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

**PARTICIPANT INFORMATION STATEMENT FOR YEAR 12 STUDENTS**

**(1) What is this study about?**

We invite you to take part in a research on making decisions about gap years. A gap year is a 'break' between completing Year 12 and commencing university or further studies. Specifically, we are trying to evaluate a free and non-branded information resource that we have developed to help regional students and their families in making gap year decisions. This is a collaborative project between six widening participation equity practitioners and six researchers from The University of Sydney, The University of Canberra, The University of Wollongong, together with the Country Education Foundation and the NSW DE Steering Committee.

We invite you to participate in this study because you are a Year 12 student (or over 17 years of age) in a regional area and will soon decide about taking a gap year. Your participation can help the researchers better understand what information is needed for making such decisions. This Participant Information Statement tells you about the research study and helps you decide whether to take part in the research. Please read this sheet carefully and feel free to ask any questions.

You are free to decide to participate in this research study or not.

If you give your consent to take part in this study, it means 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.

This Participant Information Statement is for you 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, Nada Labib
- The University of Canberra: Phillip Roberts, Laurie Poretti
- The University of Wollongong: Kylie Austin, Jade Andrews
- The Country Education Foundation: Ashlea Pritchard.

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?**

Participation in any part of the research is entirely voluntary. There are several different ways you can choose to be involved in the study, you can pick and choose which ones.

[Year 12 Post School Intention Survey](#) – this is an online survey that should take about 7 minutes to complete. It will ask you questions about whether you are studying an ATAR pathway and what your career, education and financial plans might be for when you’ve finished high school. It is not a major focus of the survey, but there are also some questions that relate to the impacts COVID-19 and recent natural disasters may have on your gap year and uni decisions. The survey mostly features ‘tick-a-box’ questions and a few optional text boxes. Completing the survey also provides choices about whether or not you would like to sign up to a monthly email about gap year information (this is not compulsory, you can skip this question) and it asks you to think about whether or not the research team can use your survey responses just for this survey or for this survey and future research projects (this is also not compulsory in any way).

*Resource Evaluation Interviews/focus groups* - If you have been using, or are intending to use, the monthly email resource about gap year decision making (available at <https://astar.tv/gapyear/>), then you are eligible to participate in the resource evaluation interviews/focus groups. Ideally, we’d like to hear from you before or soon after you start using the resource (a pre-interview/focus group) and again one year after being introduced to the resource (a post interview/focus group). But, if you’ve stumbled upon this information sheet *6-12 months after* starting to use the resource, we would also like to hear your thoughts and you can opt to do a post-interview/focus group only. Each pre or post interview will take no more than 30 minutes (no more than one hour in the case of focus group) of your time and will be arranged to happen outside of school hours, either at a participating university campus or via zoom. Zoom is an app that is a bit like Skype or Facetime and lets you see and talk to the interviewer, the app is free to download ([zoom.us](https://zoom.us)) and works on your phone or your computer. During the interview/focus group you will be asked about your thoughts about gap years and the monthly email resource (e.g. what was most memorable, what new information if any was provided, what was least helpful etc.). It is not a major focus of the survey, but there are also some questions that relate to the impacts COVID-19 on gap year and uni decisions. To organise timing, location, modality that suits you, the researchers request that you complete a 3-minute [recruitment survey](#). This short recruitment survey is not part of the research (we will **not** publish information from this or share this information with anyone); it is a helpful way for the researchers to keep track of scheduling interviews/focus groups. If you’d rather not do the recruitment survey but you’re still keen to be interviewed or participate in a focus group, you can email Sam McMahon directly instead ([samantha.mcmahon@sydney.edu.au](mailto:samantha.mcmahon@sydney.edu.au)).

[Resource Evaluation Surveys](#) - If you have been using, or are intending to use, the monthly email resource about gap year decision making (available at <https://astar.tv/gapyear/>), then you are eligible to participate in the resource evaluation survey. This survey will be released about 12 months after you first signed up for the resource. If you tick the relevant box about ‘resource evaluation surveys’ on the High School student consent form and provide a (non-school) email address, then the researchers will send you the survey link when it goes live. The survey will take approximately 7 minutes to complete

and will feature questions about your opinion of the monthly emails you received. It is not a major focus of the survey, but there are also some questions that relate to the impacts COVID-19 and recent natural disasters may have on your gap year and uni decisions.

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

- The [Year 12 Post School Intention survey](#) will take about 7 minutes to complete.
- The resource evaluation interviews are 20 - 30 minutes duration for each pre or post interview (a total of one hour if you do both pre and post interviews) or 45-60 minutes duration for each pre or post focus group (a total of 1.5-2 hours if you do both pre and post focus groups). The [recruitment survey for interview/focus group](#) participation is 3 minutes duration.
- The [resource evaluation survey](#) will take about 7 minutes to complete.

#### **(5) Who can take part in the study?**

- To take part in the survey and/or the interviews/focus groups you must be living in a regional area and attending Year 12 at high school. You must be over 17 years of age to participate.
- You do not need to be using or intending to use the resource in order to participate in the Year 12 Post School Destination survey.
- To be eligible for participating in Resource evaluation interviews/focus groups or the Resource evaluation survey you must be using, or intending to use, the monthly email resource available here (available at <https://astar.tv/gapyear/>).

#### **(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. The interviews/focus groups and surveys are not part of your schoolwork or any coursework that you complete with a university outreach program. You do not have to participate in the research to meet any course requirements. Participating (or not) in the research will have no impact on your grades, achievements, outcomes, status or learning experiences at school or at university, now or in the future.

Your decision whether to participate will not affect your current or future relationship with the researchers, your school, or anyone else at the University of Sydney, or any of other 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 any of the surveys or one or more individual interview/s, you may refuse to answer any of the questions, you are free to stop participating and withdraw at any stage (up until results of the study are published). However, if you choose to be interviewed in a small group and not just by yourself, this is totally okay but it means that then 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 costs associated with taking part in this study.

It is possible that you might experience some discomfort when thinking about impacts of COVID-19 and natural disasters (drought, flood, fires) on your post school plans. If this happens, we encourage you to access support via free 24-hour counselling services such as Lifeline ([lifeline.org.au](http://lifeline.org.au), 13 11 14) or beyond blue (<https://www.beyondblue.org.au>, 1300 22 4636). Beyond Blue also offers a specialised Coronavirus mental well-being support service that can be accessed via their website.

Lifeline also offers a Drought tool kit for getting through the drought and a website about recovering from natural disasters (<https://www.lifeline.org.au/about-lifeline/media-centre/natural-disaster-support>).

**(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 or 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?**

The interviews/focus groups will be audio-recorded so that they can be transcribed, the survey data will be recorded in a secure, password protected, university approved survey platform. The interview/focus groups transcriptions and survey data will be used for data analysis and reporting. What is said in the interviews/focus groups and typed into surveys 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. Even though your interview/focus group may happen with any of the researchers listed from any of the universities on this document, the audio recordings, word document transcripts and related data analysis files will be stored centrally for the project on University of Sydney Research Data Store 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 Research Officer's office (room 515 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 ([samantha.mcmahon@sydney.edu.au](mailto:samantha.mcmahon@sydney.edu.au), +61 2 8627 5137) will be available to discuss and answer any questions you may have.

**(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. Feedback will be in the form of a brief summary and links to any free 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 (2019/881). 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](mailto:ro.humanethics@sydney.edu.au)
- **Fax:** +61 2 8627 8177 (Facsimile)

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