

HUNTER RESEARCH FOUNDATION

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YOUnite PROJECT Final Report

Executive Summary – June 2015

*Partnering with our clients to deliver research success
and delivering insights that move the Hunter forward*



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1. Executive Summary

1.1 What we did

The Hunter Research Foundation's YOUnite Project embarked on a journey to:

- examine what barriers young people in the Hunter face that prevent them from successfully transitioning from school to adult life, and also begin to determine what actions are required to address these barriers
- shine a spotlight on the issues facing young people as they transition to adulthood and independent living
- engage young people in as many aspects of the research as possible, both as participants and researchers and to encourage their development and self-determination
- obtain the views of the community and businesses on these issues
- provide an opportunity for those working with young people to be involved in the research and to foster and promote greater collaboration and coordination.

1.2 How we did it

We used a mixed method design, selecting activities specifically to suit each target group to ensure a good cross-representation of views. Key activities involved are provided in Table 1.

Table 1: Key YOUnite research activities

Activity	Target	Number of participants
Stakeholder workshop	Practitioners working with young people	12
Focus groups	Young people aged 14-18 and 19-25	28
Telephone interviews	Hunter and Upper Hunter residents and businesses	1,200
Face-to-face interviews	Young people aged 13-25	540
YOUnite Summit	Research apprentices	3
Summit workshop	Participants aged between 13-25	60+
Stakeholder workshop	Practitioners working with young people	17

1.3 What we found

Overall, some young people, particularly those who are academically oriented, who have a clear idea of the type of work they would like to do and who have support within their immediate family and social network, are able to make a successful transition to adulthood. Unfortunately, for those who do not have ready access to this support, who are less academically inclined or who do not have any idea what they would like to do when they leave school, the transition to adulthood is both daunting and wrought with difficulties and barriers to success.

1.3.1 Barriers

The main barriers to successfully transitioning to adulthood identified by young people of the Hunter were:

- The stress of the Higher School Certificate and its lack of relevance to non-academic students
- A lack of alternative pathways (other than the HCS) for non-academic students
- A lack of life and entrepreneurial skills taught at school
- Not knowing what they wanted to do when they finished school
- Not knowing what work opportunities were available in their local area
- An inability to organise work experience for themselves
- An inability to secure work

It is clear from the views expressed by young people that these barriers are having real impacts on their aspirations, wellbeing and outlook on life. In addition to these barriers, young people and Hunter residents also identified key areas that would benefit from more focused attention. These are summarised below:

1.3.2 Government policy

The findings indicate that there are many issues with the current government policy relating to school completion that need to be addressed. Overall, the value placed on the HSC as a major stepping-stone to success is eroding amongst the younger generation and this changing attitude amongst young people resonates with the views of businesses, 80 per cent of whom said they would employ someone without their HSC. Clearly, there needs to be a review of the impact this policy is having on young people.

1.3.3 Broadening the HSC

Rather than throw the baby out with the bathwater, young people would like to see adjustments to the HSC to make it work for them. They would like the focus on the HSC to be less blinkered in order to reduce the stress and pressure placed on young people to perform well. They would like the inclusion of life skills and practical skills in subjects to enhance their employability and a separate stream for students who are trade-oriented. It is hoped that these adjustments will help keep ALL young people engaged at school until Year 12, particularly those who were less academically inclined and who may not need the HSC for their future career options.

1.3.4 Getting more support

The results also highlighted that preparation for post school choices is not implemented uniformly across schools and there is room for improvement. While some schools are doing it well, others are lagging behind. Overall, students wanted more opportunities to explore what they wanted to do when they finished school that includes a clearer understanding of a wide range of career options and pathways. Having lots of choice was seen as being good but confusing and meant that students needed more help to narrow down the most appropriate choices.

1.3.5 Career advisors

Career advisors were singled out as having a key role to play in removing some of the barriers to success. However, it was also acknowledged that careers advisors should not have classroom duties but should have access to sufficient resources and support to undertake their job. Students needed their careers advisors to be more visible, more accommodating to different types of students and be able to provide greater up-to-date relevant information on the latest jobs, occupations, growth industries, work opportunities in the local area, bridging courses, scholarships and financial support to students. They also needed time to mentor students through the various choices.

1.3.6 Life and entrepreneurial skills

A key theme that arose throughout the YOUNite project was the need to incorporate life skills into the high school curriculum and to teach students how to start their own business. It is envisaged that such a move would prepare students for life as an adult and allow them to convert their passion into a source of income rather than working for an organisation doing work that they may not enjoy.

1.4 Ideas for action

Many potential solutions to the problems were also discussed by both young people and the key stakeholders who were engaged with YOUNite.

1.4.1 Enhancing support and funding for career advisors

- Giving careers advisors their own professional standing (association)
- Creating a portal for careers advisors to link them with their peers and to offer professional development.

1.4.2 Greater exposure to different pathways from school to work

- Invite more ex-students to return to schools to talk about their journey
- Use social media to identify suitable and willing Hunter alumni who can deliver inspiring and informative presentations about their journey from school to work
- Highlight alternative pathways to success
- Organise this as a network of schools rather than individual schools so more students would benefit. Regional school meetings could be a good starting point for such a program.

1.4.3 Hunter job guide website

- Showcasing ALL available Hunter-based positions – needs to start with a scoping exercise of what is already available and find ways to bring all the data together into the one website
- Portal needs to be designed by young people for young people
- In addition to a job vacancy section, the website also needs to include 'how to' guides for resume writing, interview tips, application writing and contact phone numbers for assistance.

1.4.4 Mentoring programs

- Specifically, university students or industry partners as mentors
- Can be individual or in group mentoring
- Students were clear that they want a peer mentor i.e. someone relatively close in age
- The university would have to be involved to get students registered and the program would ideally commence with a few pilot schools in 2-3 locations before it is rolled out across the region.

1.4.5 More pathways available and promoted in high school

- Rebranding of vocational pathways as legitimate and worthwhile
- Promoting entrepreneurial paths and how to start a small business and make such information more readily accessible to young people
- Lobbying government to implement policy change to ensure vocational training is available and cost effective.

1.4.6 Enhance volunteering opportunities

- Identifying a legal framework including sorting out insurances, WHS issues and minimising administrative burden to workplaces taking on volunteers
- Information on volunteer opportunities needs to be centrally located so young people can easily access the information
- A marketing campaign to highlight the beneficial nature of volunteering to future employment prospects.

1.4.7 Greater work experience/student placement opportunities offered to University students

- Work experiences opportunities written into University course curriculums
- Clear induction processes developed and implemented so students are not seen as a burden. Dialogue between Universities and industry will ensure that the needs of all three parties (University, industry and students) are met.
- Decrease current student workloads to encourage work experience
- A starting point would be the Work Integrated Learning section to see how work experience placements might be expanded across a broader range of courses (Arts, Sciences, Maths etc.).

1.4.8 Create a one-stop Work Hub for Hunter Youth

- Suggestions include a mobile hub such as a bus or van that moves around the Region including shopping centres and sporting or cultural events
- Create links with local labour markets and employers
- Coordinate a guest speaker calendar with inspirational and informative local business people/employers telling 'their story'
- Service hosted by experienced and qualified careers advisors/youth workers
- Offer all the support young people need to find work
- Keep a register of participants to measure return on investment.

The YOUNITE research also highlighted that key stakeholders such as governments, parents, employers and young people have differing views about successful transition from school to independent adult life. Greater dialogue to reach a shared understanding of what is required to help young people negotiate this challenging time in their lives will have benefits for all parties, especially young people themselves.