



HUNTER RESEARCH  
FOUNDATION



# YOUnite PROJECT

Hunter Region



## YOUNITE PROJECT The issues explored

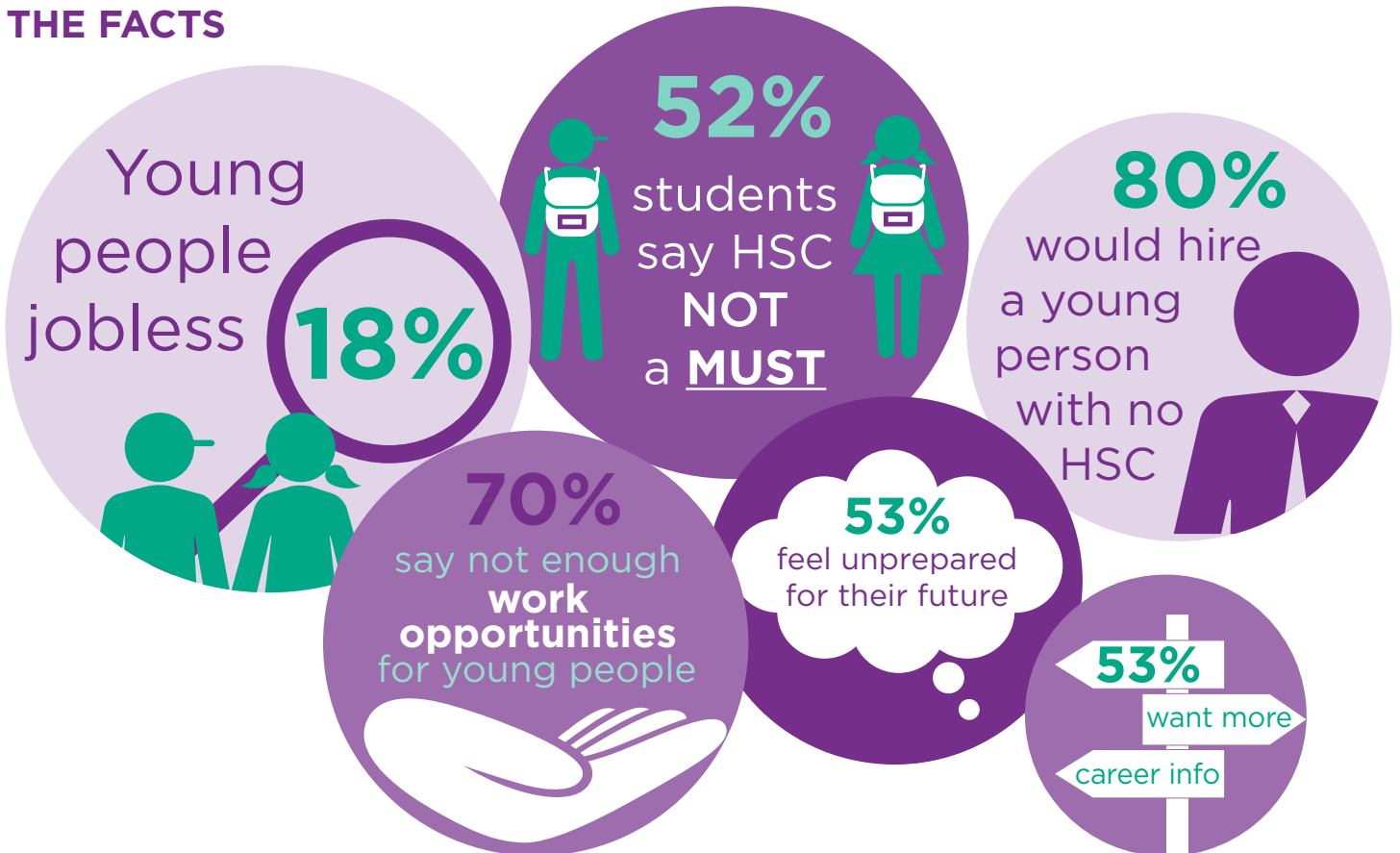
Why is the **transition from high school to adult life** challenging and confronting for some young people?

Does the **Higher School Certificate (HSC)** really prepare young people for the challenges ahead?

Navigating the maze of **post-school options** in a rapidly-changing world can be daunting. Are young people in the Hunter getting the practical and emotional support they want and need in this challenging environment?

With one in five Hunter young people leaving school in 2015 potentially facing unemployment, are there ways in which we can **improve employment prospects** for young Hunter people?

## THE FACTS



## WHAT CAN WE DO ABOUT IT? Let's YOUnite

The Hunter Research Foundation's YOUnite program attempts to address some of the issues faced by young people in the Hunter during the transition from school to adult life. **The program aims to:**

- **Identify key issues and barriers** young people face in transitioning to life after school
- **Empower** young people to have a voice and make their concerns and experiences known
- **Encourage** them to discuss and debate the issues and come up with collective solutions
- **Champion** their own cause and work towards removing barriers to effective transition in the Hunter



## HSC: Ticket to success or highly stressful cocoon

### ATTITUDES TO CURRENT POLICY

Current government policy requires students to complete Year 12 unless they have 30 hours of work. Overall, views of current students, young people under 25 who had left school and Hunter residents in general varied, with agreement rising with age. Many expressed the idea that school is not for everyone and that those who would like to enter a trade or TAFE should be allowed to.

*“The people who are forced to stay and do not wish to often want to rebel and ruin it for others because they have no interest in being there.”*

Group	Proportion who agreed or strongly agreed that students should stay and complete Yr 12
Still at school	48%
Finished school and under 25	63%
Hunter residents	75%
Upper Hunter residents	79%

### VALUE OF THE HSC

Views within the Region about the value of the HSC for future employment were polarised. Several focus group participants believed that the HSC is becoming more important to employers while others thought that practical abilities and other factors such as community involvement were equally important.

*“A piece of paper doesn’t tell people much. Employers want to know how you handle a situation.”* On the other hand *“there’s a boy in our class who has an apprenticeship but they didn’t want to start him until he had his HSC”.*

Group	Proportion who agreed or strongly agreed that doing well in the HSC had a major or moderate impact on their future employment
Still at school	60%
Finished school and under 25	50%
Hunter residents	70%
Upper Hunter residents	80%

In contrast, the views of businesses suggest that doing well in, or even completing, the HSC is not as important as residents and young people think. Eighty per cent of businesses said they would consider employing a young person who had not completed their HSC. So what do young people think of the HSC?

### HSC – THE EXPERIENCE

Many participants in the focus group of 19-24 year olds believed that the HSC was highly stressful. Some also expressed doubts about its effectiveness in preparing them for later life and resented the emphasis placed on the HSC.

*“I think there needs to be a strong, institutional cross-societal focus on changing the perception of the HSC as being thrust up on a pinnacle and also thrusting kids up towards it. Many kids get the bends on the way up and fall away. They are left by the wayside and there is a lot of talent and skills potentially going to waste because our focus is so blinkered on the HSC.”*

### IMPROVEMENTS

Several participants suggested adjustments to the HSC to make it more useful. This included the use of practical skills in subjects to enhance students’ employment prospects and a separate stream for students who are trade-oriented.

When current students were asked about their aspirations, doing full-time university was ranked highest, part-time work ranked second, taking a gap year third, and full-time TAFE fourth in terms of what students wanted to do when they finished school.

*“I don’t think Uni was ever as stressful as the HSC.”*

*“They really need to look at having two separate tasks and if you pursue Uni, focus on this stream to give you an ATAR. And also offer a stream of courses that teach life skills so that you can survive in the world until you reach a point where you are able to decide what it is that you want to do.”*

## SUPPORT FOR TRANSITION: Super or sucks?

### POST-SCHOOL ASPIRATIONS

Forty-four per cent of young people who had completed their schooling had known what they wanted to do when they left school. **The most commonly desired post-school aspirations for this group were:**

- Working (either full or part-time) (59%)
- University (either full or part-time) (49%)
- Taking a gap year (22%)

At the time of the survey, 70 per cent of these young people had achieved their aspirations.

**The most common initiatives that schools could implement to help students figure out what they wanted to do when they finished school were:**

- More information about the different pathways and careers available (53%)
- Coordinating relevant work experience (44%)
- Provision of workshops presenting the different types of careers (41%)

### BEING PREPARED

Approximately 75 per cent of young people who had finished school felt prepared for their post-school pathway choice. In contrast, only 34 per cent of young people still at high school felt prepared for what they want to do after school. This could indicate that preparation for post-school choices is not as well implemented in schools as it should be.

In general, the wider Hunter community acknowledged that more information and assistance could be provided to young people about post-school options. More respondents felt that there was *not enough* information and assistance than those who felt there was the *right amount*.

		Hunter	Upper Hunter
Information for young people about the different pathways they can follow after they've finished school	Not enough	52%	42%
	Right amount	32%	41%
Assistance for young people to help them decide what might be the best options given their circumstances, skills, abilities and interests	Not enough	61%	52%
	Right amount	24%	32%

'Advice from either parents or friends or relatives' (89%) was what most helped prepare the greatest proportion of those who felt ready for their post-school choices, followed by 'teachers' (38%) and 'work experience (paid or unpaid)' (34%).

Those who felt unprepared for post-school life nominated the following supports as the best remedies:

- School guidance counsellor (50%)
- Work experience (paid or unpaid) (38%)
- Teachers (34%)

Greater assistance through their school years, through the provision of programs aimed at guiding and helping young people with these decisions, could give students a clearer idea of the pathways available, and which of these were best suited to the individual.

*"Having a lot of choice is good, but can be confusing. Knowing what you like and don't like is also good."*

*"Some people lack initiative, they need encouragement to find a career path."*

Focus group participants indicated that school careers advisors need to:

- be more visible and more accommodating to a range of students
- provide clear, up-to-date information, and understand and support all of the pathways available post-school.

### LIFE SKILLS

Seventy-one per cent of Hunter residents, and 62 per cent of Upper Hunter residents, as well as almost nine in ten young people interviewed, felt that there was not enough assistance with life skills such as doing tax or starting a business. Many focus group participants proposed teaching life skills in high school.

Overall, young people felt that more provision of information and assistance navigating post-school options, as well as practical advice regarding life skills would make the transition to post-school life easier.

*"Having energy and resources is important for careers advisors."*

*"My careers advisor made me feel like a burden. They were very dismissive."*



## WONDERFUL WORLD OF WORK or just wishful thinking

### OPPORTUNITIES FOR WORK

Despite youth unemployment figures, there were mixed perceptions about work opportunities for young people in the Hunter. Some focus group participants were optimistic about work opportunities: **“There is work I want to do here, yes.”**

Others thought the situation far less promising: **“Work around here is less and less available”** and **“Newcastle lacks opportunities that Sydney and Melbourne have.”**

Group	Proportion who believe that there are currently not enough work opportunities for young people in the Hunter doing what they want / staying in the area if they want
Still at school	45%
Finished school and under 25	36%
Hunter residents	67%
Upper Hunter residents	70%
Hunter businesses	57%

Given that many young people expressed a preference to stay in the Region or to return later in life, it would be beneficial to see greater and more diverse employment opportunities in the Hunter.

One possible solution to this lack of opportunity raised by focus group participants was the revitalisation of Newcastle City and in particular, fast tracking the expansion of the City Campus of the University. The top three types of employment that young people felt were least available in the Hunter were in the following fields: design, engineering and science; arts and; media and information communications technology.

**WHAT WE DID...**

- Focus groups x 2**  
14 high school students  
14 young people under 25
- Telephone interviews x 1,200**  
Hunter & Upper Hunter residents & businesses
- Face-to-face interviews x 540**  
Young people 14-25 years
- Paper surveys x 10**  
Non-profit organisations

### WORK EXPERIENCE

Triangulation of the data suggests that there may be a disconnect between businesses and young people with respect to work experience. Many focus group respondents believed that there was little or no opportunity within high school to undertake work experience and that work experience was not sufficiently credited.

**“My high school had no opportunity for work experience.”**

In contrast, eight of the 10 not-for-profit organisations who were surveyed, and 45 percent of all businesses, stated that they offer work experience opportunities for young people. A possible explanation for the lower proportion in the second group is that many of those businesses were sole traders and small family businesses which may preclude many of them from being able to offer work experience.

### REQUIREMENTS FOR WORK

Seventy per cent of Hunter businesses have employed or currently employ young people under 25. Young people and residents held similar views about what was important in the pursuit of employment. Both groups rated getting a University degree as *moderately important* (mean between 2.9 and 3.2 out of 5) and getting a TAFE qualification as *moderately important* (mean 3.0 to 3.3) to a young person's future employment prospects.

However, responses were not as clear-cut amongst focus group participants. Some suggested that employers were also interested in other aspects of a person whereas some felt that a qualification was paramount in their preferred field of work. This suggests that there are a myriad of employment options and young people need to be informed about the different requirements and pathways to these options.