

WESTERN SYDNEY  
UNIVERSITY



**Vice-Chancellor's**  
**GENDER EQUALITY FUND**  
**Final Report 2020**

**Report Title:**

***BREAST - Breastfeeding and  
Returning to work/study Education  
And Support Technologies***

**Author/s:** *Dr Nicole Bridges  
Vanessa Campbell*

# Contents

Recommendations.....	3
Executive Summary .....	5
Itemised Budget Expenditure .....	6
Research Report.....	7
Bibliography .....	24
Appendix .....	25

## Recommendations

Staff and students feel that it is very important for WSU to be a breastfeeding-friendly workplace in both accreditation and culture. They are actively seeking information on how they can successfully combine breastfeeding and work/study. Participants feel that more can be done to grow the understanding of breastfeeding within the University as “it’s essential that it’s accredited however all staff members (need to be made) aware that breastfeeding is a right and not a privilege”. We specifically recommend the following:

- **Enhanced awareness of and support for breastfeeding students** - It seems that for students, there is still room to improve the wider University’s understanding of what is required to support breastfeeding families. Comments such as “I’ve heard many stories from students facing difficulties with exams due to breastfeeding - there seems to be a gap in how these policies are applied to students and staff”, were not uncommon and show that although WSU is a leader in this area, more education and support via breastfeeding-friendly policies are needed.
- **Increased engagement with staff and students who are currently breastfeeding** - There is the opportunity to better engage with those who are breastfeeding, as 50% of participants felt that WSU didn’t know they were breastfeeding. This would make it hard to provide information and support to this group of parents as they don’t feel they have been asked the question or given the opportunity to state that they are, and how the University can support them.
- **Improved facilities that support a breastfeeding-friendly community on campus** - The University can better support those who visit its campuses to breastfeed, as the research showed that there were high rates of negative sentiment towards facilities and support offered. Staff and students are very aware of the benefits of breastfeeding to at least 2 years and want to combine breastfeeding and returning to work/study. They are actively looking for information that will help them make this transition.
- **Continued support for and promotion of the “WSU Breastfeeding and Returning to Work and Study Support Network” Facebook group** - Satisfaction with this Facebook group is high. This group could be an extension of WSU’s support offered to parents going on maternity leave or returning to work to provide them with up-to-date and evidence-based information. It could reinforce that breastfeeding parents are encouraged to work/study at WSU and show the range of support that is available. Continued resourcing of this group and a strategy to help grow awareness of its existence could help pregnant and breastfeeding staff and students feel encouraged and supported in discussing their return to work and study plans with their supervisors based on readily available resources.

- **Additional research into the breastfeeding culture at WSU** - Future research could focus on breastfeeding parents' return to work and study experiences to identify where there are gaps in the information and support available to see if this closed Facebook group and wider support network could enhance their experiences, and the associated health outcomes for mothers and babies. It was identified that mothers did not feel that WSU were aware of their breastfeeding status and this gap in knowledge on behalf of the institution made it difficult to support them in a manner that would make their sustained breastfeeding journey easier, more inclusive and productive in terms of work, study and baby-led outcomes.

## Executive Summary

The following report relates to the Breastfeeding and Return to work/study Education and Support Technologies (BREAST) project that was undertaken in 2020/2021 as a result of funding from Western Sydney University's (WSU) Vice Chancellor's Gender Equality Fund.

The BREAST project continues the important work of Dr Elaine Burns who conducted the Breastfeeding Friendly Communities at WSU project, which described the provision of breastfeeding-friendly spaces at WSU campuses and benchmarked WSU breastfeeding policy and provisions against those in other universities. The work of Dr Burns led to WSU being accredited as a Breastfeeding Friendly Workplace by the Australian Breastfeeding Association (ABA) in 2019.

The original aim of the BREAST project was to build on the work of Dr Burns and the university's breastfeeding-friendly accreditation by creating and evaluating the effectiveness of a WSU social networking site that was to provide information and support to staff and students as they combine breastfeeding with their return to work and/or study on-campus. However, as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, there was a slight adjustment to the project. With staff and students experiencing periods of not working on campus, this has raised a different set of issues that still require information and support. This project went ahead as originally planned, with the focus shifting to how breastfeeding parents can successfully combine returning to work and study, while working/ studying from home and/or on-campus.

The project aims have been achieved in the following way:

- 1) the establishment of a social networking site aimed at supporting these parents, called 'WSU Breastfeeding and Returning to Work and Study Support Network';
- 2) the evaluation of this social networking site in addition to exploring the needs of WSU staff and/or students when they return to work after the arrival of a child, and how effectively they feel WSU is currently supporting them.

It has been found that staff and students feel that it is very important for WSU to be a breastfeeding-friendly workplace in both accreditation and culture. They are actively seeking information on how they can successfully combine breastfeeding and work/study. We specifically recommend the following outcomes:

- Enhanced awareness of and support for breastfeeding students
- Increased engagement with staff and students who are currently breastfeeding
- Improved facilities that support a breastfeeding-friendly community on campus
- Continued support for and promotion of the "WSU Breastfeeding and Returning to Work and Study Support Network" Facebook group
- Additional research into the breastfeeding culture at WSU

## Itemised Budget Expenditure

**Total funded amount: \$4997.52**

<b>Date</b>	<b>Activity / Item</b>	<b>Cost (GST incl.)</b>
1/6/21	Wages for research assistant (\$49.76 x 86 hours + oncosts of \$680.28)	\$4958.78
<b>Total expenditure:</b>		<b>\$4958.78</b>

# Research Report

## Introduction

The following report relates to the Breastfeeding and Return to work/study Education and Support Technologies (BREAST) project that was undertaken in 2020/2021 as a result of funding from Western Sydney University's (WSU) Vice Chancellor's Gender Equality Fund.

The BREAST project aligns with and builds on another body of work that Dr Elaine Burns conducted with funding from the 2017 round. The Breastfeeding Friendly Communities at WSU project described the provision of breastfeeding friendly spaces at WSU campuses and benchmarked WSU breastfeeding policy and provisions against those in other universities. The project provided data on the experiences of staff and students who access these spaces and produced recommendations on what aspects of WSU policy and provisions are currently meeting the needs of breastfeeding parents. Dr Burns' project led to updating and improvements in WSU policy and provisions affecting breastfeeding women, and the official accreditation of WSU as a Breastfeeding Friendly Workplace (Burns & Triandafilidis, 2019).

The BREAST project will continue this important work by supporting breastfeeding staff and students of WSU as they combine breastfeeding with their return to work and/or study. The original aim of the BREAST project was to create and evaluate the effectiveness of a WSU social networking site that was to provide information and support to staff and students as they combine breastfeeding with their return to work and/or study on-campus.

In light of the COVID-19 pandemic, there was a slight adjustment to the project. With staff and students experiencing periods of not working on campus, this has raised a different set of issues that still require information and support. This project went ahead as originally planned, with the focus shifting to how breastfeeding parents can successfully combine returning to work and study, while working/ studying from home and/or on-campus.

The project aims have been achieved in the following way:

- 3) the establishment of a social networking site aimed at supporting these parents, called 'WSU Breastfeeding and Returning to Work and Study Support Network';
- 4) the evaluation of this social networking site in addition to exploring the needs of WSU staff and/or students when they return to work after the arrival of a child, and how effectively they feel WSU is currently supporting them.

## Literature Review

Breastfeeding is an important public health issue and is associated with reduced infant mortality and improved health outcomes for children and their mothers. This act of breastfeeding "makes the world healthier, smarter, and more equal" (The Lancet, 2016). Research indicates that although most women are aware of the importance of breastfeeding, they are often denied the opportunity to meet their breastfeeding goals due to a lack of consistent informational and emotional support (Bridges, Howell, & Schmied, 2018).

In Australia, 96% of women initiate breastfeeding, however, this figure decreases every month thereafter until at 5 months of age only 15% of infants are exclusively breastfed (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2011). This is contrary to World Health Organization (WHO) recommendations for exclusive breastfeeding until six months and continued breastfeeding until two years of age and beyond (World Health Organization, 2014). One of the key inhibitors for breastfeeding in high income countries such as Australia, is returning to work while breastfeeding (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2011). The number of Australian mothers who breastfeed and the duration of breastfeeding is significantly lower than in poorer countries, which is concerning given that access to education, and health information, is higher in affluent countries like Australia (Victora et al., 2016). There is limited Australian data on breastfeeding rates and return to work and/or study, however returning to paid employment has been identified as having a significant impact on weaning for Australian mothers (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2011; Weber, Janson, Nolan, Wen, & Rissel, 2011).

In recent times, there have been substantial changes to the way breastfeeding mothers seek and receive support in their mothering role. It is evident that social media has become a significant method of communication and social connection for the current generation of mothers. By designing social media tools and integrating the use of social networking sites into the support mechanisms available to breastfeeding mothers, employers can provide cost-effective and socially relevant methods of connecting with and supporting breastfeeding mothers – now and into the future (Bridges, 2016).

Concerns of mothers seeking breastfeeding support during the COVID-19 pandemic, and the experiences of Australian Breastfeeding Association (ABA) volunteers who assisted them, were explored via a recent research study by Hull, Kam and Gribble (2020). Mothers were commonly stressed, isolated and needing reassurance. Many respondents raised concerns about COVID-19 and breastfeeding safety, while the majority claimed they were unable to access face-to-face health services because of fear or unavailability.

### **Creating the social media site**


A closed Facebook group called 'WSU Breastfeeding and Returning to Work and Study Support Network' was created on 30 July 2020 by Dr Bridges and HDR student, Vanessa Campbell was added as a group administrator. The Facebook group was promoted to staff and students via Yammer, the 'Engaged Parent Network', and the 'WSU Student Parent Union' Facebook group.

The group is private which means that only members can see who's in the group and what they post. The aim of this group is to provide breastfeeding parents with support so that they can successfully combine breastfeeding with returning to work and/or study. With the additional challenge of COVID-19 and the shift to working and studying from home, this group also supports parents to negotiate the 'new normal' while juggling the needs of their new family with work and study.



## Engagement and observations

As of 18 June 2021 there were 27 members of the closed Facebook group. There were 96 posts and they ranged from informational to emotional. The emotional posts seemed to be more community building and tended to attract more likes, comments and views. Please see examples below for illustrations of the main two types of posts:


**Vanessa Campbell**  
 Moderator · September 3, 2020 · 🌐

Here is the list of parent and breastfeeding rooms just in case anyone is one campus and in need. Has anyone checked them out? I would love to hear what they are like.

[https://www.westernsydney.edu.au/.../student\\_facilities](https://www.westernsydney.edu.au/.../student_facilities)

	Queer rooms	Women's rooms	Parent and Breastfeeding rooms
<b>Bankstown</b>	1.1.211	1.1.211	1.G.07 1.G.08
<b>Blacktown (Nirimba)</b>			U10.1.26
<b>Campbelltown</b>	4.G.07	2.2.05	2.G.35 21.G.39 30.1.07
<b>Hawkesbury</b>	K4.G.100	K4.G.74	K4.G.20 K4.G.79
<b>Kingswood</b>	N.G.12	N.G.13	N.G.11 N.G.13
<b>Liverpool</b>			3.1.15 3.1.18
<b>Macarthur Clinical School</b>			X7.G.38
<b>Parramatta</b>	EB.3.16	EB.G.16	EHa.LG.63
<b>Parramatta City</b>		1.1.33	1.1.34


 Nicole Bridges
 Seen by 5

Figure 1: An example of an informational post



Figure 2: An example of an emotional post

As a general rule, group members would 'like' informational posts and those that had an element of celebrating motherhood in a comic manner seemed to attract comments and use of more of the emotion response such as the "ha ha" emoji shown at the bottom of Figure 2. Members are actively searching for information that will help them combine work/study and breastfeeding. The content that received the highest engagement was when members asked a specific question or problem that they needed solving (eg. "My special consideration has been knocked back even though I have a fully breastfed baby who cannot go the length of my exam without a feed"). Members were happy to provide advice, make suggestions about who to talk to and use their own experiences to suggest solutions. They were united in support and appeared to share similar experiences around the lack of infant and breastfeeding knowledge and how it has impacted their work/study journey.

### Survey

After the Facebook group had been running for around eight months, a survey designed to gauge the experiences of those in the online community, and the

experiences of WSU staff and students who are combining parenthood with the return to work and/or study, was deployed.

The objectives of the survey were to:

1. Explore online breastfeeding support provided via the 'WSU Breastfeeding and Returning to Work and Study Support Network' Facebook group.
2. Understand what additional breastfeeding support WSU staff and/or students would like when they return to work after the arrival of a child.
3. Investigate the participants' perceptions of the WSU workplace culture around breastfeeding and return to work and/or study.
4. Determine if participants found participation in the 'WSU Breastfeeding and Returning to Work and Study Support Network' Facebook group useful in their pursuit of returning to work and/or study and continuing to breastfeed.
5. Understand what other breastfeeding support resources parents are accessing to support them with returning to work and/or study.
6. Collect demographic information of the cohort of staff and students who are returning to work and/or study while breastfeeding.
7. Discover if COVID-19 has affected participants' ability to breastfeed when returning to work and/or study.

### Methodology

A Qualtrics survey was shared with staff and/or students of WSU. Data was collected via anonymous survey over a six-week period. This was a combination of multiple choice, Likert Scale and open-ended questions.

The link to the survey was posted in the closed Facebook group 'WSU Breastfeeding and Returning to Work and Study Support Network' in addition to the 'WSU Parents Union' Facebook page. In early March, WSU Human Resources staff also sent an email to all staff who: a. had commenced maternity leave from 1 November 2019, b. were currently on maternity leave, or c. who would be on maternity leave until 31 October 2021. Those who wished to participate needed to click on the link and view the participant and consent information before they committed to commencing the survey.

Participants could close the survey at any time if they no longer wished to participate. Participants needed to hit "submit" in order for their submission to be valid and included in the data collection process.

Questions explored the following:

- Demographics
- Breastfeeding history and attitudes
- Social media engagement
- WSU's support for breastfeeding mothers
- The experiences of parents returning to work and/or study while breastfeeding during the COVID-19 pandemic.

### Ethical considerations

This research received Human Research Ethics Committee approval from WSU prior to commencement and all conditions of this approval were upheld by the research team. Human Ethics approval number is H14037.

Data was stored securely on password protected computers, only accessible by the named researchers and analysis was conducted by the research team.

### Limitations

As a percentage of WSU employees and/or students, the response rate would be considered low which renders any statistical analysis impossible. This study and the data presented herein should therefore be considered a scoping study, exploring stakeholder perceptions and highlighting emerging themes which may be of interest for further research.

### Demographics of participants

Participants either worked and/or studied at WSU and were parents. Having breastfed previously was not a requirement for participation in this survey.

### Results/Key Findings

The survey closed on 8 April, 2021 and there were 28 responses in total.

The demographic breakdown of respondents is:

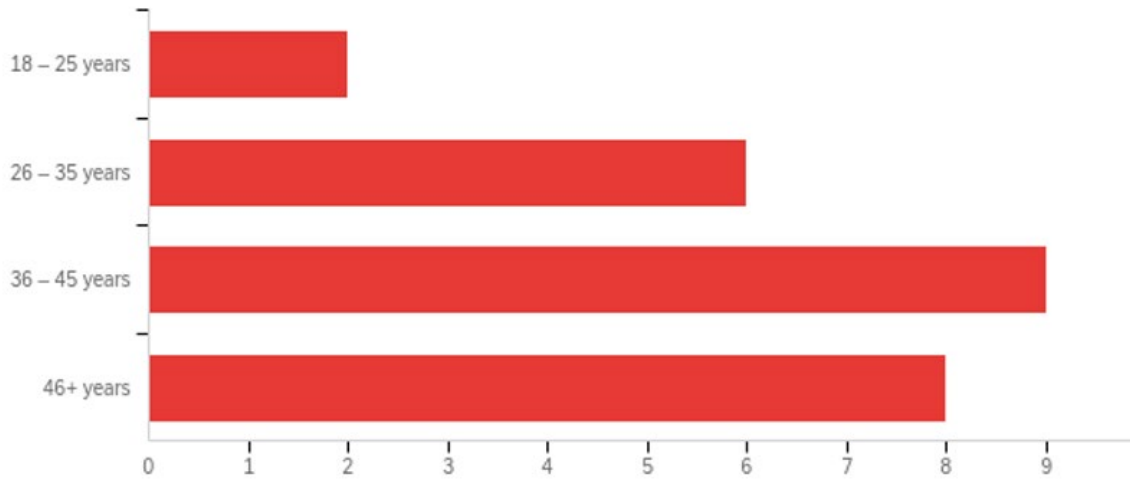
- 37% staff members
- 37% staff member who are also students
- 19% students

96% identified as female and 4% as 'Other'.

All respondents were NSW based with heavy concentration in the following postcodes:

- 2750 (x5)
- 2745 (x4)

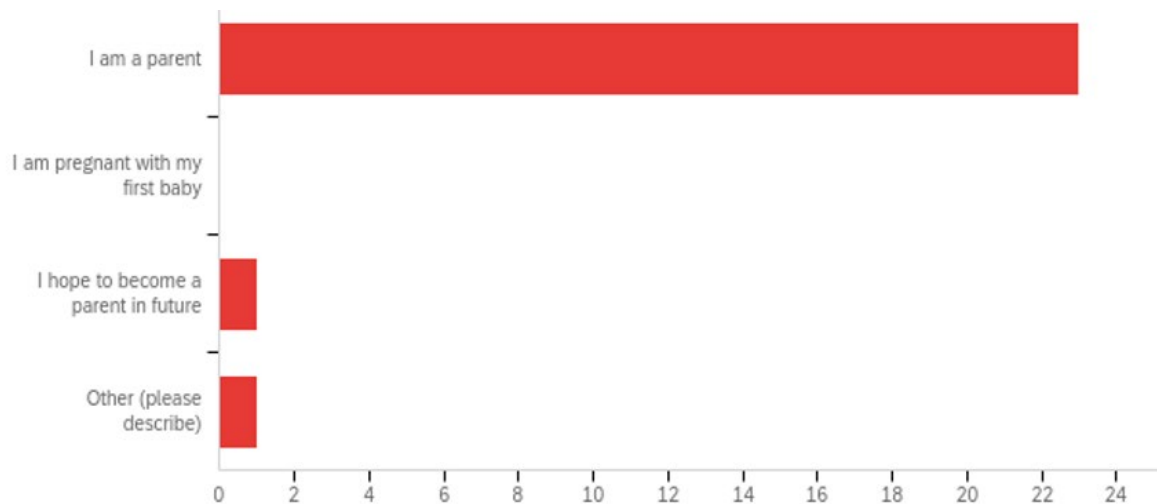
Participants ranged in age, with the 26-45 year old age group comprising 60% of the sample. Please see Figure 3 for a further breakdown:



*Figure 3: Survey participants by age category.*

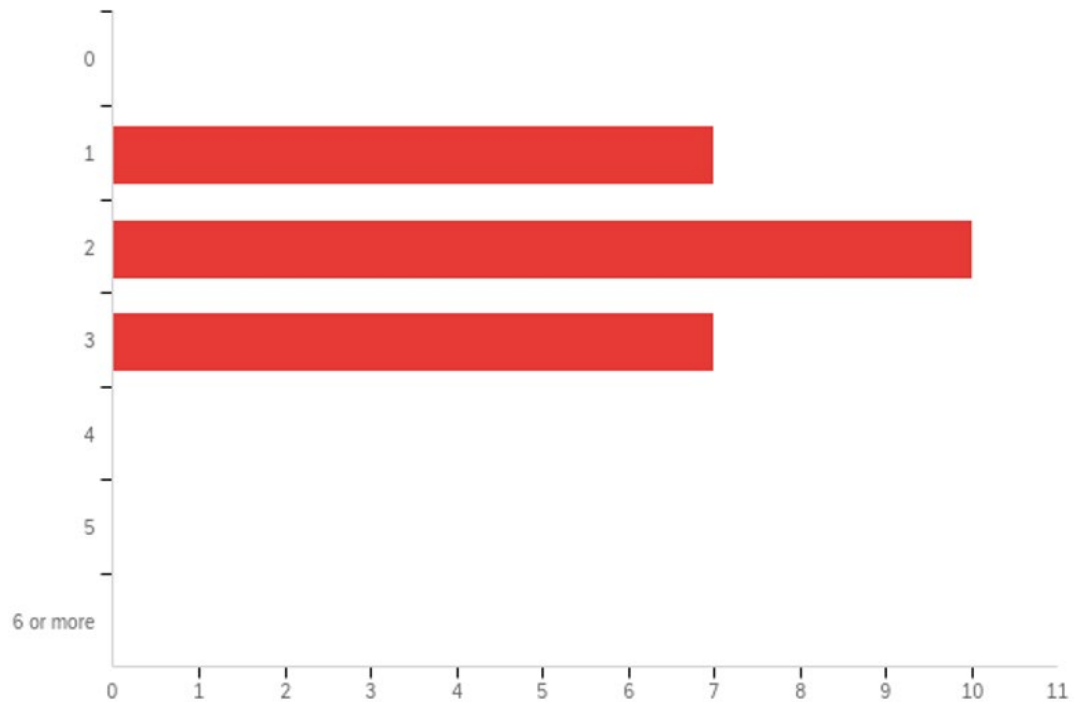
The majority of respondents identified as Australian (18) with others stating that they were South African (1), White (1), German/ Indonesian (1) and other (4).

Most participants were already parents, as shown in Figure 4:



*Figure 4: Survey participants by parent category.*

The majority of participants had 2 children (42%) with an equal number having 1 or 3 children (29%). No participants had more than 3 children as per Figure 5:



*Figure 5: How many children do survey participants have?*

When it comes to breastfeeding history, most participants had breastfed previously but were not currently (60%). 20% were breastfeeding for the first time, 10% were currently breastfeeding and had also breastfed previously, while 10% had never breastfed.

Of those who were currently breastfeeding, 50% said they planned to breastfeed until at least 2 years of age. One participant said “until natural weaning” occurred. One other said “as long as possible” and the last participant to this question said for “another year or so”. This shows a trend that participants were more likely to breastfeed in line with the WHO recommendations (World Health Organization & UNICEF, 2003) and were intending to far exceed the Australian average (Australian Health Ministers’ Conference, 2009). They have made this decision because:

- Of previous experience (2)
- Australian and WHO recommendations (1)
- There’s nothing in the world like breastmilk (1)
- Breastfeeding works for us and is part of our routine (1)

Of those who were currently breastfeeding and had previously breastfed a child, they breastfed previous children anywhere from 1 year to 4 years.

The most popular reason given for stopping breastfeeding was returning to work/study. This was followed by “The baby decided it was time”, “I needed to return to a medication I’d had to stop whilst pregnant and breastfeeding” and “I didn’t have enough milk”.

Of those who had ceased breastfeeding, the length of time they breastfed ranged from under 1 month to 24 months. Figure 6 shows the wide range of answers given:

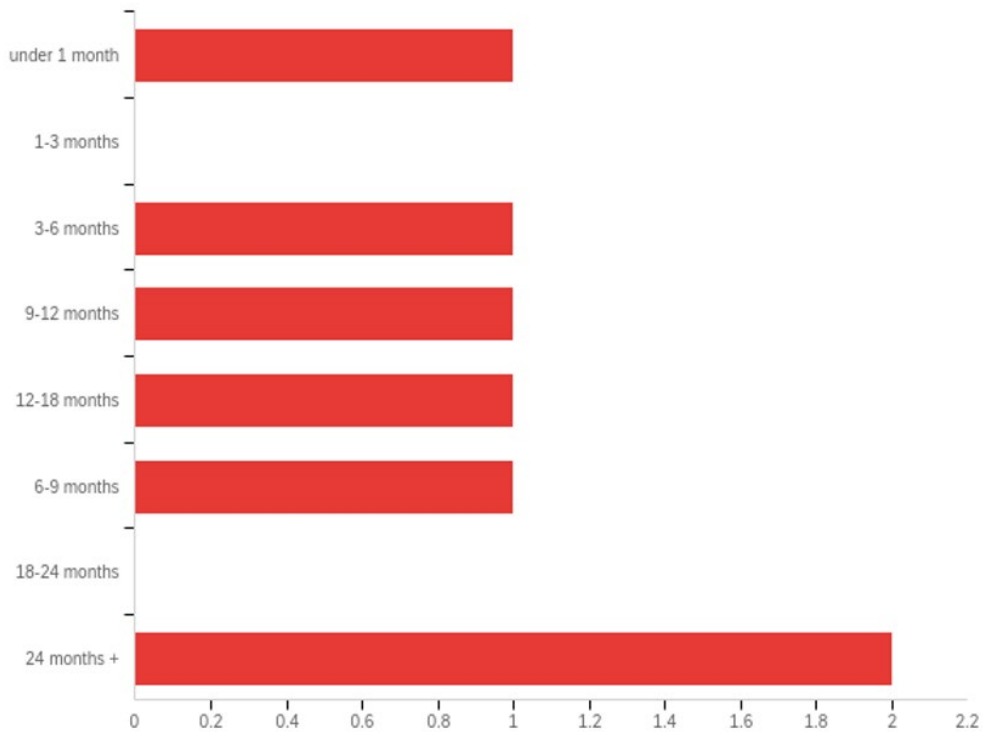


Figure 6: How long have participants previously breastfed children (who are not currently breastfeeding).

The participants who listed that they hadn't breastfed, gave the following reasons:

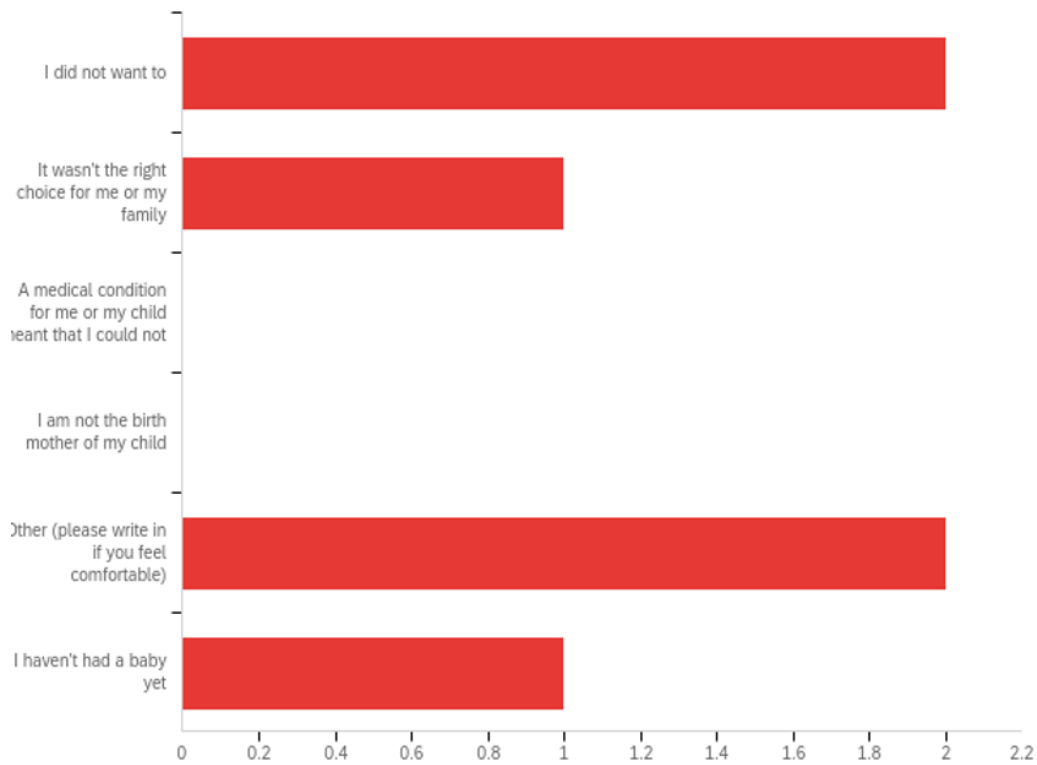
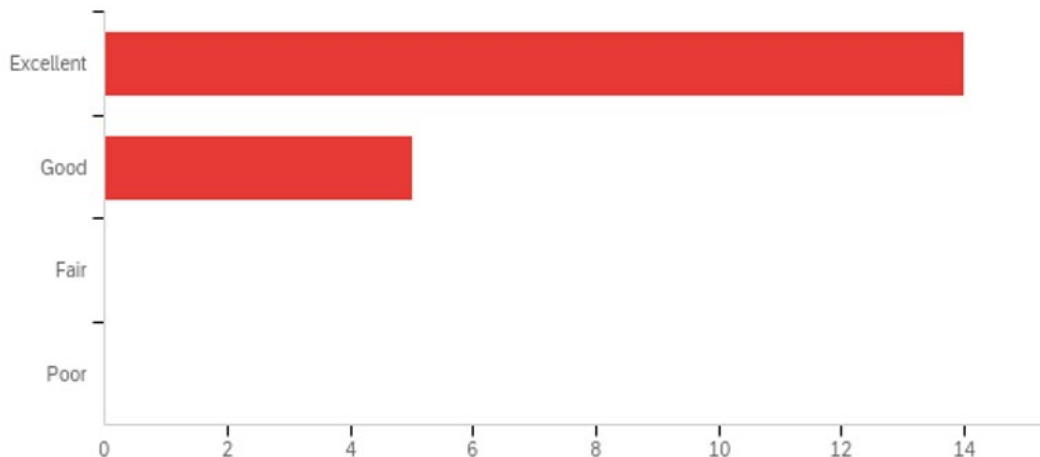


Figure 7: Reasons for not breastfeeding.

The majority of respondents felt that breastfeeding was important to them and that it is the “normal way to feed babies” and that their partners and families have been supportive of them breastfeeding.

Most felt that breastfeeding was harder than expected and that they had to overcome challenges to breastfeed their children. But in saying that, the overwhelming majority were “Proud of how I have breastfed my children”.

The survey group felt that they had a high level of knowledge surrounding breastfeeding:



*Figure 8: How would you rate your knowledge of breastfeeding?*

Most felt that their partners/support person had some level of knowledge surrounding breastfeeding (17). 10 participants felt that their partner/support persons knowledge was excellent. Only 2 participants felt that their support person’s knowledge was poor.

When it came time to discuss the ‘WSU Breastfeeding and Returning to Work and Study Support Network’ Facebook group, 50% of the sample were a member of the group and the others weren’t. Those who are members found the group as a result of Facebook (4), Yammer (2) and word-of-mouth (2).

Respondents said that they joined the WSU breastfeeding Facebook group because they:

- Were after “accurate info re WSU policy”
- Wanted “to be a part of a mission that supports breastfeeding parents. To bring back the biologically normal. To stop others from having bad experiences like I did.”
- Were looking for “support and connection with people who understood the experience of studying/working while breastfeeding”
- Wanted “advice regarding University policies and my rights”
- Thought it would be “fun”
- Were “interested”



100% of those who responded to this question felt that the group had provided them with what they were hoping for. They went on to say that:

- “It’s a nice community and seems to have some beautiful values around parenting and feeding”
- “It’s been a good group to be a part of!”
- “The members of the group are extremely informative and willing to help”
- “I’m better informed”

A total of 7 of the 8 members have actually posted in the Facebook group and the one person who hasn’t, stated that they were new to the group so they haven’t had a chance yet. Of those who have posted (7), most had posted at least once (4), a third between 2-5 times and one person has posted more than 11 times. A third of participants who are group members, felt that they had posted about the same topic more than once. Figure 9 outlines the reasons that participants have posted to the Facebook group:

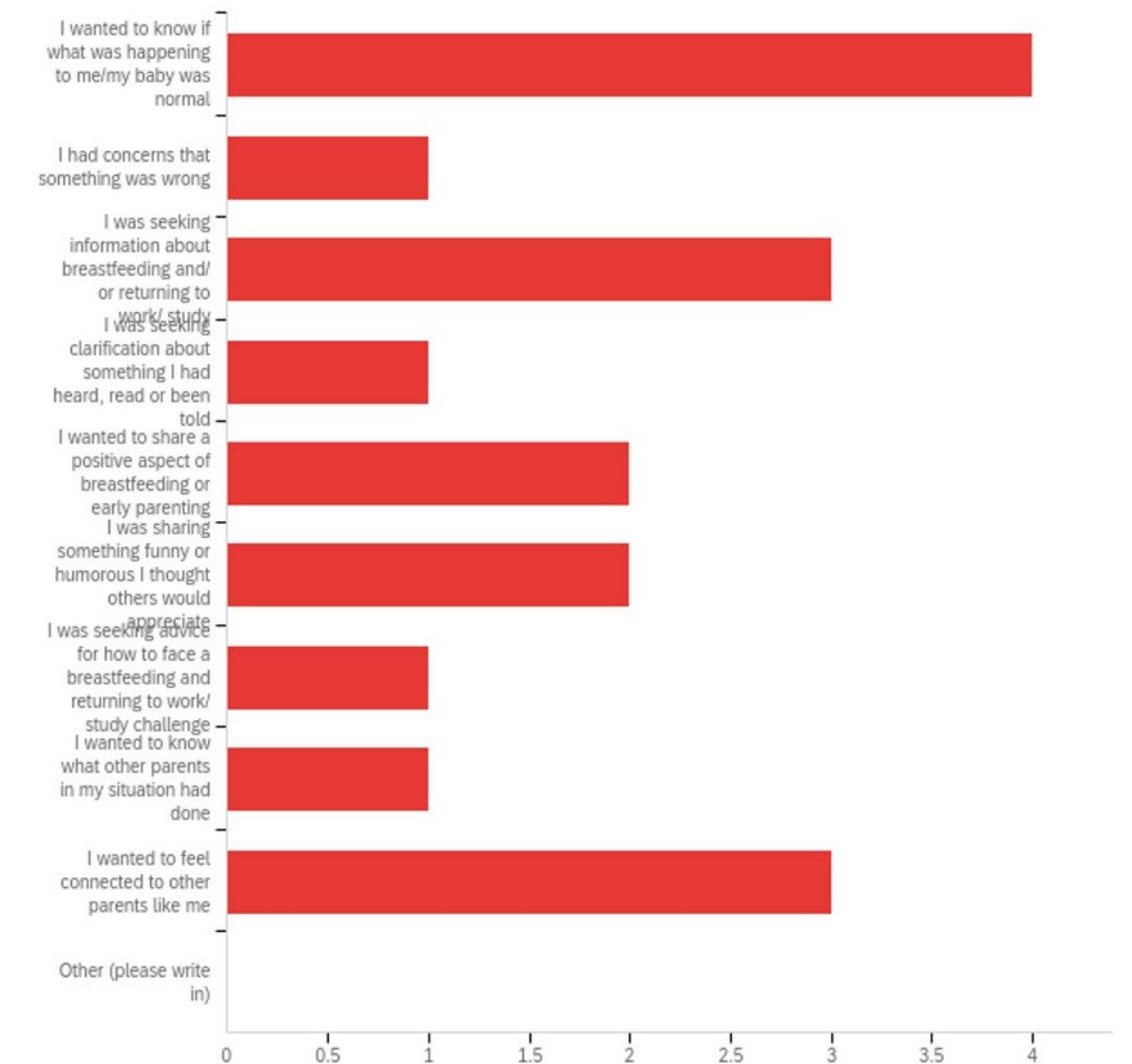


Figure 9: For what reason/s did you post in the group?

This shows that the main reasons were because members wanted to know if what was happening was normal, wanting information about breastfeeding and returning to work/study and wanting to be connected to other like-minded parents.

Breastfeeding issues posted about included returning to work/study, supply issues, painful breasts/nipples, expressing and storing breastmilk, questions surrounding Special Consideration in regard to studying. When asked about their experiences with getting advice from the Facebook group, all were satisfied that they received the support and advice they were seeking from their post. Part of the reason for this is they felt that they were hearing other perspectives which were useful and they appreciated hearing from other parents who were sharing their experiences, and from ABA volunteers/counsellors.

What is interesting is where members would have gone for information if the WSU breastfeeding Facebook page was not available to them. They would have gone to other parents primarily as per Figure 10. One person, who specified 'other' said they would have gone to "ABA or Breastfeeding Project":

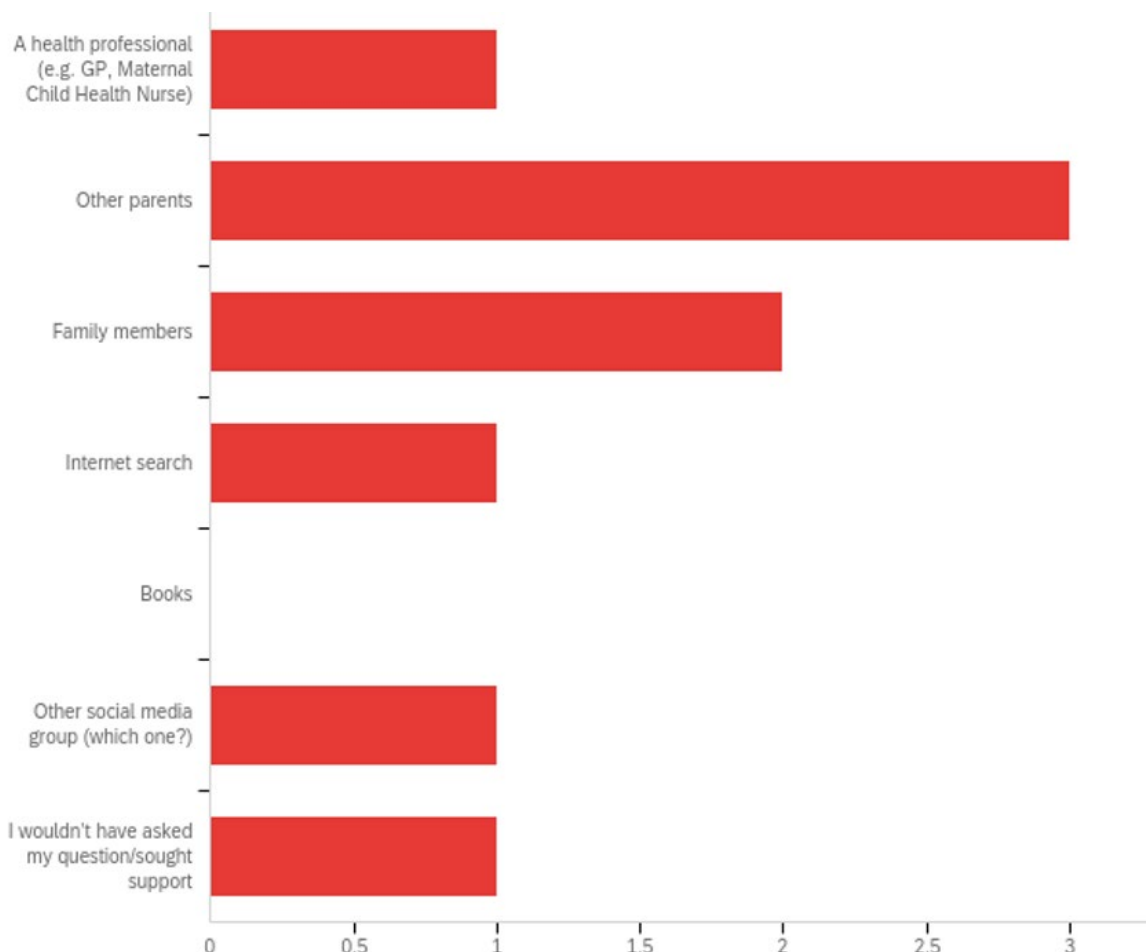


Figure 10: If you had not posted to the Facebook group, where would you have gone for the information, support, advice or solidarity you were seeking?

It's interesting that books didn't rate and health professionals and industry experts (ie. ABA) scored so low in this question. As a group who has a high level of education, referring to reputable sources didn't seem to rate as highly as anticipated.

The majority of respondents felt that the group is well moderated and the information that is shared is "truthful and useful". They got what they needed from the group and have appreciated hearing from other parents, while having a sense of "connection". The group dynamic is respectful and a safe place to ask questions in a judgement-free manner. The majority felt that their knowledge about breastfeeding had increased as had their confidence to breastfeed. They also felt supported and valued as a WSU staff member/student as a result of their involvement in the group.

When asked about how COVID-19 has impacted their situation, participants responded that they felt less able to seek face-to-face support about breastfeeding and early parenting, and that it had impeded their ability to access a parenting community. All felt that the pandemic had resulted in new parents having less support, and most felt this had made the group feel more important to them than before. The majority also felt that COVID-19 had made them more determined to breastfeed. The majority felt that COVID-19 meant that most staff/students worked/studied from home in 2020. In relation to COVID-19, participants felt that:

- working and/or studying from home have made it easier to continue breastfeeding (60% strongly agreed)
- working and/or studying from home has enabled me to breastfeed for longer than I had intended (53% strongly agreed. None disagreed)
- working and/or studying from home have made it easier to meet my work and study commitments than being on campus (60% strongly agreed and 13% agreed)
- WSU has adequately supported me as a staff member/student during the COVID-19 pandemic (53% strongly agreed, 20% agreed)

Some other interesting comments include:

- "I have poor confidence and the group makes me feel a sense of belonging and validation"
- "It has informed me of my rights when returning to studying"
- "My attitudes were fairly ingrained prior to joining"
- "I don't think it's influenced my attitude, the content has aligned with my attitude though."

Moving forward, participants felt that the group met their needs and moderators should "keep up the good work". The only suggestion on how the group could improve in future was to try and foster "a little more social chatter and lighthearted posts occasionally".

Most identified that they don't use social media to access breastfeeding information:

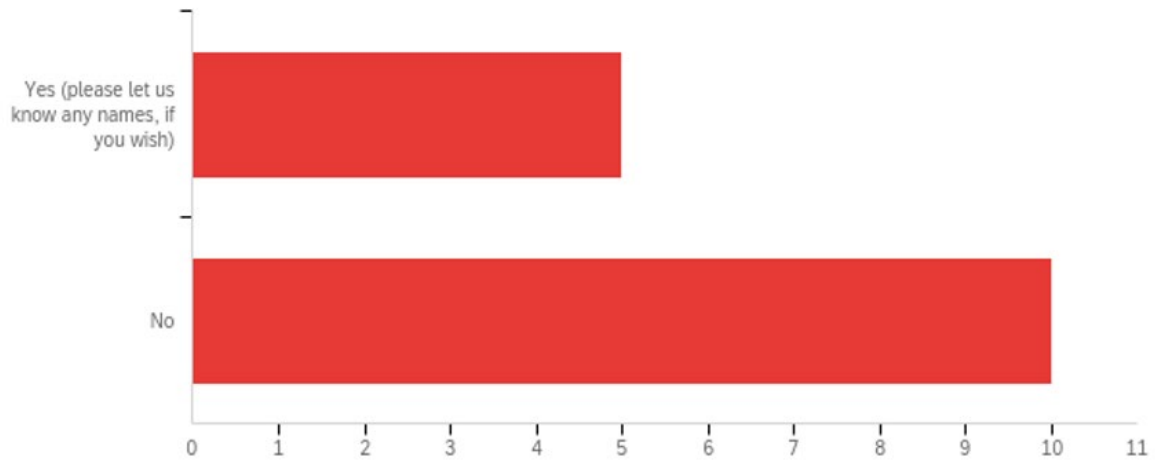


Figure 11: Do you follow any other breastfeeding support or information pages or group on social media?

Of those who do, they follow:

- ABA Nepean
- Lucy Ruddle
- ABA (multiple)
- Australian Breastfeeding Project
- “Can’t remember all the names properly: Southern Network something, Co sleeping something, and a few others”
- “The breastmilk queen, the breaster, gentle breastfeeders (I follow a tonne and am also garbage at remembering page names)”

Of those who responded above, 87% access these social media sites a few times a day.

80% of participants were aware that WSU is a Breastfeeding Friendly Workplace. 93% said it was “essential” that WSU have this accreditation. The remaining 7% felt this accreditation was very important. They felt this way because:

- “it was good to know that my workplace would support me in being able to pump and feed as necessary.”
- “It allows current and future mums the hope and support we otherwise face in the unspoken social norms of needing to hide or be ashamed we need to breastfeed.”
- “Breastfeeding is a right and it should be encouraged and facilitated”

They were aware of the following resources offered by WSU:

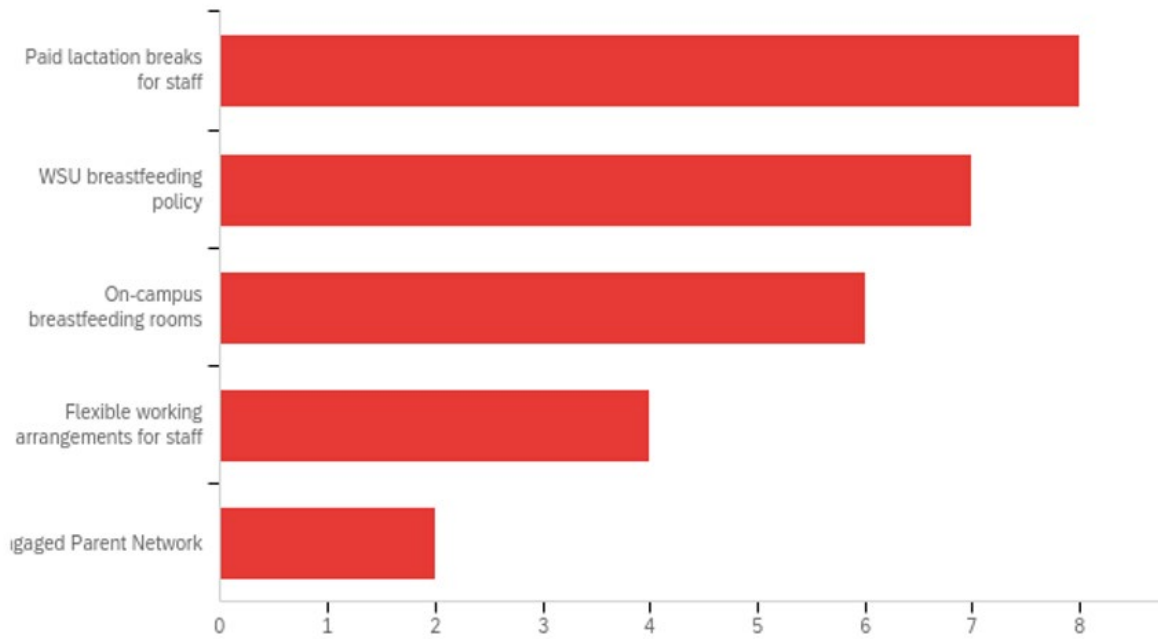


Figure 11: Resources available to WSU staff/students who are parents

Figure 12 shows the WSU resources that staff and students accessed to assist them in returning to work/study after the birth of their child:

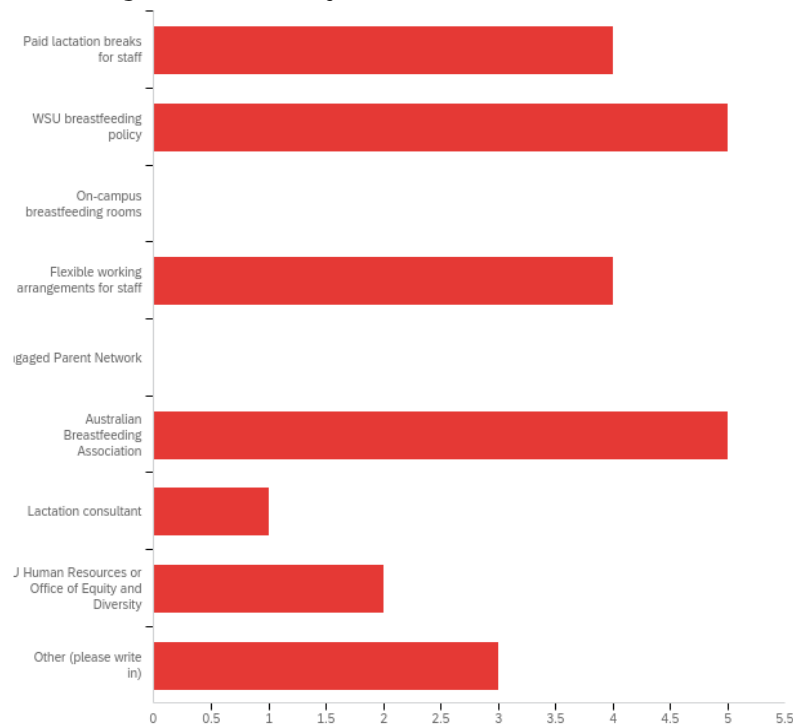


Figure 12: What resources have you accessed to assist you in the return to work and/or study after the birth of your child?

Participants noted as part of this question that:

- “It’s been 5 years since I breast fed my daughter but I didn’t have any services I could access and I couldn’t even get her pram in the shuttle bus - I found it very unsupportive at that time for me as a mother”
- “Currently waiting for special consideration results”

When it comes to participants’ feelings about the level of support and encouragement that WSU offers, the responses were mixed:

- 58% felt that WSU values breastfeeding and its importance, 25% didn’t have an opinion, and 17% felt that WSU didn’t value this.
- 42% believe that WSU supports them to keep breastfeeding my child when I returned to work/study after the birth of my child, 33% had no opinion and 25% didn’t agree with this statement.
- 45% agree WSU provides adequate facilities that enable me to breastfeed my baby on site, 27% have no opinion and over 36% felt that the facilities weren’t adequate.
- 36% felt that WSU provides adequate facilities that enable me to express and store my breastmilk when I am away from my baby and am on campus. While 64% had no opinion or disagreed with this.
- Responses were equal when it comes to WSU knowing/not knowing that staff are breastfeeding.
- 47% believe that WSU cares that I am a breastfeeding parent, 27% neither agree nor disagree with this statement and 27% strongly disagree with this statement, which is the highest response in the disagree category.

Below is a list of support that staff and students felt could help breastfeeding mothers return to work/study:

- Contacting staff/ students returning from maternity leave to let them know about the return-to-work policy and to offer support.
- Shuttle buses being pram friendly.
- Breastfeeding rooms.
- Consideration for students who are breastfeeding and have to sit exams.
- Having rooms to breastfeed around campus, instead of having to walk across campus to a designated room.
- Expressing and secure breastmilk storage areas for students
- Flexibility in terms of timetable schedules and willingness to negotiate suitable locations for clinical placements (people couldn’t be too far from their babies and childcare providers).

Here are some of the experiences they wanted to share that informed their ideas above:

- “No one contacted me when I came back from work after maternity leave to offer me any support (5 years ago). They did not tell me about the return to work policy. Nothing about breastfeeding support. Nothing! I had to express milk in my glass office. People could hear the express machine noise outside. It was embarrassing. I was not told of any alternatives.”
- “Online exams really need to have some provisions for breastfeeding. I had to jump hoops over a special consideration application for an exam and it was

rejected initially. Nothing has been put in place to help parents with Covid 19 and exams”

- “Having enrolment schedule times appropriate/similar to a 9-5 workday. Having first priority with timetable allocation that can work between my toddler’s routine and daycare pickup/dropoff (due to covid there is allocated times for pick up and drop off otherwise it causes under-staffing issues). Having exams between 9am and 5pm. Having tutorial work available on vUWS and recorded.”
- “As a student I had difficulties accessing a fridge to store pumped milk while my baby was at daycare. There were spaces I felt comfortable to pump (and a student breastfeeding room), but storage was tricky, particularly since I spend most of my time at the library and only knew of fridges in the academy space, building P and building N (Kingswood campus). This meant I stayed home to avoid storing milk in publicly accessible fridges (and this negatively impacted my capacity to study/routine etc)”.

The final comments that participants provided are listed below:

- “It’s clear it’s improved since my experience 5 years ago and it’s essential this continues to be developed and improved.”
- “WSU needs to promote better that they are breastfeeding-friendly and it should be seen in the teaching staff as well”
- “I really appreciated being able to bring my newborn to classes and breastfeed in the first 5 or so months of her life (at which point she started daycare). Tutors and UCs were great about this.”
- “Thank you for advocating for us breastfeeding parents!”

## Bibliography

- Australian Health Ministers' Conference. (2009). Australian National Breastfeeding Strategy 2010 - 2015. Retrieved from Canberra:
- Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. (2011). 2010 Australian National Infant Feeding Survey: Indicator Results. Retrieved from <http://www.aihw.gov.au/publication-detail/?id=10737420927>
- Bridges, N. (2016). The Faces of Breastfeeding Support: Experiences of mothers seeking breastfeeding support online. *Breastfeeding Review*, 24(1), 11-20.
- Bridges, N., Howell, G. V. J., & Schmied, V. (2018). Breastfeeding peer support on social networking sites. *Breastfeeding Review*, 26(2), 17 - 27.
- Burns, E., & Triandafilidis, Z. (2019). Taking the path of least resistance: a qualitative analysis of return to work or study while breastfeeding. *International Breastfeeding Journal*, 14(15), 1-13.
- Hull, N., Kam, R., & Gribble, K. (2020). Providing breastfeeding support during the COVID-19 pandemic: Concerns of mothers who contacted the Australian Breastfeeding Association. *Breastfeeding Review*.
- The Lancet. (2016). Breastfeeding: achieving the new normal. *The Lancet*, 387(10017), 404. Retrieved from [https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736\(16\)00210-5/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736(16)00210-5/fulltext)
- Victora, C. G., Bahl, R., Barros, A. J. D., Franca, G. V. A., S, H., & Krasevec, J. (2016). Breastfeeding in the 21st century: epidemiology, mechanisms, and lifelong effect. *Lancet*, 387(10017), 475 - 490.
- Weber, D., Janson, A., Nolan, M., Wen, L. M., & Rissel, C. (2011). Female employees' perceptions of organisational support for breastfeeding at work: Findings from an Australian health service workplace. *International Breastfeeding Journal*, 6(19).
- World Health Organization. (2014). *Infant and young child feeding*. In World Health Organization (Ed.). Geneva.
- World Health Organization, & UNICEF. (2003). *Global strategy for infant and young child feeding*. Geneva: World Health Organization.



## Appendix

### Survey questions

#### Introduction:

This survey is part of a research report being led by Dr Nicole Bridges from Western Sydney University. Through this project, Breastfeeding and Returning to work/study Education And Support Technologies (BREAST), we want to find out how well WSU supports staff and students return to work and/or study as they continue to breastfeed. More specifically, we want to know what the 'WSU Breastfeeding and Returning to Work and Study Support Network' Facebook page means its members, how they have benefited from being a member and how they have felt supported as a student or staff member returning to work and/or study. Your feedback will help us improve not only how the Facebook group is run but also help us to better understand how WSU might support breastfeeding parents as they return to work and/or study in the future. We expect this survey will take about 20 - 25 minutes to complete. It is anonymous and the information you provide will be stored securely. Your responses will be combined with responses from others and go into a report we will write. This report might be published in an academic journal.

You can view some more detailed information by clicking here [link to downloadable copy of full Participant Information Sheet].

This is an optional study on your breastfeeding experiences. If you feel uncomfortable about this topic you can cease the survey at any time by closing the window. Free counselling support is available from:

- Western Sydney University Assistance Line (1300 897 669)
- Australian Breastfeeding Association Breastfeeding Helpline (1800 686 268)
- Lifeline (13 11 14)
- Beyond Blue (1300 22 4636)

If you would like more information about this project, please contact Dr Nicole Bridges at n.bridges@westernsydney.edu.au or via 0413 726 513.

This study has been approved by the Western Sydney University Human Research Ethics Committee. The Approval number is [enter approval number once the project has been approved].

Do you agree to complete this survey?

- Yes, I'd like to start the survey
- I'd like some more information before I complete the survey ([take to Additional Information on the study](#))
- No ([exit survey](#))

Demographics:

Before we get started we're interested in knowing a little bit about you

1. Are you a staff member or student of Western Sydney University?
  - Staff
  - Student

- Staff and student
  - Neither staff or student (exit survey)
2. By what gender do you identify?
    - Female
    - Male
    - Other
    - I'd prefer not to say
  3. What is the postal code of your home address? (open response)
  4. How old are you?
    - 18 – 25 years
    - 26 – 35 years
    - 36 – 45 years
    - 46 + years
  5. By which cultural heritage do you identify? (open response)
  6. Which statement best describes you today?
    - I am a parent
    - I am pregnant with my first baby
    - I hope to become a parent in future
    - Other (please describe)
  7. How many children do you have?
    - 0
    - 1
    - 2
    - 3
    - 4
    - 5
    - 6 or more

**Breastfeeding history:**

We're interested in your experiences with breastfeeding. When we say "breastfeeding", this might be exclusive breastfeeding, it might mean you have pumped and fed your baby expressed breastmilk through a bottle, cup, tube or other feeding tool, or it means mixed feeding (a combination of breastfeeding and using formula)

8. Which statement best describes you?
  - I am currently breastfeeding for the first time
  - I am currently breastfeeding, and have breastfed previously
  - I have breastfed previously but am not currently

- I have never breastfed

Currently breastfeeding:

9. How old is the child you are currently breastfeeding, in months? (numerals only)
10. How long do you plan to breastfeed? (open response)
11. Why have you made that decision? (open response)

Only show for “currently breastfeeding, and have breastfed previously”

12. For how long did you breastfeed your other child/children? (open response)
13. For what reason did breastfeeding stop? (open response)

Previously breastfed, not breastfeeding currently:

14. For how long did you breastfeed your child/children? (open response)
15. For what reason did breastfeeding stop? (open response)

Any experience breastfeeding:

16. Overall, how much do you agree with the following statements?
  - a. Breastfeeding is important to me
  - b. Breastfeeding was harder than I expected
  - c. I feel I have had to overcome many challenges to breastfeed
  - d. Most other parents I know have also breastfed their children
  - e. I am proud of how I have breastfed my children
  - f. Breastfeeding is the normal way to feed babies
  - g. My partner/family have been supportive of me breastfeeding my child/children

Never breastfed:

17. For which reason have you not breastfed? Please choose all which apply.
  - I did not want to
  - It wasn't the right choice for me or my family
  - A medical condition for me or my child mean that I could not
  - I am not the birth parent of my child
  - I am not a parent yet ([exit survey](#))
  - Other (please write in)

**Breastfeeding attitudes of pregnant parents/future parents:**

18. Overall, how much do you agree with the following statements?
  - a. Breastfeeding is important to me
  - b. I believe breastfeeding is important for a baby's growth and development
  - c. I hope to breastfeed my child/children
  - d. My partner/family are supportive of me breastfeeding my child/children
  - e. Most other parents I know have also breastfed their children
  - f. Breastfeeding is the normal way to feed babies

19. How would you rate your knowledge of breastfeeding? (Scale: Excellent, Good, Fair, Poor)

20. How would you rate your partner/support person's knowledge of breastfeeding? (Scale: Excellent, Good, Fair, Poor)

**Breastfeeding attitudes of "other" respondents:**

21. Overall, how much do you agree with the following statements?

- a. Breastfeeding is important to me
- b. I believe breastfeeding is important for a baby's growth and development
- c. I hope my partner or the parent I am supporting will be able to breastfeed our/their child/children
- d. I would consider myself to be supportive of breastfeeding
- e. Most other parents I know have also breastfed their children
- f. Breastfeeding is the normal way to feed babies
- g. Many new parents experience some breastfeeding challenges

22. How would you rate your knowledge of breastfeeding? (Scale: Excellent, Good, Fair, Poor)

**WSU Facebook group engagement:**

23. Are you a member of the 'WSU Breastfeeding and Returning to Work and Study Support Network' Facebook group?

- a. Yes
- b. No (Skip to Question 40)

24. How did you find out about the 'WSU Breastfeeding and Returning to Work and Study Support Network' Facebook group?

- Yammer
- Facebook
- Email
- Word-of-mouth
- Other (please write in)

25. Have you posted in the 'WSU Breastfeeding and Returning to Work and Study Support Network' Facebook group?

- a. Yes (Go to Question 25)
- b. No (Skip to Question 31)

26. About how many times do you think you have made a post in the group?

- Once (Skip to 28)
- 2 - 5 times
- 6 - 10 times
- More than 11 times

27. Have you posted about the same topic or subject more than once?
- Yes
  - No
28. For what reason/s did you post in the group? (choose all which apply)
- c. I wanted to know if what was happening to me/my baby was normal
  - d. I had concerns that something was wrong
  - e. I was seeking information about breastfeeding and/or returning to work/study
  - f. I was seeking clarification about something I had heard, read or been told
  - g. I wanted to share a positive aspect of breastfeeding or early parenting
  - h. I was sharing something funny or humorous I thought others would appreciate
  - i. I was seeking advice for how to face a breastfeeding and returning to work/study challenge
  - j. I wanted to know what other parents in my situation had done
  - k. I wanted to feel connected to other parents like me in the WSU community
29. What topic/s did you post about? (choose all which apply)
- Supply issues
  - Painful breasts/nipples
  - Returning to work/study
  - Transitions to childcare
  - Introducing solids
  - Expressing breastmilk
  - Sleep
  - Feeding patterns
  - Breast refusal
  - Weaning
  - Other (please write in)
30. If you hadn't posted, where would you have gone for the information/support/advice/solidarity you sought?
- A health professional (e.g. GP, Maternal Child Health Nurse)
  - Other parents
  - Family members
  - Internet search
  - Books
  - Other social media group (please write in)
  - I wouldn't have asked my question/sought support
31. Have you commented on any other posts?
- Yes, I've made comments a few times
  - Yes, I've made one or two comments

- No (skip to Question 33)

32. What was your motivation for commenting? (choose all which apply)

- Offer my own opinion
- Share my own experience
- Ask a follow-up question
- Offer solidarity
- Other (please write in)

Skip to Question 33.

33. Why do you think you haven't commented or replied to a post? (open response)

### Perceptions on the value of the WSU Facebook group

34. Why did you join the group? (open response)

35. Have your expectations been met?/Has the group provided you with what you were hoping? (open response)

36. How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements? (Likert scale: strongly agree, agree, neither agree nor disagree, disagree, strongly disagree)

- I think this group is well moderated
- The information that is shared is truthful and useful
- I appreciate when other parents share their experiences
- I feel that people respond to each other with respect in the group
- I know that if I ask a question in the group, someone will reply quickly
- I feel that the group is a safe place to ask questions
- I do not feel like I will be judged if I make a post or a comment in the group
- I have learnt something more about breastfeeding from the group
- Being in the group has increased my breastfeeding confidence
- Participating in the group helps me feel like I am a member of a breastfeeding community
- Being in the group gives me a sense of connection with others
- The support I receive in the group has complemented support I receive elsewhere
- I feel that WSU is supporting and valuing me as a staff member/student

37. We're interested in how COVID-19 might have impacted your experience of parenting. How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements? (Strongly agree, agree, neither agree nor disagree, disagree, strongly disagree, N/A)

- Due to COVID-19, I have felt less able to seek face-to-face support with breastfeeding/early parenting questions
- COVID-19 has impacted my access my parenting community
- I think many new parents will have had less support because of COVID-19
- COVID-19 has made this group feel more important to me than before

- COVID-19 has made me feel more determined to breastfeed my baby to keep them healthy

38. Do you think being a member of the group has influenced your attitudes to breastfeeding in any way? Can you please explain your response? (open response)

39. Do you have any other comments or suggestions on the group and how it is run? (open response)

**General social media engagement:**

40. Do you follow any other breastfeeding support or information pages or groups on social media?

- Yes (please write in)
- No

41. How often do you access social media?

- A few times a day
- Once a day
- A few times a week
- Once a week
- A few times a month
- Once a month
- Less than once a month

**WSU's support for breastfeeding parents:**

42. Are you aware that Western Sydney University is accredited as a Breastfeeding Friendly Workplace?

- Yes
- No

43. Being accredited as a Breastfeeding Friendly Workplace ensures the space, time and support to continue breastfeeding is in place for you. Below are some of the resources available to WSU staff/students who are parents. Please select all that you are aware of:

- Paid lactation breaks for staff
- WSU breastfeeding policy
- On-campus breastfeeding rooms
- Flexible working arrangements for staff
- Engaged Parent Network

44. How important do you feel WSU being accredited as a Breastfeeding Friendly Workplace is?

- Essential
- Very important
- Moderately important

- Slightly important
- Not important at all

45. Please explain your answer to the previous question.

46. To what extent do you agree with the following statements about your experience at WSU of combining breastfeeding with the return to work/study:

- WSU values breastfeeding and its importance
- WSU provided me with support that enabled me to keep breastfeeding my child when I returned to work/study after the birth of my child
- WSU provides adequate facilities that enable me to breastfeed my baby on site
- WSU provides adequate facilities that enable me to express and store my breastmilk when I am away from my baby and am on campus
- WSU knows that I am a breastfeeding parent
- WSU cares that I am a breastfeeding parent

**The realities of returning to work/study while breastfeeding:**

47. The COVID-19 pandemic has meant that most staff/students have been working and studying from home for most of 2020. Has this been the case for you?

- Yes (progress to next question)
- No, my work and/or study situation has been unchanged by COVID-19 and I remain on campus (progress to final question)

48. How much do you agree/disagree with the following statements:

- COVID-19 and working and/or studying from home have made it easier to continue breastfeeding
- COVID-19 and working and/or studying from home has enabled me to breastfeed for longer than I had intended
- COVID-19 and working and/or studying from home have made it easier to meet my work and study commitments than being on campus
- COVID-19 and working and/or studying from home has meant my experience combining work and/or study with breastfeeding has been more stressful than it otherwise would have been
- COVID-19 and working and/or studying from home has caused me to change my work and/or study situation (e.g. delaying the return to work and/or study, changing my work and/or study arrangements from full time to part time, discontinuing work and/or study, etc)
- WSU has adequately supported me as a staff member/student during the COVID-19 pandemic

49. What resources have you accessed to assist you in the return to work and/or study after the birth of your child? Please select all that apply to you:

- Paid lactation breaks for staff
- WSU breastfeeding policy



- On-campus breastfeeding rooms
- Flexible working arrangements for staff
- Engaged Parent Network
- Australian Breastfeeding Association
- Lactation consultant
- WSU Human Resources or Office of Equity and Diversity
- Other (please write in)

50. What additional support do you feel WSU could have offered you when returning to work and/or study after the birth of your child? (open response)

**Final comments:**

51. Do you have any other comments you'd like to share? (open response)



## Are you a breastfeeding mum?

Researchers at WSU want to know how you feel about the support provided to our staff and students. Click on the link to share your thoughts!

(survey link)

For more information contact: [n.bridges@westernsydney.edu.au](mailto:n.bridges@westernsydney.edu.au)  
Ethics approval number: (number)

