

Students with Young Families, Cohort Management and Opening Solutions for All

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Stepping into a new culture and context to undertake study is both a significant learning experience and for many reasons a challenge for International students. Students who undertake this journey as parents with young children face an even greater challenge of balancing study and family commitments.

In recent years, there has been a rise in the number of International students who undertake University study with a young family, particularly among the Middle Eastern student cohort. In 2013, International Student Life at Swinburne University in Victoria conducted a survey of Middle Eastern International students from various countries including, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Libya and the UAE. All students in this group were studying and caring for a young family with children aged between 6 months and 15 years of age.

Through methodology of a short answer survey and individual student interviews, students were asked to reflect on their individual experiences. They were asked to comment on the accessibility of important information across a range of services in their local community. These services included local schools, maternal and child health services, childcare, family day care, playgroups, family support services and social services.

Analysis of the data identified the need for further support and information sharing among Middle Eastern students. Furthermore, the common similarities in student responses suggested the importance of extrapolating and examining the findings across the wider student population.

In light of these findings, a workshop entitled “Juggling Uni and Parenthood” was created by Swinburne International Student Life in collaboration with Community and Family Projects officers from the local council as well as support staff at the Swinburne Health Service and Swinburne College. The workshop encouraged students to engage with relevant staff from both internal and external departments within the community, and also provided an opportunity for students to interact with one another and share their experiences.

This presentation examines the perceptions and experiences of International students with young families that inspired the development of a collaborative workshop in an effort to support International students who are seeking to find the right study, work and life balance.