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**Reinventing the Gap Year: Establishing new forms of supportive communications between universities,
regional students and parents**

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION STATEMENT – Gap Year Students’ Focus Group

(1) What is this study about?

You are invited to take part in a research study about making decisions about gap years. The gap year for this project is a year (or two) ‘gap’ between completing Year 12 and commencing university studies. Specifically we are trying to research, develop and evaluate a free and non-branded information resource to ensure informed decision making about gap years for regional students and their families. This project is a collaborative effort by six widening participation equity practitioners and six researchers from The University of Sydney, The University of Canberra, The University of Wollongong and the Country Education Foundation. Additionally, The University of Sydney works with their community partner, NSW DE Steering Committee to deliver the proposed project.

You have been invited to participate in this study because you completed high school in a regional area, have taken a gap year and understand the kinds of decisions you made in order to do this, you may also have made (or are making) decisions about whether to go to university at the end of your gap year. This means you are well positioned to help the researchers better understand what information is needed for making such decisions. This Participant Information Statement tells you about the research study. Knowing what is involved will help you decide if you want to take part in the research. Please read this sheet carefully and ask questions about anything that you don’t understand or want to know more about.

Participation in this research study is voluntary.

By giving your consent to take part in this study you are telling us that you:

- ✓ Understand what you have read.
- ✓ Agree to take part in the research study as outlined below.
- ✓ Agree to the use of your personal information as described.

You will be given a copy of this Participant Information Statement to keep.

(2) Who is running the study?

The study is being carried out by the following researchers from:

- The University of Sydney: Samantha McMahon, Valerie Harwood, Alyson Grove O'Grady, Catherine (Kate) Smyth, Patrick Brownlee, Mary Teague
- The University of Canberra: Phillip Roberts, Laurie Poretti
- The University of Wollongong: Sarah O'Shea, Kylie Austin, Jade Andrews
- The Country Education Foundation: Ashlea Pritchard, Wendy Cohen.

This study is being funded by the NSW department of Education. None of the institutions or individual researchers in this project will benefit from their involvement in the study.

(3) What will the study involve for me?

You will be asked to participate in a focus group. This focus group will happen at a time and location of mutual convenience with you, the researchers and fellow focus group members, as per the advertisement for the focus group. Research sites could include, Sydney University or a public place such as a community hall or offices. If a face to face meeting is not possible due to distance from the venue, you can ask to attend the focus group via zoom software. Zoom is free to download and use on your phone and computer <https://www.zoom.us>.

During the focus group you will be asked questions like: "What sorts of things have you already heard or seen about 'the gap year'? Where did you see / hear this?", you will also be asked to look at a list of topics that research says is important for gap year decisions and offer your opinion about which are most / least important and whether you think there's extra topics that should be considered. You will also be shown the format of the proposed resource and asked your opinion of that.

(4) How much of my time will the study take?

The focus groups are 20 - 30 minutes duration.

(5) Who can take part in the study?

To take part in this study you must have lived in a regional area when you completed your HSC and you be taking, or have taken, a gap year.

(6) Do I have to be in the study? Can I withdraw from the study once I've started?

Being in this study is completely voluntary and you do not have to take part. Your decision whether to participate will not affect your current or future relationship with the researchers or anyone else at the University of Sydney, or any of the universities or organisations involved in this study (including The University of Canberra, The University of Wollongong, The Country Education Foundation, or our other providers such as Education and Training Out West).

If you take part in a focus group, you are free to stop participating at any stage or to refuse to answer any of the questions. However, it will not be possible to withdraw your individual comments from our records once the group has started, as it is a group discussion.

(7) Are there any risks or costs associated with being in the study?

Aside from giving up your time, we do not expect that there will be any risks or costs associated with taking part in this study.

(8) Are there any benefits associated with being in the study?

We cannot guarantee that you will receive any direct benefits from being in the study. There is potential benefit from reflecting on and working through decisions collaboratively of gaining extra perspectives to consider when making gap year decisions in the future.

(9) What will happen to information about me that is collected during the study?

You will not be asked personal questions during the focus group. The focus groups will be audio-recorded. If the focus groups take place 'in person' an audio recorder will be used. If the focus groups take place via zoom then the zoom software will be used to record the audio (we will not record the video component of the zoom meeting). This audio is recorded so the focus groups can be transcribed and analysed accurately. What is said in the focus group may be quoted in reports and publications (e.g., meetings, presentations, reports to funding body, journal articles, book chapters, conference papers, media releases and on websites). Study findings may be published, but you will not be individually identifiable in these publications. All identifying features such as names of people, places, businesses and organisations will be removed during the transcription process and replaced with fake names. The only people who can access the original audio file and transcript are the researchers listed on this form and transcribers/research assistants, who will sign confidentiality agreements.

Your information will be stored securely and your identity/information will be kept strictly confidential, except as required by law. The audio recordings, word document transcripts and related data analysis files will be stored on University of Sydney eNotebook servers. The only hard copy items to be stored will be participant information sheets and these will be stored in a locked filing cabinet in the Chief Investigators' office (room 920 of the Education Building at the University of Sydney). Data will be retained for five years after the study, after this time all data for the project will be destroyed.

By providing your consent, you are agreeing to us collecting personal information about you for the purposes of this research study. Your information will only be used for the purposes outlined in this Participant Information Statement, unless you consent otherwise.

(10) Can I tell other people about the study?

Yes, you are welcome to tell other people about the study.

(11) What if I would like further information about the study?

When you have read this information, Samantha McMahon will be available to discuss it with you further and answer any questions you may have. If you would like to know more at any stage during the study, please feel free to contact Samantha McMahon (samantha.mcmahon@sydney.edu.au, +61 2 8627 5137)

(12) Will I be told the results of the study?

You have a right to receive feedback about the overall results of this study. You can tell us that you wish to receive feedback by ticking the relevant box on the consent form and providing your email address. This feedback will be in the form of a brief summary and links to any open source online

publications from the project. You will receive this feedback after the study is finished (i.e. after June 2021).

(13) What if I have a complaint or any concerns about the study?

Research involving humans in Australia is reviewed by an independent group of people called a Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC). The ethical aspects of this study have been approved by the HREC of the University of Sydney 2019/643. As part of this process, we have agreed to carry out the study according to the *National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (2007)*. This statement has been developed to protect people who agree to take part in research studies.

If you are concerned about the way this study is being conducted or you wish to make a complaint to someone independent from the study, please contact the university using the details outlined below. Please quote the study title and protocol number.

The Manager, Ethics Administration, University of Sydney:

- **Telephone:** +61 2 8627 8176
- **Email:** ro.humanethics@sydney.edu.au
- **Fax:** +61 2 8627 8177 (Facsimile)

This information sheet is for you to keep