



# Key Findings for New University Students

## First in Family: Mature Age Students

### UNIVERSITY CAN INITIALLY BE A CHALLENGE

Many mature age and non-school leaver FIF students did not have friends attending the same university and they found the information provided by their friends did not help their transition to university life. While mature age students may find that the social side of university is not as important for them as younger students, they still need to find support to get through their studies.

*"I think in Week 2 or Week 3 I'd wondered what I'd walked into, and wondered how I was ever going to do it – with home and work and all the rest of it. So at that point I thought I've just made the biggest mistake ever. But then, I just went through it and soldiered through it, and... here I am."*

More mature age FIF students found that the difficulty of work at university was extremely different to high school. Many find that support for their university studies does not come from existing family and friends who often do not have a clear understanding of what they are doing at university or why they choose to be there.

### What does this mean for you?

**You will need to find new mentors and develop new support networks:** Some students find a sympathetic tutor/ lecturer or ask other students to help them understand what is required of them. Don't be afraid to ask for help!

**Develop peer networks:** Students found having the support of fellow students and friends crucial. And if your course or university has a peer mentoring scheme – join in if you can!

**Give yourself time:** Most FIF students find the first six months the hardest, but once settled in go on to be highly successful students.

*"My best advice to other students is to make friends with other people doing the same course as you, and stay organised and on top of your work."*

### UNIVERSITY IS A JUGGLING ACT

Since mature age FIF students are more likely to go to university to improve their job prospects and earning potential, many find it a juggling act to manage the demands of their existing employment, family and personal needs, and getting used to meeting university expectations.

### BACKGROUND

- FIF students are the first member of their immediate family, including siblings, to attend university.
- This research explored the in-depth stories of eighteen FIF students across the three South Australian universities and analysed the expectations and experiences of over 5,300 FIF students.
- Statistics show that 32% of FIF students are over 21 years and 17% are over 30 years.
- FIF students attending university may find they need to take time to get to know and understand the university environment and what is expected of them.



FiF students often tend to neglect their own health and wellbeing as they struggle to juggle their study and other responsibilities. However, FiF students, especially mature age students, are also likely to be more aware of how their commitments/activities outside of university affects their ability to study and plan accordingly.

### What does that mean for you?

**Find a balance:** Be aware that it is going to be difficult to manage study and other responsibilities, prepare yourself for university life by working out in advance how you might achieve a balance.

**Be prepared:** Prior planning helps prevent poor performance. Be aware that it is going to be difficult to juggle competing demands, focus on planning your studies to succeed.

**Seek help:** University student services provide courses for students on aspects such as time management and study skills. Find out about these courses and participate whenever possible.

*"I'm quite organised, I am a compulsive list maker and I set myself targets and a time frame for everything because I have to, I've got teenage kids, got a house to run, I've got a full time job and all of those things, so if I'm not organised I just can't do it all."*

## MANAGE YOUR EXPECTATIONS

FiF students pride themselves on being hard workers. Mature age FiF students:

- Often have a high level of self-confidence/capability and expect to do well at university
- Typically expect to study more per week than other students: meaning they enter university with realistic expectations about how much study is actually required
- Often have high expectations of their own performance at university and can place a lot of pressure on themselves. Mostly, these expectations are met as students reported their performance as either better or much better than expected.

*"[studying] does take up a lot of time and I want to do it properly and to be honest my biggest thing when I first committed to it was I'm not just going to pass and so I've set myself pretty high goals and my family think I am insane but I have sort of set these personal goals for myself."*

### What does that mean for you?

**Be realistic:** There's nothing wrong with reaching for the stars but try to develop goals that are reasonable and achievable. Don't be too hard on yourself if your performance does not always meet your own high expectations.



## TRANSITION INTO UNIVERSITY REQUIRES PATIENCE AND PERSEVERANCE

We know that FiF students are highly capable and do particularly well when given opportunities to participate and the support to succeed, but mature age FiF students also don't have family members who can help them understand what to expect from University so they may need to seek this information from other sources and sometimes feel like they don't really fit in initially.

While many mature age FiF students found the transition into uni life a challenge, all that were interviewed said it was worth it. As well as the potentially improved employment and career benefits of studying, many students focused on other benefits including making new friends with similar interests and beliefs and improving their communication and critical thinking skills.

*"I feel like I've walked up a really big mountain and I'm just at the very top now and about to come over the other side."*

### What does this mean for you?

**Inform yourself:** Find out as much as you can about University before you start by attending Open Days, Orientation week, information and study sessions.

**Focus on the positives:** Remember that university will be worth it in the long run. The benefits you'll gain through the new skills you develop as a result of your studies are worth the hard slog!