 am</td>
<td>Invited speaker: Dr Ema Wolfram-Folisch, University of Auckland: A Global Perspective: Exploring First in Family learners experiences internationally</td>
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<td>10:30 am</td>
<td>Morning tea</td>
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<td>11:00 am</td>
<td>Lightening Presentations on Best Practice (1)</td>
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<tr>
<td>11:30 am</td>
<td>Invited speaker: A/Prof Sharron King, A/Prof Ben McCann, Dr Ann Luzecky, University of South Australia (UniSA): Transforming Identity: First in family students’ experiences of success at university</td>
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<tr>
<td>12:15 pm</td>
<td>Lightening Presentations on Best Practice (2)</td>
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<tr>
<td>12:45 pm</td>
<td>Lunch and networking</td>
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<tr>
<td>1:30 pm</td>
<td>Invited speaker: Dr Cathy Stone, NCSEHE Fellow / University of Newcastle: Improving participation, success and retention of online first-in-family university students</td>
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<tr>
<td>2:15 pm</td>
<td>Invited speaker: Ms Kara King, Charles Sturt University: Supporting students who are first in family and community to come to university: A focus on resources</td>
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<td>3:00 pm</td>
<td>Roundtable discussion with speakers on themes emerging from the forums, questions, comments from participants</td>
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<tr>
<td>3:45 pm</td>
<td>Close and where to from here?</td>
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<tr>
<td>4:00 pm</td>
<td>Finish</td>
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Reflections

Consider the following questions:

• Is the first-in-family cohort a significant one in your discipline or institution?

• What is your understanding or experiences of first-in-family students in your discipline?

• What might it be like from the family’s perspective when no-one has been to university before, and then a close family member starts?
Questions / Feedback

Interested in attending the Forum?

References


References


