



Progress Bulletin

February 2019

Professor Sarah O'Shea
2019 NCSEHE Research Fellow

'Mind the Gap!' Exploring the post-graduation outcomes and employment mobility of individuals who are first in their family to complete a university degree

Project update

This Research Fellowship is a joint endeavour between the National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education (NCSEHE) and the Centre for Higher Education Equity and Diversity Research (CHEEDR) at La Trobe University, and is being led by Professor Sarah O'Shea (the University of Wollongong).

The Fellowship commenced in mid-January 2019 and adopts a mixed methods approach to deeply explore the post-graduation experiences and outcomes for students who are the first in their family to attend university.

The Fellowship will analyse available statistics related to post-graduation outcomes and include in-depth narrative biographical interviews (O'Shea, 2014) and surveys with graduated students and key stakeholders in the field. Drawing on Bourdieuan concepts of capital and habitus, the Fellowship will deeply explore how learners negotiate existing and new forms of capital to compete in shrinking employment fields. Participants will be those who are the first in their family to attend university, this categorisation based on the recognition that many of these students are intersected by various equity categorisations (O'Shea, 2016–2019).

The qualitative and quantitative data will be analysed to consider key recommendations underpinning best practise in supporting students from diverse backgrounds to achieve their post-graduation desires and ambitions.



While still in its early stages, the following has been achieved under the auspices of the Fellowship:

- ▶ An Expert Committee has been formed with leading researchers and scholars within the graduate employability and equity fields including:

Professor Dawn Bennett, Curtin University
Professor Jessica Venderiele, La Trobe University
Professor Ann-Marie Bathmaker, Birmingham University UK
Professor John Phillimore, Curtin University
Associate Professor Amani Bell, IRU Vice Chancellors Fellow
Professor Sue Trinidad, NCSEHE, Curtin University
Associate Professor Andrew Harvey, CHEEDR, La Trobe University

- ▶ A framing paper for the Fellowship is currently being written which will situate the proposed activities within broader sociological, policy and practice fields.
- ▶ Ethics to interview/survey students, key stakeholders and alumni is currently being prepared for submission. An additional ethics application has already been approved to return to previous research participants for follow-up interviews post-graduation.
- ▶ Preliminary analysis of existing data that explored how First-in-Family students persisted in higher education including their perceptions of 'success' beyond graduation.
- ▶ Broad level analysis of statistical data available in Australia such as the QILT Graduate Outcomes Survey (2018) and also review of key research reports within Australia and internationally.
- ▶ Review of key research articles related to graduate outcomes and equity that includes the grey literature in the field; this review is still in preliminary stages and will inform a larger literature review to be completed in April 2019.

References

O'Shea, S. (2014). Transitions and Turning Points: How first in family female students story their transition to university and student identity formation. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 27(2), 135–158.

O'Shea, S. (2016-2019) "Capitals and Capabilities: Rethinking higher education persistence". Australian Research Council Discovery Project (DP170100705). Available from www.heaccessforall.com

For further details or updates about the Fellowship, please contact first-in-family@uow.edu.au or follow @Uni_FiF.

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