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# **Young Tasmanians and the transition from education to employment in Tasmania**

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This study used a comprehensive literature review and a two-round Delphi process engaging key thought leaders from the Tasmanian community to investigate the question what challenges face young Tasmanians aged 15 to 25 transitioning from education to employment in this State? The question comprises one of 50 action items highlighted in the Tasmanian Government's State Population Growth Strategy, which aims to increase Tasmania's population to 650,000 people by the year 2050.

The first round of the Delphi process comprised a set of open-ended interview questions that asked participants first to reflect on their own experiences of transitioning into employment and then to discuss key factors, influences, and challenges facing today's young people. We analysed the responses using a combination of approaches derived from studies by DeLuca et al. (2015) and Bowman, Borlagdan, and Bond (2015), and a discussion paper by Stratford (2016).

Participants were then sent a summary report that outlined key findings from the first interview round, categorised into several themes informed by people's understandings of systems of education and learning: individual context, social and cultural context, political and economic context, and spatial and place-based issues. The participants then completed a second interview, which asked them to rate the key influences, challenges, and enablers using five-point Likert scales. Fifty-seven participants engaged in the first round (42 of them fully completed the interview), and 31 participants engaged in the second round (29 of them had fully completed the first round).

The findings yielded a set of strong themes within each of the following domains:

- **for individuals:** the importance of experiencing (dis)advantage and having strong communication skills, employability and enterprise skills, and sense of self;
- **in relation to social and cultural dynamics:** the importance of positive support and influence from family, friends, peers, and community members, including links to mentors and professional networks;
- **specifically in relation to systems of education and learning as social and cultural practices:** the influence of teachers and educators, the structural features of education systems, and opportunities for work-integrated learning;
- **for political and economic systems:** the importance of employers as key players able to provide support for young employees and galvanise Tasmania's economic position and job market, as well as the importance of robust governance in education;
- **in terms of spatial and place-based issues:** the influence of being located in rural, regional, or remote areas, or outer suburbs of Hobart and Launceston, as well as the importance of access to transport and connection to place; and
- **overarching themes:** the importance of culture of expectation based on strong educational foundations; of high aspirations to contribute to society—not least in relation to employment; and of collaboration between stakeholders.

A set of recommendations to do with each theme is comprehensively outlined in Section 6.2.

# 1. INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 Aim, purpose, objectives, and scope

This report aims to respond to one question of critical importance for Tasmania's future: what challenges face young Tasmanians aged 15 to 25 transitioning from education to employment in this State? This question comprises one of 50 action items highlighted in the Tasmanian Government's State Population Growth Strategy, which aims to increase Tasmania's population to 650,000 people by the year 2050.

Key reasons for promoting population growth in Tasmania include countering the effects of an ageing population, stimulating economic productivity, increasing the size of the rate base in Tasmanian communities, and improving Tasmania's ability to supply services (Tasmanian Government Department of State Growth, 2015a). A dynamic population also increases opportunities for creativity and innovation in policy and business.

The Tasmanian State Government recognises the point that attracting and retaining young people is a significant factor in supporting population growth. The experience of young people transitioning from education to employment influences whether and how young people choose to stay in, leave, or return to Tasmania.

The objectives of this study are to:

- identify key factors that influence the ability of school leavers and graduates to successfully transition into the employment market in Tasmania;
- pinpoint the key barriers or challenges to the successful transition for school leavers and graduates from school or study in Tasmania;
- isolate factors that impact the decisions and experiences of school leavers and graduates in Tasmania, including:
  - the applicability of education to the employment market;
  - availability of appropriate entry level or graduate positions;
  - perception of the 'employability' of Tasmanian school leavers and graduates;
  - career pathways in Tasmania;
  - lifestyle and desire to travel;
  - opportunities available; and
  - other factors as relevant; and
- consider the experiences of school leavers and graduates based on where they reside in Tasmania, their socio-economic status, and their level and field of study in identifying the factors listed above.

Meeting these objectives offers insights into how to retain and/or increase the number of young people in Tasmania and delves deeply into fundamental questions of what quality of life means in this State. Young people will want to come to, stay in, or return to Tasmania if they feel connected to the place and believe they can flourish in it. Tasmania therefore needs to be a place where young

people know that they can be themselves and fulfil their potential. The analysis that follows directly confronts micro- and macro-level factors that influence these beliefs.

This study draws on the views of leaders in the government, private, and community sectors, from a range of industries and locations around the State. As such, it focuses on experiences and perspectives—information that is difficult to capture quantitatively. Our task is to identify key influences and challenges for young people transitioning into employment, as described by individuals who, through their own lives and work, are driving influential and/or creative approaches to these issues within Tasmania.

The findings provide the background and context that are critical to understanding how young people make key decisions related to education and employment, as well as how others make decisions affecting young people. Those findings thus identify key points for supporting young people in making successful education-to-employment transitions. They also offer insights into (a) what constitutes a successful transition in shifting employment markets and (b) how questions of identity and life experience contribute to meaningful employment for young people.

## **1.2 Outline of this report**

This draft report presents a comprehensive analysis and discussion of preliminary findings about the challenges facing young Tasmanians aged 15 to 25 transitioning from education to employment in Tasmania based on the first part of a two-part interview process, in the context of information found in scholarly articles and policy documents.

The Introduction (**Section 1**) and the Literature Review (**Section 2**) set the scene.

**Section 3** outlines and justifies the **methodology** in detail, including the reasons for choosing the approaches that we have. It gives an overview of the qualitative approach to research, study area, ethics clearance process, literature review, Delphi approach to interviewing, participant recruitment and selection, and approach to data analysis. It also discusses limitations of the approaches and methods we have chosen.

**Section 4** presents the **preliminary findings** drawn from the first-round participant interviews. The analysis is divided into five broad categories: (a) background to the topic of youth employment in Tasmania; (b) individual factors; (c) social and cultural factors; (d) political and economic factors; and (e) connections to space and place. The thoughts, ideas, reflections, and opinions of the participants are discussed, and a preliminary literature review provides background, context, and comparators. **Section 5** expands on these findings through a discussion of the second-round responses to Likert-scale questions about key challenges raised in the first round..

**Section 6** offers **recommendations** for action and/or further investigation based both on participant suggestions and on our own interpretations of their responses and the findings from the literature review.



## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

To prepare the ground for this investigation, we first undertook a review of existing literature relating to young people's education and career pathways. A systematic review of scholarly and policy literature is key to supporting depth and breadth of understanding of the topic area. The literature provided the baseline information necessary to contextualise the education-to-employment transition for young Tasmanians.

We used several databases to review a wide range of studies, including Google Scholar, ScienceDirect, JSTOR, Informit, Taylor & Francis, and SpringerLink. Search topics focused first on the nature of education-to-employment transitions within regions of Tasmania (Kilpatrick & Abbott-Chapman 2002) and Tasmania as a whole (Abbott-Chapman & Kilpatrick 2001; Abbott-Chapman, Johnston & Jetson 2014; Langworthy & Johns 2012; Turner & Hawkins 2014; Watson, et al. 2013), comparable regional areas within Australia, such as regional South Australia (Robinson 2012) and Victoria (Butler 2015), and, finally, Australia as a whole (Campbell 2014; Daly, Lewis, Corliss, & Heaslip 2015; Devlin 2013; Jackson 2013).

As an archipelagic state, Tasmania shares similarities with regional jurisdictions and countries beyond Australia's borders. As such, the literature review investigated areas of the world experiencing comparable or revelatory youth employment challenges, or with similar geographies. International comparative contexts include Czech Republic (Straková 2015); Denmark (Görllich & Katznelson 2015); Portugal (Cardoso & Moreira 2009); Spain (Alegre, Casado, Sanz & Todeschini 2015; Salvà-Mut, Thomás-Vanrell & Quintana-Murci 2015); United Kingdom (Bathmaker, Ingram, & Waller 2013; Hutchinson & Kettlewell 2015; Maguire 2015); India (Khare 2014); Canada (Fenesi & Sara 2015; Walsh 2013); and the United States (Van Praag, van Witteloostuijn & van der Sluis 2012).

We reviewed scholarly literature that offered general insights into ways of thinking about and influencing educational attainment and education-to-employment transitions for young people (DeLuca, Godden, Hutchinson & Versnel 2015; Fouad & Bynner 2008; McMahon, Harwood & Hickey-Moody 2015; Werquin 2012), as well as the economic and other causes and effects of rural-to-urban and international 'brain drain' (Docquier & Rapoport 2012; Gibson & McKenzie 2012; Güngör & Tansel 2012; Petrin, Schafft & Meece 2014).

Finally, we evaluated reports and policies from Tasmania and Australia more broadly to garner an understanding of what government agencies, community organisations, and policy think tanks observe about the factors affecting young people from across Australia (see, for example, Bowman, Borlagdan, & Bond 2015; Daley, Wood, Weidmann & Harrison 2016; Denny & Churchill 2016).

The purpose of taking wide-ranging geographical and topical approaches to the review was to gain a deep understanding of both the universality of youth employment issues, as well as the specific features of the Tasmanian context.

Much of the literature to do with education-to-employment pathways for young people focuses on the following interrelating areas:

1. discussions of the interacting and overlapping factors that affect **education-to-employment transitions** for young people;
2. the **changing nature of work and the economy**, including globalisation, automation, shifts in desirable skill sets, and the impacts of the 2008 Global Financial Crisis;
3. **intergenerational issues** affecting young people's ability to transition into employment;
4. **spatial factors**, including student and worker mobility and living in rural areas;
5. **socio-economic factors**, such as the impacts of disadvantage;
6. the influence of **personal and social** background, experiences, attributes, and aspirations on the experience and outcomes of transitioning to employment;
7. the influence of **educational and work experience** choices on employment outcomes; and
8. the **effectiveness of specific policies** on youth employment indicators.

In order to create background for the rest of the analysis, the remainder of this section deals with the first two points. The final six points are threaded throughout the analysis, as they relate to specific factors that emerged in interview responses. The analysis discusses key trends and influences that have emerged within Australia and globally, which have general or specific applicability to Tasmanian young people.

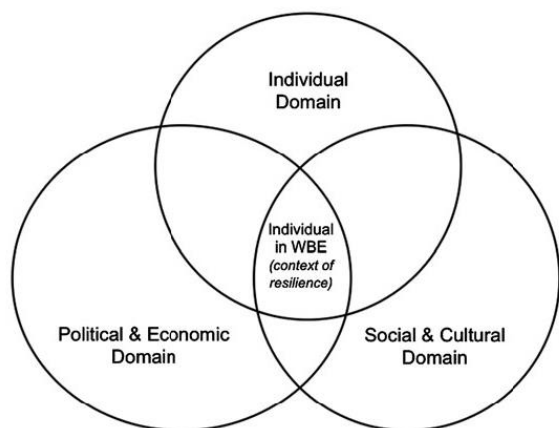
## **2.1 Factors affecting education-to-employment transitions for young people**

There are relatively few studies focusing specifically on the nature of young people's education-to-employment transitions or pathways, as compared to studies focusing on either education or youth employment (see, for example, O'Reilly et al. 2015). In Tasmania, a number of studies focus on transitions in the education system itself—for example from high school to college (Beswick et al. 2012; Watson et al. 2013).

Notable exceptions can be found in the work of Bowman, Borlagdan, and Bond (2015), whose Brotherhood of St Laurence report, *Making sense of youth transitions from education to work*, provides a comprehensive overview of the factors influencing such transitions. DeLuca, Godden, Hutchinson, and Versnel (2015) use the person-in-context model originally framed by Ford and Smith (2007) to evaluate different ways of thinking about these transitions. Fouad and Bynner (2008) discuss the general nature of work transitions undertaken at any age, providing a wide-ranging discussion of identity, capability, context, and choice. Denny and Churchill (2016) evaluate trends in youth employment and their influence on school-to-work transitions.

The common thread running between these studies is the complex, interacting, overlapping and non-linear nature of the transition from education to employment. Career pathways can be thought of as a series of choices influenced by many other features of life, such as relationships or policy landscapes at a time of transition, rather than a single choice made early in life (Fouad & Bynner 2008). Figures 1, 2, and 3 provide three examples of ways to think about the factors influencing such transitions and pathways:

**Figure 1: Person-in-context model for enabling resilience through work-based education for at-risk youth in transition from school to work** (DeLuca et al. 2015)

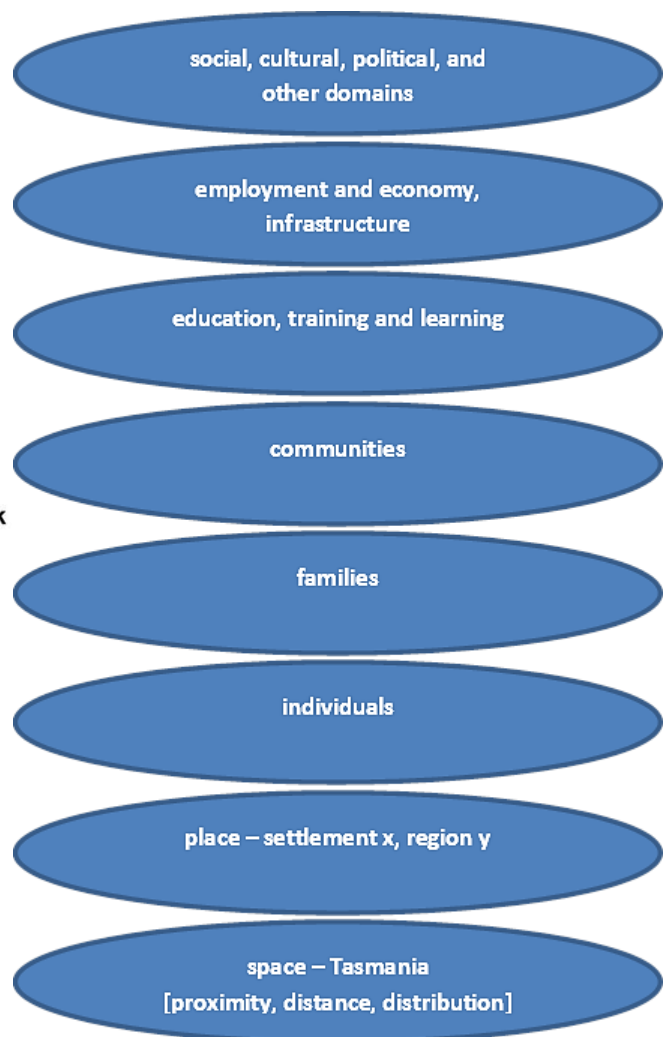


School Work  
School-to-work Transition Experience

**Figure 3: Levels of policy intervention for education-to-employment transitions** (Bowman, Borlagdan, & Bond 2015)



**Figure 2: Integrative framework for understanding Tasmania’s educational context** (Stratford 2016)



It is clear from the diagrams above that transitions from education to employment take place in and in relation to domains over which an individual may or may not be able to exert some level of control. How young people are able to navigate, learn from, and take advantage of these systems goes a long way to determining whether their transitions and experiences thereof are positive or negative, successful or unsuccessful (Bathmaker et al. 2013; Devlin 2013; Fouad & Bynner 2008). Whether these outcomes are, in turn, viewed as positive or successful, depends largely on the perspective of the individual, which is informed by their position in relation to worlds of employment.

A positive aspect of this complexity is that it provides many possible points of intervention. It also underlines the importance of having concrete policies available at each level or in each domain influencing the transition. It is important that policies ‘facilitate effective transitions and to take a broader approach than ... short-term unemployment policies allow. Such a lifelong learning agenda is fundamental not only to the well-being of individuals but to building the human resources on which the modern state depends’ (Fouad & Bynner 2008, p. 249).

What follows in this analysis focuses mainly on the political, social, and economic systems that influence individual outcomes.

## **2.2 The changing nature of work for young Australians**

The context in which youth employment exists is subject to rapid and profound transformation. ‘Work has long been important for the livelihood, dignity, and happiness of humankind. We intuitively and statistically know that work helps us meet our most basic and complex needs, providing a path towards financial security, mental and physical health, dignity, and meaning’ (Foundation for Young Australians 2015, p. 5). However, digitisation and globalisation have instigated change at such a pace that, for young people in the present, the experience of work and questions about the future of work seem highly uncertain in comparison to the experiences of past generations (Denny & Churchill 2016). Salvà-Mut et al. (2015) note that four features currently dominate the youth transition from education to employment in Spain: lengthening, complexity, precariousness, and individualisation. In one Grattan Institute discussion forum, Norton, Younger, Carroll, and Oliver (2015) noted similar trends in Australia.

Youth employment in Australia has experienced increasing precariousness since the 1960s. The recession of the early 1990s exacerbated this trend, with youth unemployment levels reaching 25 per cent at the peak of that period (Denny & Churchill 2016). The Global Financial Crisis of 2008 (GFC), sent shockwaves through the global economy, negatively affecting youth employment levels worldwide. While the GFC was not felt as strongly in Australia as elsewhere, 30 per cent of young people are currently unemployed or underemployed, with greater debt and decreasing access to homeownership in comparison to previous generations (Cooke 2016; Foundation for Young Australians 2015; Norton, Younger, Carroll & Oliver 2015). The Millennial generation<sup>1</sup> is set to be

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<sup>1</sup> See Horovitz, Bruce (4 May 2012) After Gen X, Millennials, what should next generation be? *USA Today*. Retrieved 2 June 2016 from <http://goo.gl/EmqLre>.

the first in decades to be worse off than their parents in terms of financial outcomes (Cooke 2016). They have joined what is known as the ‘new precariat’, the generation of workers for whom instability and fragmented or non-continuous pathways are the norm (Denny & Churchill 2016; Salvà-Mut et al. 2015).

The result of these events has been a cultural shift in what is required to obtain work. In tandem with targeted government policy, the absence of jobs encouraged young people to undertake tertiary study or other forms of training in order to remain active and increase their competitiveness (Denny & Churchill 2016; Salvà-Mut et al. 2015). Education and training are two approaches aimed at ensuring young people’s occupation in structured activities during periods of employment market stagnation or decline. Whether engaging in various types of education directly correlates with positive employment outcomes varies across sectors, with increasing numbers of employers saying that young graduates are lacking key workplace skills (Norton, Younger, Carroll & Oliver 2015).

In addition, while more young people than ever are obtaining qualifications, the number of full-time positions available for young people has continued to decline (Norton, Younger, Carroll & Oliver 2015). Primary and manufacturing industries have declined in Australia and other OECD countries, moving offshore to emerging overseas economies. With the loss of these industries comes the loss of unskilled labour positions—replaced with fewer, more highly skilled jobs (Denny & Churchill 2016; Foundation for Young Australians 2015). Federal workforce policies have most specifically focused on engaging women, older workers, and skilled migrants, meaning that economic recovery from the impacts of the GFC in Australia has not meant recovery for the youth labour market (Denny & Churchill 2016).<sup>2</sup>

An increasing number of positions are part-time, casual, contract-based, and/or uncertain. Indeed, more than 54 per cent of OECD job growth has been in temporary, self-employed, or part-time positions (Foundation for Young Australians 2015). Young people are more likely to take a ‘portfolio’ approach to employment, working in multiple roles on multiple projects for multiple employers or clients. Jobs are increasingly collaborative, requiring engagement with a range of intra- and interorganisational stakeholders. This flexibility provides advantages as employees may become more agile and benefit from working with a range of employers. There are disadvantages in insecurity of tenure and mutual lack of investment in employer-employee relationships.

One risk is that the insecurity and persistent change prevents young people from forming a professional identity as they enter the first fragile stages of their careers (Salvà-Mut et al. 2015). This situation is exacerbated by the increasing influence of technology and automation, as, in the words of marketing expert Seth Godin (2016, np) ‘entire professions and industries are disrupted by the free work and shortcuts that are produced by the connection economy, by access to information, by robots’. Approximately 40 per cent of existing Australian jobs may be at risk of automation or digital

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<sup>2</sup> It is noted that there are several examples of specific initiatives present in Tasmania include VET programs and course offerings, Tasmanian State Government work with education-to-employment organisation, The Beacon Foundation, pathways to apprenticeships and traineeships, training programs supported by Skills Tasmania, and others.

disruption in the next 10 to 15 years, and nearly 60 per cent of students are being trained in occupations that will be highly affected by this trend—and this proportion increases to 71 per cent when only VET students are considered in isolation (Foundation for Young Australians 2015, p. 7; PwC 2015). Among them are significant parts of many jobs that are taken for granted, from traditionally ‘blue collar’ jobs, such as construction labouring, to ‘white collar’ jobs, such as accounting and administrative work. Over the past 25 years, Australia has lost 100,000 machine operator, 400,000 labourer, 250,000 technical and trade, and nearly 500,000 secretarial and clerical positions (Foundation for Young Australians 2015, p. 5).

Increasingly complex technology capable of progressively more human and nuanced tasks presents both opportunities and barriers for young workers. Online business platforms and social media help reduce barriers to entry for young entrepreneurs and start-ups, as well as support flexible working arrangements, such as working from home, searching for jobs, and collaborating with other workers. In short, ‘skilled workers have enjoyed efficiency benefits from the introduction of machines ... [through] “skill-biased technological change”, which means that, over time, new technologies have caused the employment and incomes of skilled workers to increase’ (Foundation for Young Australians 2015, p. 23). In this instance, technology may isolate rather than connect, where young people without the relevant knowledge or access miss out on this ubiquitous way of working and communicating. In the past 25 years, one in ten unskilled male workers lost their job and never replaced it, and one in four unskilled men of working age are neither engaged in or seeking work (Foundation for Young Australians 2015).

Losses to automation in the past 25 years have been accompanied by the creation of 400,000 new jobs in community and personal services and 700,000 in professional and business services (Foundation for Young Australians 2015, p. 5). This service and knowledge economy calls for highly developed ‘enterprise skills’ that include transferable skills such as team work, creativity, critical thinking, digital and financial literacy, communication and presentation skills, and problem solving. For example, an analysis of over 4.2 million unique job advertisements by the Foundation for Young Australians (2016) showed staggering increases in employer requests for digital literacy (212 per cent), bilingualism (181 per cent), critical thinking (158 per cent), and creativity (65 per cent) between 2012 and 2015. The same study found that enterprise skills comprise over 50 per cent of the skills requested in 13 of 19 industry sectors evaluated. The remaining six industries were those largely in decline in Australia, such as mining, construction, agriculture, forestry, and fisheries. At the same time, an average of one third of Australia’s 15-year-olds demonstrated low proficiency in key enterprise skills, such as problem solving (35 per cent), digital literacy (27 per cent), and financial literacy (29 per cent) (Foundation for Young Australians 2016).

A shift toward individual accountability for education and employment outcomes has occurred alongside the aforementioned trends in recent years (Salvà-Mut et al. 2015). On a societal level, young people are increasingly expected to take responsibility for their pathways and to develop the capacity to thrive on shifting ground. The rise of start-up culture, which values entrepreneurialism and the ability to ‘create your own work’ means that workers must be knowledgeable about business practices beyond the technical skills required to carry out a single occupation (Norton, Younger, Carroll & Oliver 2015). In tandem with the need for enterprise skills is the need for fluid knowledge:

the ability to continually learn, adapt, acquire new skills, and discard approaches that are no longer relevant (Norton, Younger, Carroll & Oliver 2015). A globalised economy both increases opportunities for as well as expectations of a workforce that is willing and able to change locations to aid career progression (Khare 2014).

Underpinning these issues are larger questions of how systems of education are—or are not—preparing young people to engage with this rapidly changing employment landscape. The number of young Australians participating in higher education has dramatically increased. There are doubts, however, as to whether the university and VET systems in their current forms provide students with the necessary skills to compete in the employment market. In some cases, teachers and educators are seen to be underqualified or inexperienced in key knowledge areas, such as digital literacy and entrepreneurial skills, and are not widely engaging in professional development to fill these knowledge gaps (Foundation for Young Australians 2016). Studies have shown that employers believe that prospective young employees are consistently lacking both generic and technical expertise to succeed in the positions that are available. One result of this perception is that a larger number of graduates, who have degrees but not necessarily requisite skills, compete for fewer jobs. This issue is prevalent in other countries as well (see, for example, Khare’s 2014 study from India).

There are several hypotheses about why this skills gap may exist. One possible reason is the limited number of opportunities for meaningful entry level, graduate, and apprenticeship positions. One alternative is to seek available work experience in unrelated fields or through work placements organised by education providers or directly by young people themselves. These positions may or may not lead to meaningful employment in a young person’s preferred field of work. Although they are becoming increasingly necessary in order for young people to gain real-world experience, employers can also find it stressful to manage work experience students, or may rely on them to carry out responsibilities that would typically be the province of an employee (Norton, Younger, Carroll & Oliver 2015).

Another possible reason for the gap is that what is thought of as graduate ‘employability’ is really a set of personality traits that develop more strongly in some individuals than in others, and generally at a young age (Tymon 2013). Not every young person has access to the support required from family, peers, and educational institutions to develop these traits. Communication skills, for example, are critical to presenting well at interviews, engaging in critical thinking and problem solving, and forming productive workplace relationships. The assembly line approach to learning, popularised with the advent of the Industrial Revolution, is becoming increasingly less relevant as specialisation must now be accompanied by widely-applicable enterprise skills that allow an individual to work in a range of possible occupations. In a world with larger numbers of qualified people, young people are required to develop points of difference beyond their degrees and certificates to remain competitive.

What is being called for is a certain type of highly-skilled, highly-adaptable Renaissance scholar; that is, people with highly developed specialist or technical skills matched with fluid, transferable

enterprise skills. Graduates with STEM<sup>3</sup> skills serve as an example, where there are many underemployed STEM graduates at the same time that employers are unable to find employees that have STEM skills integrated with more general employability skills (Norton, Younger, Carroll & Oliver 2015). Employability is a combination of skills, knowledge, and attitude (Khare 2014), an achievement as well as a process and status relative to others in the labour market. Some Arts graduates could be understood to have enterprise skills without having obtained specific technical expertise that gives them a niche in the market. It is becoming clear that it is not an either-or but a both-and scenario. High-end technically skilled jobs will continue to be required regardless of whether or not those employees have enterprise skills (Khare 2014). Graduates are increasingly aware that they need additional skills and attributes for career success (Tymon 2013).

Another reason for the apparent skills gap is that intergenerational disconnects exist in working culture. An ageing workforce means that older people are staying in higher-paid jobs for longer, limiting career progression opportunities for younger workers. Employers may not understand or agree with the values or preferences of the millennial generation, especially in light of economic pressures to maintain operational efficiency (Tymon 2013). Meanwhile, legislation is lagging behind the rapid pace of change, limiting the very opportunities for entrepreneurialism touted as solutions to the lack of full time positions.

The result is that there are shifting barriers to workplace entry, where transitioning into the workforce has become easier for some young people and harder for others. For those who are highly educated, networked, and confident, there are increasing opportunities for entrepreneurialism and positions related to the knowledge and service economy. For those with lower levels of attainment and motivation, with limited capacity to network with the ‘right people’, or who lack confidence, the new landscape of work may be more complex, daunting, and challenging to navigate than ever.

We are left, then, with serious questions about the purpose of education in Tasmania, Australia, and globally. There is a blurry line between the intrinsic value of education for the making of a rich and fulfilling life and its extrinsic value for obtaining paid employment and filling a niche in the labour market. ‘The advent of mass higher education in the last three decades, and the related growth in the number of vocationally oriented courses offered, appears to have changed expectations for many stakeholder groups’ (Tymon 2013, p. 846). Sir Ken Robinson, a British education expert living and working in the United States, presented his TED Talk on creativity in education—the most watched of all time, with over 39.8 million views as at this writing—in 2006. A decade later, we are asking the same questions of our education systems that he asked then. In an article for *Time* magazine, Robinson (2013, np) again noted the one of the key challenges facing young people currently participating in education:

One of the myths of standardized education is that life is linear. A message we should give all young people is that it is not. Students are often steered away from courses they would like to take in school by well-meaning parents, friends or teachers who tell them they will never get

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<sup>3</sup> Science, Technology, Engineering, and Maths, sometimes also abbreviated as STEAM (to incorporate Arts) or STEAMD (to incorporate Arts and Design).



a job doing that. Real life tells a different story, and there is often little relationship between what people study in school and what they do for the rest of their lives.

This study responds to some of them, interrogating how these changes experienced by different people across the State, demographically, spatially, personally, socially, and on many other levels.

### **3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND APPROACH TO ANALYSIS**

#### **3.1 Overview**

This report takes a qualitative approach to social research. Qualitative research is ‘concerned with how the social world is interpreted, understood, experienced, produced, or constituted’ (Mason 2002, p. 3). It involves using methods such as interviewing and observation as means to learn about a specific research question or set of questions. One of its greatest capacities is to generate data about ‘how things work in particular contexts’ and draw connections across contexts (Mason 2002, p. 1).

Transitioning from education to employment is a highly personal experience, albeit one influenced by myriad external factors. This topic area therefore lends itself well to a combination of quantitative and qualitative research. Stratford and Bradshaw (2016, p. 123) note that, ‘it is conceivable that conducting in-depth interviews with a small number of the “right” people will provide significant insights into a research issue’.

Qualitative research may draw on quantitative methods to support the analysis (for example, data displayed in lists, charts, or graphs), but the focus is on the perceptions and narratives provided by study participants. Since there is mainly text, rather than quantitative data sets, to refer to, it is important to outline the study methods and the risks associated with those methods. The remainder of this section provides this background.

Smith and Skrbiš (2015, p. 16) highlight that their chosen quantitative survey-based approach to evaluating influences on educational attainment was ‘no substitute for qualitative research exploring participants’ own recollections and experiences’. It is this exploration that we have undertaken through a systematic literature review and in-depth written interviews with key experts and stakeholders from around Tasmania.

#### **3.2 Study area**

The study area encompasses the whole of the State of Tasmania. To reflect that focus, we aimed to recruit participants from around the State, including areas of the 300+ islands in the Tasmanian archipelago, such as Flinders and King Island local government areas. As the following sections will describe, the final participant group includes a disproportionate number of people from southern Tasmania, specifically the Hobart Local Government Area. This skew is due to the large number of organisations and departments headquartered in that region of the State.

The study draws on related research from around the world, described in Section 4.4, and highlights similarities and differences in youth employment challenges and approaches to managing them.

### **3.3 Ethics clearance**

Ethical conduct is an important part of conducting any research project. In Australia, ethical conduct is defined by the National Health and Medical Research Council, and the Tasmanian Social Science Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) oversees the conduct of social science research in this State. The HREC reviews and approves research applications; this study involved a low-risk application (H0015551), where risk to participants is minimal and limited only to discomfort.

Receiving clearance involves providing background information about the study, about how participants will be recruited and selected, and in relation to how ethical conduct will be managed. The application requires information about participant privacy and confidentiality, including data retention, protection of participant identity, study procedures, and the like. An indicative list of questions and the process for obtaining participant consent must be provided.

As Section 5.6 will explain, this study involved recruiting key leaders in the Tasmanian community to participate, each of whom needed to be given the option to participate anonymously. Because a number of participants are well-known public figures, we underlined the importance of considering whether responses could unintentionally reveal identifying personal details.

### **3.4 Delphi process**

The Delphi approach to qualitative research is primarily used in cases where, ‘judgemental information is indispensable and typically [uses] a series of questionnaires interspersed with controlled opinion feedback’ (Okoli & Pawlowski 2004, p. 16). The Delphi approach is often used as a forecasting tool to compile and calibrate expert predictions of what is likely to occur in a particular area of focus (Rowe & Wright 1999). A Delphi process typically has four key features: anonymity, iteration, controlled feedback, and the aggregation or statistical aggregation of group response (Rowe & Wright 1999, p. 354).

A Delphi process involves interviewing individual experts who hold valuable knowledge about a certain topic (in this case, education-to-employment pathways for Tasmanians, aged 15 to 25) but who may not have previously collaborated or been in contact with one another. It is an effective way of bringing together a range of important views on a topic.

This method of gathering data is similar to holding focus groups; the benefit is that participants do not need to meet in person in order to participate. The distance component provides a ‘space’ where participants may voice their thoughts with confidence, with the knowledge that their views will be considered alongside those of others (Okoli & Pawlowski 2004; Pill 1970; Rowe & Wright 1999). Specialist knowledge is a key prerequisite for participation.

A central facilitator gathers each set of responses and generates a summary report, which is then sent to the participating group of experts for their comments. The facilitator then incorporates these comments into another report or set of recommendations. The process continues until a general understanding is reached, which can then translate into or inform concrete actions. This approach allows experts to calibrate their opinions relative to those of others, while, at the same time, ‘reducing group pressure for conformity’ (Pill 1970, p. 57).

For the purposes of this study, we chose to interview individual experts who hold valuable knowledge about education-to-employment pathways using online survey methods<sup>4</sup>. While there are many benefits to interviewing participants in person, for example, being able to pick up on body language and other non-verbal cues, in the case of this study, the Delphi approach supported efficiency in scheduling, as well as the ability to target participants who would otherwise be located at several hours’ driving distance from project staff.

We chose Survey Monkey, an online survey questionnaire platform, to collect interview responses. Survey Monkey automatically collates responses and allows survey administrators to track response rates. Partial responses are automatically saved when participants click between pages, making for ease of access to all responses as they are submitted; this removed the need to rely on participants to submit by email or other means, saving time for both participants and project staff.

The study took place in two rounds.

The **first round** involved 19 open-ended questions and five demographic questions. We invited participants to skip any question they did not wish to answer.

Interview questions focused on the following key topic areas:

- personal experiences of education-to-employment pathways;
- articulating the challenges facing Tasmanians aged 15 to 25 transitioning from education to employment;
- origins and historical influences of the challenges named;
- locational and social factors influencing the challenges named;
- stakeholder responsibilities in supporting positive transitions;
- Tasmania’s key strengths and weaknesses in responding to the challenges named;
- overall reflections on who creates, influences, and can resolve the challenges named;
- ways of overcoming the challenges named;
- additional thoughts not previously covered; and
- demographic questions (gender, age, workplace postcode, highest year of school completed, highest non-school qualifications obtained, and where and when it was obtained).

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<sup>4</sup> In this context of this study, the term ‘interview’ refers to qualitative interviewing, ‘in-depth, semi-structured, or loosely structured forms of interviewing’ (Mason 2002, p. 62). Although data were collected utilising survey methods, the open-ended nature of the questions meant that participants had the flexibility to approach the questions from the angle they deemed most appropriate. In this case, the ‘interviews’ had a written, rather than in-person, format.

The full question list from the first round is available in [Annex 1](#) of this report.

Following the first round, we sent an eight-page summary report of the findings to all who participated. The report briefly described the following:

- research methods used, including references to the literature and analytical framework used;
- basic demographic information about the participants involved, including sector of work, age, and educational attainment levels;
- key findings categorised into the following contexts: individual, community and social, political and economic, and space and place-based; and
- next steps for participating in the second round.

The **second round** involved requesting that participants review the summary report and then complete a second set of interview questions designed to confirm our understanding of the key findings. The second set of interview questions was comprised of nine Likert scale questions, which is a survey method used to gauge attitudes or feelings toward a particular topic.

Interview questions focused on the following key topic areas, based on the first round responses:

- influences named by participants as having profound effects on education-to-employment transitions, in terms of individual, social and cultural, educational system, political and economic, and space and place factors (scale: not at all influential/slightly influential/moderately influential/very influential/extremely influential);
- challenges named by participants as affecting education-to-employment transitions (scale: not a barrier, slight barrier, moderate barrier, significant barrier, extreme barrier);
- priority given to investigating or enacting potential ways of overcoming the challenges facing young Tasmanians transitioning to employment within the State (scale: not a priority/low priority/medium priority/high priority/essential); and
- factors that would influence young Tasmanians' decision to return to the State after spending time away (scale: not at all important/slightly important/moderately important/very important/extremely important).

Response options to each of the Likert scale questions were randomised, so that no one option would appear in the same way for each participant and so seem more important than others. Participants were provided with the opportunity to name additional factors that did not appear on the lists.

A final question comprised the member-checking component of the study. Participants were offered the opportunity to modify or change any of their first round responses or offer additional reflections based on their interpretation of the summary report.

The full question list from the second round is available in [Annex 2](#) of this report.

In both rounds, we invited participants to edit their responses until and, in some cases, after the closing date. This leeway increased the quantity and quality of responses, in that participants had the

opportunity to reconsider their thoughts and manage completing the survey as their schedules allowed. Some participants returned to their first round surveys multiple times over the period of a month, demonstrating both the challenging nature of the topic, as well as the commitment on the part of some participants to provide accurate reflections.

We asked participants to contribute their thoughts as expert individuals rather than as representatives of any particular organisation. This process allowed them to choose their own approach to the questions and remove the pressure of speaking on behalf of any official body. The first questions about personal experiences invited participants to relate their own backgrounds to their views on the topic area. This approach encouraged participants to reflect on their own experiences to set the scene for responding to questions about young people currently transitioning to employment. Participants' reflections on personal experience contextualised their responses to the remaining questions.

### **3.5 Participant recruitment, engagement and demographics**

#### **3.5.1 Participant recruitment**

By definition, the Delphi process involves recruiting experts in a particular area. For this study, we adopt a perspective shared by Pill (1970, p. 58), who suggests that the term 'expert ... could really be defined to include anyone who can contribute relevant inputs'. Transitioning from education to employment as a young person is an experience that is almost universally shared in OECD countries, although the nature of the process is highly individual. As such, we took a wide-ranging approach to participant selection.

Okoli and Pawlowski (2004, p. 19) point out that an ideal Delphi panel is composed of 10 to 18 participants. However, given the topic area and variety of lenses through which to analyse the key issues, we chose to work with a larger sample size.<sup>5</sup> A larger sample size allowed us to capture a broader range of perspectives from a range of industries and sectors.

The size of Tasmania's population and land area lent themselves well to targeted participant recruitment. There are a number of well-known community leaders who are regarded by many as being at top of their fields within the State. Many were known to project staff, or to staff from the Tasmanian Government Department of State Growth and/or Department of Education. The majority of contacts came from these sources, the remainder having been suggested by other participants<sup>6</sup>. This personalised approach meant that the contact details of many potential participants were already known to the project team. There were 129 total potential participants, of which we already had email addresses for 78, enabling us to immediately contact them directly. For 38 potential participants, we worked through general email addresses obtained through public websites, which yielded 13 additional direct contacts. We were unable to obtain direct email addresses for 13 potential participants.

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<sup>5</sup> That sample derives from several sources: the list of participants at Education Transforms Symposium held in Hobart in July 2015; from three round-table discussions held in Launceston, Hobart, and Ulverstone in February and March 2016; and from 'snowball' selection—that is, the recommendations of others well-placed to make such suggestions.

<sup>6</sup> The process of recruiting participants based on suggestions of other participants is known as 'snowball selection'.

### 3.5.2 First round participant engagement and demographic information

The **first round** survey was sent to 102 potential participants. Of these, 82 ultimately opened the email, 66 clicked through to the survey, and 57 people provided some level of response.

Of those 57 people, 44 fully completed the survey and 13 partially completed it, making for a 56 per cent response rate. This response rate is in line with expectations, given that many of the potential participants were cold contacts for the research team.

Participants worked and/or had connections to a range of industries and sectors, from small to large businesses, government, and the non-profit and community. Example areas of work include:

- accounting and finance
- agriculture
- arts and culture
- Catholic education
- construction and building
- consulting
- health and medicine
- independent education
- industry advocacy
- local government
- non-government organisations
- primary industry
- private RTO
- science
- small business
- social services
- state government
- state education
- tourism
- university education
- vocational education
- youth advocacy

Of 38 who provided their gender, 16 identified as female and 22 as male. Of the 43 who provided their age, most were over the age of 35, described in the table below:

**Table 1: Ages of Round 1 participants**

Age cohort	Number of participants	Proportion of total
15 to 19	0	0
20 to 24	1	2.3
25 to 29	0	0
30 to 34	2	4.6
35 to 39	4	9.3
40 to 44	4	9.3
45 to 49	5	11.6
50 to 54	8	18.6
55 to 59	10	23.3
60 to 64	6	13.9
65 to 69	3	6.9
70+	0	0

Participants tended to have high levels of education in either trades or university studies:

**Table 2: Highest level of schooling completed by Round 1 participants**

Highest level of schooling completed	Number of participants	Proportion of total
Year 9 or below	1	2.3
Year 10	0	0.0
Year 11	2	4.6
Year 12	40	93.0

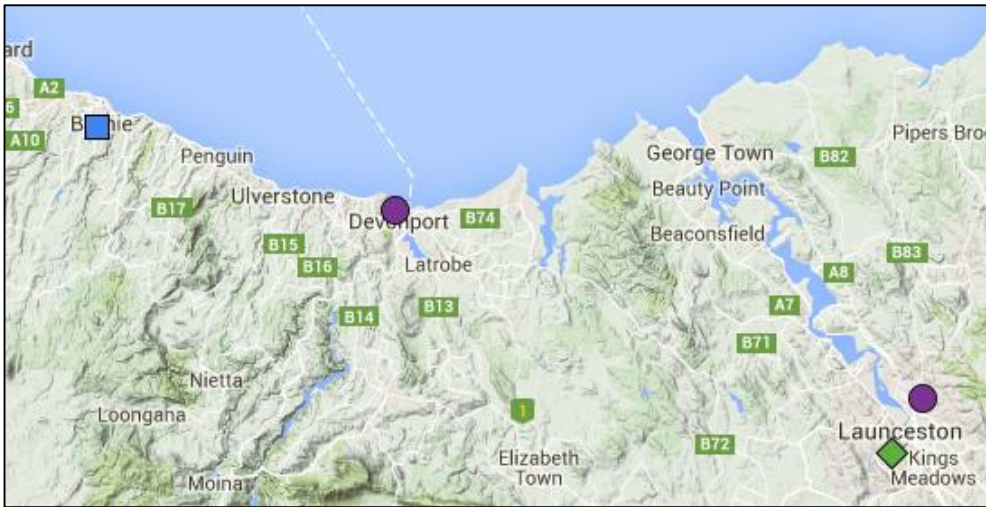
**Table 3: Highest level of non-school qualification completed by Round 1 participants**

Level of highest non-school qualification	Number of participants	Percentage of total
Certificate I/II	0	0.0
Certificate III/IV	2	4.7
Advanced diploma/ Diploma	1	2.4
Bachelor degree	14	33.3
Graduate diploma/ Graduate certificate	5	11.9
Masters degree	12	28.6
PhD	5	11.9
Other	3	7.1

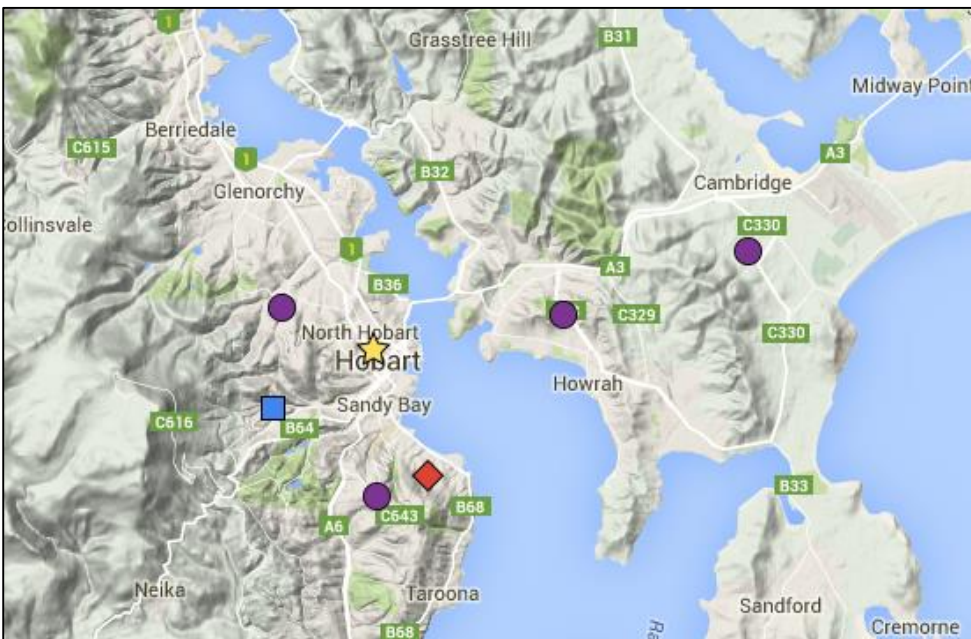
Of 32 participants who disclosed the year they obtained that qualification, just over one third had done so since the year 2000, indicating an interest for some in lifelong learning and professional development.

Participants were located throughout Tasmania, but were concentrated in the Hobart region. We expected this outcome, given the high proportion of organisational headquarters in the capital city. The maps below show approximate participant locations, defined by the post code of their main workplace. Purple circles indicate one participant, blue squares indicate two participants, the red diamond indicates three participants, the green diamond indicates seven participants, and the yellow star indicates 22 participants. Approximately 31 participants (of 41 who responded to the question) were located in the Hobart metropolitan area.

**Figure 4: Indicative map of Round 1 participant post codes of main work place (N/NW)**  
 (Source: Google Maps)



**Figure 5: Indicative map of Round 1 participant post codes of main work place (South)**  
 (Source: Google Maps)



### 3.5.3 *Second round participant engagement and demographic information*

It was critical to retain participants to ensure the validity of the results in the second iteration of the study. According to Hsu and Sandford (2007, p. 1), ‘due to the characteristics of multiple iterations, the possible scarcity of qualified subjects, and the relatively small number of subjects used, being unable to achieve and maintain an ideal response rate can jeopardise the validity of the study’.



The second round survey was sent to the 57 participants from the first round. Of these, 41 ultimately opened the email, 33 clicked through to the survey, and 31 people provided a response, making for a 54 per cent retention rate.

There is no universal set of requirements for carrying out a Delphi process, which makes it difficult to name an ideal retention rate (Boulkedid et al. 2011). For example, Hsu and Sandford's (2007) Delphi study had an approximately 70 per cent retention rate but with less than half the group size used in this study. Dalkey (1969, p. 13) noted a reliability coefficient of 0.8 with a Delphi group of 13 participants. Given the group size and the large proportion of thought leaders participating, the retention rate was suitable for ensuring the validity of this study.

It is important to note that of the 57 participants from Round 1, 42 of them fully completed the Round 1 survey. Twenty-nine of those 42 went on to fully complete Round 2, making for a 69 per cent retention rate amongst that group. Only two participants who partially completed Round 1 (of a total of 13) went on to complete Round 2.

These rates show that the greatest attrition occurred amongst those who had partially completed the first round, meaning that the majority of second round participants (94 per cent) were those that fully completed the first round. As partial responses tended to be skewed toward the first four questions of Round 1, which focused on personal background and naming of challenges, the Round 2 responses speak to the perspectives of those most committed to completing the study.

Participant demographics shifted slightly in the second round, to focus even more strongly on Hobart-based participants, the majority of whom had undertaken university studies. At a glance:

- of 26 who responded to the question, 11 identified as female and 15 as male;
- six indicated their main workplace was based in or near Launceston, one in or near Burnie, one in the Southern Midlands, and 19 in or near Hobart;
- all had completed Year 12, with the exception of one who completed Year 9; and
- two had obtained a Certificate III/IV, one an Advanced Diploma or Diploma, 11 a Bachelor degree, four a Graduate Diploma or Certificate, eight a Masters degree, and three a PhD.

### **3.6 Limitations**

Qualitative research does present challenges, especially given that it is generally based on rich descriptions and analysis and understanding of complexity, detail, and context, rather than on mainly numerical data (Mason 2002). This engagement with complexity is one of its greatest strengths.

The Delphi approach has specific limitations. The first is that it works with a small number of participants, valuing depth over quantity of input. Given the broad scope of education-to-employment stakeholders and experts in Tasmania and elsewhere, there would have been many 'ideal' participants who we were unaware of, could not obtain contact details for, or who were unavailable to participate. This limitation is unavoidable, however we succeeded in recruiting participants from a wide variety of backgrounds and sectors.

There are also challenges in the generalisability of the technique, or whether the data can be scaled up to apply more or less universally to this or similar study areas, as well as to similar people who did not provide responses (Pill 1970). Our approach is to collect the perspectives of a number of key stakeholders whose opinions have broad application.

Whether the Delphi approach yields genuine ‘consensus’ is another challenge of this study. Some participants felt well-versed in the topics covered, while others noted that they did not feel ‘expert’ enough to comment. In general terms, Delphi participants who feel less experienced may adopt opinions expressed by those who appear more experienced, for example, in formulating responses to summary reports. This challenge was mitigated by stressing to participants that, as community leaders, their perceptions and perspectives were as important as those working directly in education-to-employment pathways. As described in [Section 3.4](#), the second round response options were automatically randomised for each participant, to avoid any one influence, challenge, or other factor to appear more important than others.

There were logistical challenges to do with circulating the survey and receiving responses. Disadvantages of the Survey Monkey approach included survey links being caught in spam filters, travelling participants struggling to access the online platform, some participants losing their responses due to internet connectivity issues, and uncertainty for some about whether the survey was genuine. We dealt with these issues one-on-one, either by email or phone. The personalised approach helped to reassure participants that their time commitment was valued and that our interest in their feedback was genuine.

Timing presented the most significant challenge. Circulating the survey in April 2016 meant that it competed for time with several public and school holidays. Many potential participants were on leave from work, sometimes in remote areas with limited internet connectivity. Many then had full work schedules to compensate for their time away. Email correspondence and phone calls with a number of participants indicated that timing was a key influence on response rates and retention.

We compensated for the scheduling challenges by extending the submission deadline and offering flexibility to any participant who requested it. We also sent personalised reminder emails prior to each deadline, which greatly improved the response rate. Many of the partial responses can be attributed to lack of time.

Many Delphi studies use more than two rounds (see, for example, Dyer, Breja, & Ball’s 2003 study on agricultural education, which used four rounds). Adding additional rounds could have led to refinement of the results. In the case of this study, the second round responses were reflective enough of the first round responses to give provide the necessary confirmation of our understanding of the findings.

### 3.7 Analytical approach

In analysing both the relevant scholarly and other literature and the interview responses, we used a combination of approaches derived from studies by DeLuca et al. (2015) and Bowman, Borlagdan, and Bond (2015), and a discussion paper by Stratford (2016).<sup>7</sup> These approaches to understanding social issues use overlapping categories, such individual, families, community, and systems of education.

We ultimately chose categories corresponding to several themes informed by people's understandings of systems of education and learning: individual context, social and cultural context, political and economic context, and spatial and place-based issues. These themes represent a composite of those outlined in [Section 2.1](#) of the literature review. It is important to note that many factors, influences, and challenges 'belong' to more than one theme or category. We have assigned categories based on the lens through which they may most easily be understood or analysed, recognising that no factors exist in isolation.

We chose to anonymise the data before we analysed it; this process allowed us to keep an open mind and avoid attributing any given response to a certain person or type of person.

For the first round, we printed summaries of the questions, typically yielding three to eight A4 pages of responses each. The questions toward the beginning of the survey had the largest number of responses. As we reviewed the responses, we highlighted themes and sub-themes emerging within each question. We then categorised the themes based on our chosen analytical framework, meshing data from across all questions to create a well-rounded and reinforced analysis.

As the second round used five-point Likert scales, the Survey Monkey platform automatically aggregated the responses. Survey Monkey assigned a weighting to each response (on a scale of one to five), which furnished an instant ranking of the factors deemed most important by participants. We compared these weighted averages with our understanding of the first round responses and the findings of the literature review to inform our analysis.

## 4. ROUND ONE INTERVIEW FINDINGS

### 4.1 Setting the scene

The following analysis discusses the challenges that participants shared with us and which we categorised *post ipso facto*. The first three themes are discussed in order of scope (from micro- to macro-level). The fourth theme connects all of the challenges to Tasmania's specific context.

The analysis refers to all participants anonymously, by question and the number of their response. For example, a quote drawn from the third response to the fourth question would be noted as (Q4R3). The response number is based on the total number of responses for a given question, which

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<sup>7</sup> See [Section 2.1](#) (p. 11) for visual representations of these models.

varies from question to question. Therefore, references to (Q4R3) and (Q5R3), for example, do not necessarily refer to the same participant.

The responses that participants provided touched on topics ranging from the specific to the general. They directly and indirectly confronted fundamental questions about education and employment in Tasmania: Why do we educate children? Why do people want to learn? What does it mean to work?

When referring to these transitions in Tasmania, the bulk of the reflections focused on (a) challenges for **school-leavers**, who conclude their schooling at Year 10, for whom a university education may seem a ‘long distance and culture away’ (Q8R11) and (b) challenges for **aspirational university or vocational graduates**, who aim to find compelling work to match their qualifications.

There are also many young people in between, who, interestingly, received minimal mention in the responses. The challenges named generally varied depending on which of these two broad groups was being discussed.

The term *intersectionality* is key to understanding effectively all of the challenges named. Intersectionality is, ‘the interconnected nature of social categorisations such as race, class, and gender as they apply to a given individual or group, regarded as creating overlapping and interdependent systems of discrimination or disadvantage’ (Oxford English Dictionary). The term can also apply to overlapping systems of privilege or advantage, or any combination of advantage and disadvantage. For example, a young person could be advantaged in their financial position but disadvantaged in their relationships with family or peers.

Applied to what participants in this study had to say, the experience of the education-to-employment transition is a confluence of factors from each of the four domains discussed here: it is an ‘amalgam of educational attainment, occupation, and household income’ (Q7R12), among many other social indicators. Response Q7R40 argued that the:

disproportionate focus on education and employment, just two of the determinants, is designed to have a pull-through effect for everything else in life—give someone an education and an income and they will fix up the rest ... There are bright and employable 15–25 year olds in Tasmania who find the transition from education to employment a challenge because of one or more social determinants, regardless of how much money was spent on their school and how many local job vacancies there are.

This quote touches on the complexity of these issues. It also hints at how many possible leverage points there are for positively influencing outcomes.

Give that many of the challenges crossed over with others in terms of location, background, identity, or other factors, some of them are discussed more than once. As Fouad and Bynner (2008, p. 244) explain, ‘work transitions cannot sensibly be separated in transitions from other life domains, including building a relationship, becoming a parent, and achieving financial independence’.

## 4.2 Individual context

The individual domain encompasses the ‘individual psychological attributes that contribute to a youth’s propensity for resilience’ (DeLuca et al. 2015, p. 187).

Participants highlighted the point that the individual has ultimate responsibility for finding success and fulfilment in life, but that each person’s situation is framed by interactions with others, who can only help so much. This attitude reflects global scale shifts toward responsibility and accountability being placed on the individual in relation to education, employment, and other domains of life (Görlich & Katznelson 2015).

It is important to note (as one participant did) that one person’s barriers are another’s advantages (Q7R50). If confidence is a key attribute, for example, those who have it stand a better chance of succeeding in a competitive marketplace than those who do not.

The remainder of this section discusses, first, the influence of personal background and attributes on the education-to-employment transition, and, second, how participants viewed the current generation of young people (15 to 25-year-olds) as labour force participants.

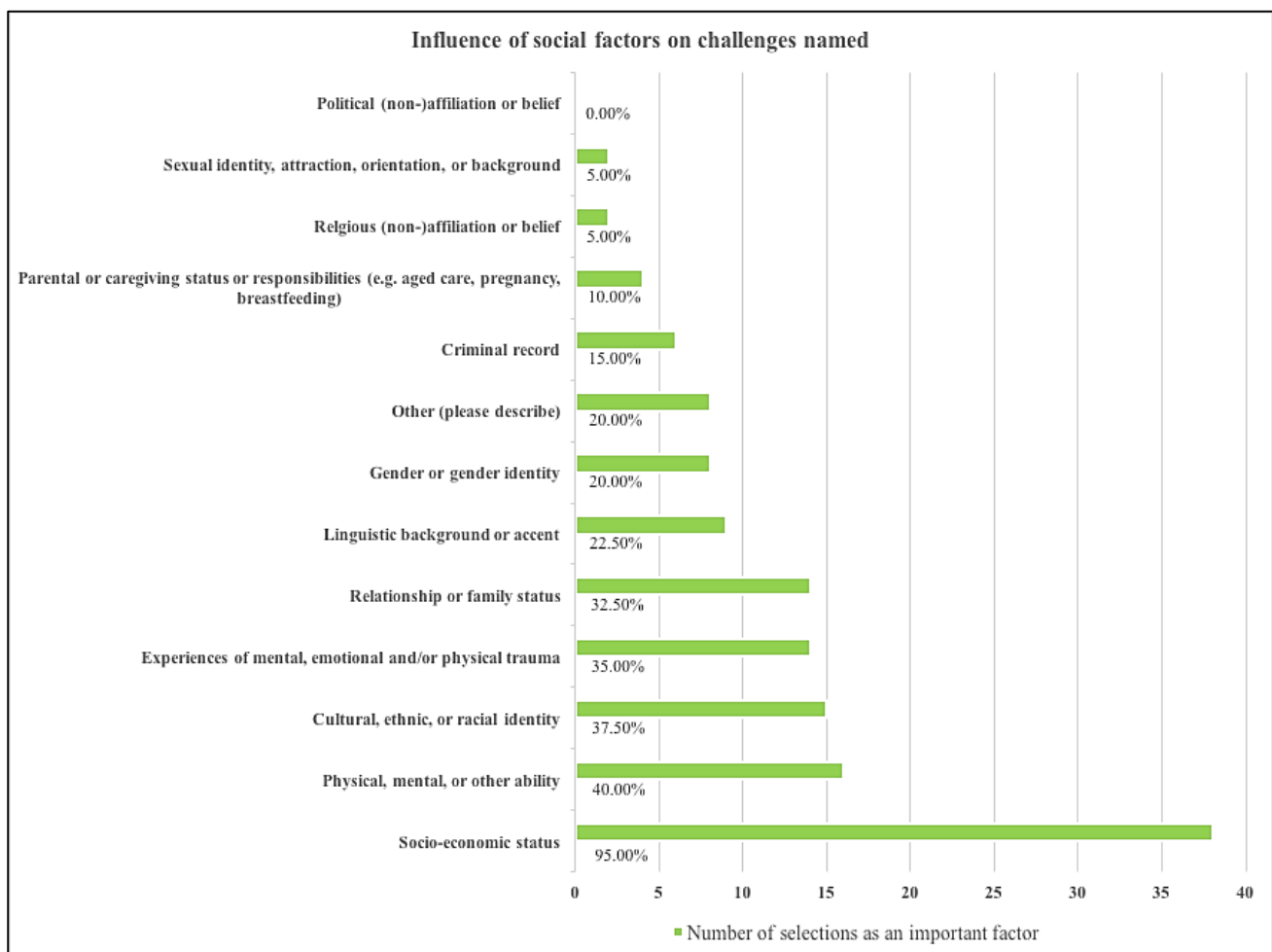
### 4.2.1 *Influence of personal background and identity*

Participants were asked to select and discuss the influence of at least three socially-based factors on potential challenges of transitioning from education to employment. Figure 6 shows the rate at which each option was selected.

The nature of the responses generally focused on the negative experiences an individual young person would have if one of the attributes played a significant role in her or his life. Themes about personal background occurred throughout the survey.

**Socio-economic status** was the factor most frequently mentioned, with 95 per cent of the 40 respondents naming it as a key issue. Whether or not young people presently experience disadvantage is a complex and interwoven social issue, discussed in detail in [Section 4.3](#).

**Figure 6: Influence of social factors on challenges named**



Questions of **cultural and linguistic background** featured strongly. Participants thought that young people of culturally and linguistically diverse/non-Anglo-Celtic background would face difficulties in securing employment. According to one response, there is ‘culture of racial discrimination within Tasmania for middle to upper echelon positions’ (Q15R12), where, according to another, ‘any obvious difference could be a barrier’ (Q15R9).

The experience of **Indigenous young people** was mentioned by two participants. Response Q11R38 noted that they<sup>8</sup> were left behind by ‘inadequate and culturally inappropriate educational systems. Racial profiling in schools, where kids are considered not to be “academic” based on their Aboriginality is reported to me frequently’.

A number of participants thought that Tasmanians (including young Tasmanians) had difficulty working with or understanding the **accents** of non-native English speakers. Interestingly, although communication skills featured strongly, there was no mention of how a native English speaker’s

<sup>8</sup> For the purposes of this report, we adopt the gender-neutral ‘they’.

accent would influence they others might perceive them, and the influence that could have on employment outcomes.

**Gender** appeared most prominently in anecdotes shared by female participants. A ‘basic unconscious bias that still exists’ (Q15R4), where women are overlooked for prominent professional positions (Q15R5). There was a perception that Tasmania fared worse than other states in relation to gender equity. Research from Portugal has found that girls and young women score higher than boys and young men on perceptions that there are significant barriers to career progression (Cardoso & Moreira 2009). On the flip side, the Foundation for Young Australians (2015) and Salvà-Mut et al. (2015, p.3) note that young men who exit formal education early are disproportionately negatively affected by automation and economic downturn in recent decades.

**Sexual identity** was infrequently mentioned, although in reference to LGBTQI<sup>9</sup> youth, one participant wrote that being different could mean that young people could be, ‘determined to head to the mainland to be themselves’ (Q7R14).

**Physical ability** was rarely explicitly discussed, although it was the second most selected factor, and one response pointed out that, ‘we have created a world that physically prejudices disabled people’ (Q15R15). Another highlighted that Tasmania has higher incidence of work-related disabilities, questioning why that might be (Q15R16).

**Mental health** appeared frequently and most often in connection with socio-economic status and parenting:

I think it is unknown how many children and young people in Tasmania present at schools each day with, or mental and emotional health and wellbeing [challenges]. This is impacting on teachers and their capacity to work with challenging students ... These students are in urgent need of a therapeutic response that is currently not available ... These are often the students that are regularly suspended and/or excluded and drop out at an early age (Q15R7).

Participants thought that the experience of the recovery journey, as well as the stigma around disclosing mental health issues, would be barriers to transitioning to employment. The perpetuation of negative behaviours caused by childhood trauma would also affect a young person’s ability to act according to standard workplace social norms, for example, in managing anger or dealing with criticism.

A number of participants thought that the **status of young people’s families**, for example, having teenage mothers or single-parent households, would influence aspiration and attainment. Caring responsibilities would add further challenges: ‘I don’t think many people are afforded the flexibility they need to provide care as well as work; it seems to be one or the other’ (Q15R2).

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<sup>9</sup> Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, and Intersex

The influence of **criminal record** on employment prospects was seen as profound, leading to increased likelihood of unemployment and recidivism amongst youth offenders (Australian Human Rights Commission 2004). Certainly care for chronically un- or under-employed young people who have been through the justice system has significant impact on overall levels of social inclusion and community safety and wellbeing.

#### **4.2.2 *Influence of personal attributes***

Having or not having a range of empowering personal attributes profoundly influence a young person's decision making and experience of transitioning from education to employment (Cardoso & Moreira 2009). Several key themes recurred throughout the responses:

- **self-awareness and views of oneself**, including personal aspirations, goal setting, and personal values about education;
- **sense of control**, including self-efficacy, intrinsic motivation, belief in oneself, confidence, and ability to bounce back after failure;
- **adaptability**, including the willingness to change professions or move (especially to urban centres) depending on the employment market; and
- **skills**, especially communication, high level literacy and numeracy, life skills, financial literacy, resilience, lateral thinking, and risk management.

Confidence and communication skills appeared most frequently and powerfully as essential for successful education-to-employment transitions. For example, 'the loss of confidence in oneself (especially when friends are all finding work) can really undermine a person's self-worth and eventually affect their employability and future opportunities, as the person starts to believe that they won't find a job' (Q10R13). To do with communication:

The skills of communication are not of narrow scope—they are of the very broadest human scope—for they form the base of all human engagement and accomplishment ... Those who successfully transition to anything, at any time in life, use their language and social skills to mediate those transitions—they seek information, give information, clarify, self-talk, make social approach[es] to others, convince, and rationalise. If skilled communicators find challenge in making transitions, what becomes of those whose skills are weaker? (Q7R13).

Whether or not a young person had these attributes was heavily reliant on family and social background is discussed in [Section 4.3](#).

#### **4.2.3 *Influence of position in the life course***

It is well known and documented that young people, especially those aged 18 to 25, may seek to experience the world by travelling or resisting permanency in arrangements related to employment, housing, and other normative markers of adulthood (Cooke 2016). Some participants recognised this desire and tendency. Others spoke about the transition to work as ideally being immediate.



**Gap years** were highlighted as a practice in which young people increasingly engage and that was not nearly as pronounced when many participants were first transitioning to employment. The positive influence of gap years on life experience was recognised, as was the potential that a gap year could turn into a life outside of Tasmania in the long-term (Q8R12). One participant suggested that locally-based gap year programs and opportunities could attract or keep young people in the State.

The **desire to rebel**—discussed alongside reflections on restlessness, experimentation with or abuse of drugs and/or alcohol, to leave the nest and experience ‘real life’ beyond school and work—was described as being simultaneously natural and risky. It was also seen as being timeless; a feature of every generation. This desire can also be thought of as a desire to grow and expand knowledge and understanding of the world. Response Q13R17 framed it spatially:

We are an island; you can drive from one end to the other in a day. The age group being discussed would be keen to stretch their boundaries and often, at this age, it is a rite of passage to pack the car and travel whilst still being in your backyard. This is simply not the case for young Tasmanians, and so you can understand their need to leave.

Although not mentioned in the responses, it follows that a young person’s ability to **navigate social systems** would profoundly influence whether such periods of rebellion would ultimately have positive or negative effects on employment outcomes (Bathmaker et al. 2013). One response framed it as luck, as to what life experiences and events would lead a young person toward an ultimately successful and meaningful employment transition, where it depends on, ‘who they meet and how they learn to understand how opportunity might work for them’ (Q8R11).

A number of participants pointed out that **emerging adulthood**, the amorphous phase of life when young people are semi-independent of their parents, has changed the way young people enter the workforce (Fouad & Bynner 2008). Many young people are moving out of home later, and some participants felt that extended parental engagement limited their ability to look after themselves.

The length of time taken to transition to employment was of concern for one participant, who thought that filling time with non-work related activities and then getting stuck in casual, low-wage positions would inhibit career progression, as well as block young people presently experiencing disadvantage from entering the employment market.

Given that young Tasmanians may want to experience the world more broadly then, there arises the question of whether they will choose stay in or leave the State, either permanently or temporarily. Participants highlighted many reasons why a young person **may choose to leave the State**:

- adventure and natural curiosity;
- to ‘break free’, discover, or gain experience of the larger world;
- personal growth;
- be themselves or find their ‘tribe’;
- anonymity, or to be part of a larger population;
- lifestyle change;

- university course offerings unavailable locally;
- career opportunities or progression;
- motivation and ambition to seek out new or different work;
- expand social and professional networks; and
- feel ‘over’ living in Tasmania and believe ‘the grass is greener’.

For example, ‘the [LGBTQI] young people we hear from invariably say life is harder in smaller towns where there is a feeling that everyone knows each other [and] there is little chance of privacy or confidentiality’ (Q11R13).

Whether young people return to Tasmania depends on their relationship to and association with Tasmania the State. Is it positive, negative, situational? Does the young person feel empowered or trapped? Is it a place of happy or sad memories, of positive or negative relationships? Does it represent opportunity or restriction, acceptance or isolation and marginalisation?

The answers to these questions are fluid and may change over time: ‘As my own story shows, it is quite possible to fulfil those needs [for adventure] at one stage of a young person’s life and then to re-engage with Tasmanian living at another’ (Q14R38). The same questions may equally be applied to young Tasmanians staying in the State and will determine the quality of their experiences.

Participants offered several reasons why young people **choose to stay in or return to the State**:

- to be close to family, friends, or romantic partner;
- in response to pressure from family or friends;
- as a logical expression of the loyalty or connectedness to place that they feel;
- in anticipation of starting a family;
- to raise a young family;
- to enjoy space and quality of the natural environment;
- because of the safety and lifestyle afforded here;
- motivated by a desire to stay or return to a “comfort zone”;
- because the cost of living is lower than in many other locations;
- to avoid moving costs or do not have the money to leave;
- to fill a niche as an entrepreneur or professional; and
- because their desire for offshore adventure has been satiated.

Other, tacit reasons that young people **may choose to stay in or return to** Tasmania include:

- a feeling that it is ‘home’;
- the sense of community and identity Tasmania is known for;
- the increasing opportunities for engaging with arts and culture in urban areas;
- educational opportunities unique to the island;
- world class access to wilderness pursuits;
- job opportunities; and
- the approachable size of its land area and population.

Although not a focus of this study, it is interesting to note that there was no specific mention of young people who move to Tasmania, either in terms of reasons why or in competing for employment opportunities with young Tasmanians.

Many participants highlighted that, while a young person leaving the State may ultimately choose to live elsewhere, those who return often do so with new knowledge and skill sets that are advantageous to the Tasmanian community and economy, as the following quotes demonstrate:

I think it should be imperative that all young people on [the] island leave at some stage (Q14R21).

There are big advantages for young Tasmanians who leave the State reasonably early in their life and then decide to return later. It made me realize that Tasmania is a great place to live. Unfortunately, once young people leave and become established elsewhere, especially in larger cities which are more vibrant and cosmopolitan and contain a diverse range of cultures, Tasmania can seem very small and parochial by comparison (Q14R22).

The young Tasmanians who leave the State in search of employment or interests are probably the ones that the State would want to return, with their new views on the world around them to contribute to the overall progression and wellbeing of the State (Q14R30).

If you are willing to uproot and leave the State, then generally you have the attitude that you will move for employment. That willingness is something that many who stay don't have. So I don't accept that we lose all the good people interstate; it is just that those who go have the get-up-and-go to do something or to chase the work. They aspire to be employed. Many who stay do, as well, but then there are those that are unwilling to move where the work is (Q14R36).

Mobility for employment and personal growth have become the norm worldwide (Bathmaker et al. 2013). Given that, *not* having the experience of living and working elsewhere could be to a young person's detriment, especially given that young people in large cities have access to many personal and professional experiences unique to those locations.

Young people returning to Tasmania may experience frustrations about closed or entrenched professional networks or about values they view as out-of-date or irrelevant, and may lack of comparable jobs and career advancement opportunities that exist elsewhere.

Many young people do not have the support, confidence, or financial means to move away from Tasmania to work or travel (Bathmaker et al. 2013). This incapacity may likewise lead to frustration for young people who are then disadvantaged by lack of opportunity—unless and until such circumstances are collectively addressed.

#### 4.2.4 Views of young people as labour market participants

Participants had varied understandings of young people in the Tasmanian labour market, and this issue was arguably the strongest and most recurring in all responses. Over 85 per cent of participants were aged 40 or older<sup>10</sup> and the vast majority referred to young employees in terms of generational differences and with value sets and views of the world different from their own.

Many participants thought that young people **lack the necessary skills and knowledge** to succeed in the modern workplace or to be competitive in relation to available positions. By far the most frequently mentioned factors were interpersonal skills or ‘people’ skills and communication skills. Some participants wrote that social media and smartphone technology limited young people’s ability to relate to their employers, although one response noted that students without access to devices would also have difficulty relating to tech-savvy co-workers. Declining standards in personal presentation and literacy were also mentioned.

An apparent decline in the quality of **work ethic** was frequently named as an issue and characterised as a sense of entitlement, a lack of perseverance, decrease in intrinsic motivation, view that work is an extension of social life, and reduction of stigma in accepting the dole. There was a perception that young people had difficulty differentiating between how to act at school, where students are guided and supported, and where some participants thought there was no such thing as failure, and how, then, to act in work environments, where independence and personal responsibility are paramount. One response suggested that current marketplace or legislative conditions require employers pander to employee needs.

Some participants had a more positive view of young people, writing that although young employees need to be nurtured and provided with consistent feedback and support, they have heightened awareness of social issues and are willing to commit passion to the workplace. A number of participants pointed out that this was a **generational difference** that older managers would need to become adept at working with. For example: ‘the high youth unemployment rate and the older working age of workers [mean that] many employers no longer know how to engage young people effectively ... They are unsure how to interact with them and at times may unfairly label them as not being “work ready”’ (Q8R27).

The focus on negative youth stereotypes carried through to **value sets and expectations**, one of the most frequently mentioned topics. Several participants noted that, above all, young people seem to have high expectations about walking into the perfect job promptly after completing a qualification, of receiving high starting salaries, and of quickly being given a high degree of responsibility. The first two points featured most strongly and were mentioned by participants from a range of sectors.

It is important to note, in light of this view, that, in a UK study of university students (which has applicability to the Australian context), participants ‘appeared to have internalised the discourse of “graduate as high earner” so dominant in much of the policy discourse on higher education funding

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<sup>10</sup> Thirty-five of 41 participants who responded to the demographic question asking for age bracket.

and expansion' (Tomlinson 2013, p. 52). That is to say, young people did not necessarily invent these expectations themselves.

Many participants thought that young people have a **lack of knowledge about career opportunities and employment pathways** and need assistance in interpreting the scope of jobs available to them. Some thought that that young people might think that there are limited numbers of jobs when really they are just unaware of existing employment opportunities.

Frequently discussed was the difference in **attitudes toward career progression** between generations. Many cited their own experiences of 'working their way up' on the basis of commitment and perseverance rather than qualifications or innate talent. Some thought that young people should still subscribe to this approach. Others thought times had changed:

Back in the '80s, a young person could leave school and start at the bottom of an industry and work their way up ... It isn't an option to do that now. You have to attend uni and yet you come out of uni and you have a bit of paper that says you have a degree, but that doesn't create a definite job in Tasmania. You have to go interstate to a bigger pond to get a start. There need to be more opportunities linked to the degree you are doing to pave the way into employment (Q7R39).

One response suggested that young people were 'over' the idea of the old boys' club that allegedly dominates many industries in Tasmania, highlighting the point that networks may seem difficult to break into and with values or ways of working that may seem irrelevant for some young people (Q10R15).

In line with existing research, participants thought that young people were **uncommitted** to workplaces, and they hesitated to devote time and money to training someone who would shortly move on (Deloitte 2016). Those participants thought that young people believed they could reach their goals without committing much time and effort, a feature participants attributed to the instant gratification-nature of a technological society, and which they thought would ultimately lead to disillusionment.

An alternate view was provided by a participant aged under 40:

Tasmania is a small place with an ageing population. There are less people working and in the workforce, so less opportunities for people to get jobs. That means young people like myself feel they have to move away to get good jobs or even 'a' job. A bigger city would create more opportunities, but not as good a lifestyle. Lots move away to establish their career but move back once they have done this (Q13R32).

Not mentioned were some of the key terms, such as *Generation Screwed*, *Generation Undecided*, *Generation Me*, and the *Young Precariat*, that serve as umbrella terms describing varying perspectives on the current 'millennial' generation (roughly, those born between 1982 and 2000).

The political and economic trends informing these terms are discussed in greater detail in [Section 4.4](#).

### 4.3 Social and cultural contexts

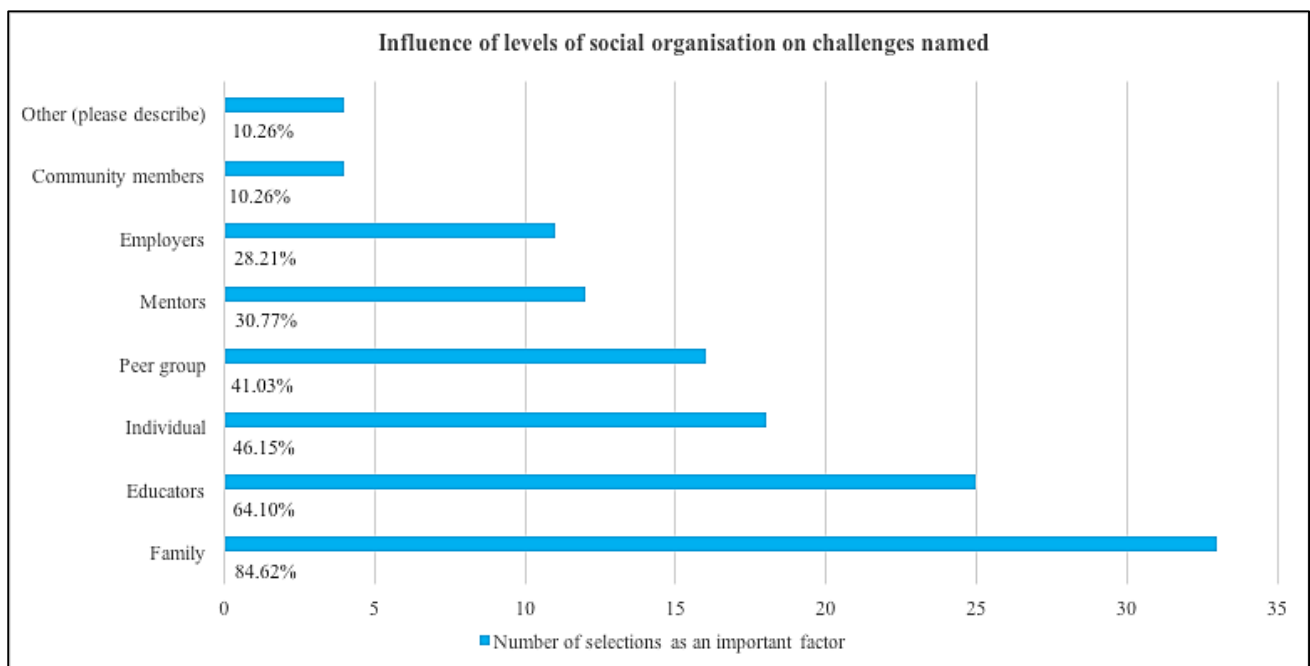
DeLuca et al. (2015, p. 189) identify strong links between social-cultural groups in transitioning from school to work, noting that ‘facets of family, peer groups, school social and behavioural expectations, and community services both influence a youth’s understanding of social norms and cultural values, and impact upon attachment to school and work’.

In this section, we consider the influence of several levels of social organisation: family, peer group, teachers and educators, mentors, and the broader community.

#### 4.3.1 Influence of socio-economic status

It has already been established that *socio-economic status was seen as the single strongest predictor of the nature and severity of challenges* and barriers facing young people transitioning from education to employment in Tasmania. Socio-economic status, or relative advantage, has reciprocal influences with each of the factors listed in Figure 7, so we discuss it first to set the context.

**Figure 7: Influence of levels of social organisation on challenges named**



**Young people who live in conditions of relative socio-economic or other forms of advantage** are thought of as being more skilled at communicating in ways deemed appropriate to the workplace, and are able to fit into workplaces where they can draw on the shared social norms that constitute personal presentation and behaviour. According to one response, private school networks and their alumni dominate employment—making it difficult for disadvantaged youth to break into these

circles (Q15R19). Questions of intersectionality are relevant when considering relative advantage, for example, where a young person might be financially advantaged but disadvantaged in terms of physical ability or family dynamics. However, young people experiencing advantage are generally viewed as more easily making the transition from education to employment.

**Disadvantaged youth**, on the other hand, likely feel the impacts of poverty on simple day-to-day decisions about going school, such as food, excursions, and transport. The impacts of such disadvantage on their well-being, health, and security affect the experiences of learning and socialising and their self-belief. Many such young people may feel ‘stuck’ and think that, ‘higher education is for the elite and wealthy and that for various reasons it is out of reach’ (Q15R13).

Specifically, young people who experience disadvantage are seen as **facing extreme bias** in the competition for jobs. For example, ‘when even friends who consider themselves left-leaning describe working class youth as bogans, I think getting a job must be tough for kids from poorer suburbs’ (Q15R22). Negative social stereotypes, especially related to assumptions of lack of family support and culture of welfare dependence, would also influence their ‘ability to break through into different strata’ (Q15R18).

In the words of Bathmaker et al. (2013, p. 730), some middle-class students have an internalized understanding of the game and play it well without actively considering the mechanisms of their own operations while others operate in a more intentional way’. Butler (2015) offers a comprehensive and insightful analysis into negative effects of these stereotypes on the schooling experiences of young people who experience disadvantage and relationships between families living in the same locations but experiencing different types, gradients, and combinations of disadvantage.

#### **4.3.2 Influence of family**

The influence of family was the strongest and most frequently mentioned theme of any of the levels of social organisation. The influence of parents was seen as especially important for a variety of reasons; the influence of siblings and extended family was not explicitly mentioned but may have been inferred.

First, the family’s **approach to work and education** was seen to have major effects on a young person’s view of those topics. Participants frequently cited their own experiences of being supported, especially by their mothers, to value and pursue education. In writing about young people’s experiences, the focus was more often on the potentially detrimental effects of a disengaged or unsupportive family, or a family unaware of how to navigate complex job markets within and outside of Tasmania.

The **level and type of support** provided to young people emerged as a key determinant of how they may respond to education and employment options. If parents promote a culture of hard work, achievement, and lifelong learning, with high aspirations for and expectations of their children, young people are likely to develop those same attributes. Parents have a key role in passing on basic life skills to do with, for example, finance, social etiquette, and personal responsibility—a role that

some participants thought many parents and family members were struggling or failing to fulfil. One response mentioned the positive impact of programs such as 26TEN in supporting adults and parents to re-engage with education (Q7R25).

Young people are less likely to gain meaningful employment if parents lack access to information about available jobs or about how to navigate job markets, have limited connections or social capital, and do not have positive education or employment experiences of their own to draw on (Daly et al. 2015). Indeed, education and employment may bring back traumatic memories for some parents, who then struggle to frame either arena as being positive for their children. Even with the best intentions, ‘the family sets the scene, but they can’t do it on their own’ (Q16R29). These reflections are corroborated by Abbott-Chapman and Kilpatrick’s (2001) study on the influence of families’ socio-economic status on post-school outcomes.

One participant noted that in either case (or anywhere across the continuum) young people **respond to the world in which they live**, in some cases simply following suit based on parents’ advice and what seems to be available and commonly done in context.

A reality specific to Tasmania (and many regional areas) is that young people may be interested in fields of work that are unavailable where they live. In that case, participants highlighted that parents need to engage in a process of **letting go** and understanding job market realities and how they will influence their children’s choices.

**Challenges within the family** were seen as potentially causing enough trauma to severely hinder a young person’s ability to complete qualifications and/or gain employment. Although this thinking was applied mainly to young people of low-SES background, these challenges could feature in households of any income level. Examples named include:

- generational unemployment;
- family breakdown/split families/single parent households;
- removal from family or being involved in child protection programs;
- lack of a present active guardian;
- neglect and abuse;
- lack of strong family bonds or attachments; and
- financial pressures.

These challenges connect to the role of young people in the home:

My perception and experience in coordinating work placement for the long-term unemployed has left me with the opinion that practical issues such as transport, suitable clothing, and education are all relevant, but the key factor is family support. I was involved in a few examples of the youth themselves being keen and turning up to work, but their parents or partners were frustrated that they were no longer working (for free) on the farm, or babysitting ... and either withdraw their approval or told them to choose—their family or the job. I can’t imagine the strength it would take to continue with work in that sort of scenario (Q8R44).



Associated with families experiencing relative levels of advantage were challenges of **approaches to raising children**. Too much attention or ‘shielding from reality’ could result in a lack of independence that would hinder successful workplace transitions. Parents could be seen to be overly supportive, raising children’s expectations to a point that they felt the sense of entitlement that participants deemed a negative attribute of many young employees.

The overwhelming attitude, however, was that, ‘no matter who you are or what your background, with the right family unit around you, you are very well-placed to succeed’ (Q16R27).

### **4.3.3 Influence of friends and peers**

Friends and peer groups, which receive specific attention in the scholarly literature, were rarely mentioned by participants (Smith, J & Skrbiš 2015). However, ‘we should not underestimate the positive and negative influence peers have on decision making relating to their pathways into learning and employment’ (Q16R7).

Young people in school often spend a **significant amount time** both during and outside of school hours in the company of friends and peers. **Fear of being excluded** or of making unpopular educational or employment choices can prevent young people from making decisions that are true to their sense of self. Young people may choose to stay in the comfort zone specific to their friendship group, to the long-term detriment of their ability to find meaningful employment. Following suit can influence the types of jobs that seem realistic or interesting, and there may also be a group mindset as to what constitutes a ‘complete’ set of qualifications (for example, completion of Year 10, a trade certificate, or a university degree):

Peers and friend networks are very influential when you are young. Perhaps in areas where there [are] enough people not focused on employment after education, there is a momentum where even those interested and capable may choose not to get a job because of the negative response of their friends and peers (Q12R38).

One response mentioned that it was important for young people to have ‘someone to share the journey with’ (Q7R50). It was unclear whether this ‘someone’ referred to a friend or romantic partner, or either. In any case, feeling that **collaboration and mutual support** are possible, as well as sensing the opportunity to co-develop interpersonal skills, is highly important for future success in the workplace.

The negative effects of **bullying and intimidation** on long-term employment prospects has been noted in the literature (Smith & Skrbiš 2015).

### **4.3.4 Influence of teachers and educators**

Teachers and educators received less mention in comparison to influences such as personal attributes and family, except in responses to the question that specifically asked about their influence on

transitions to employment. This insight can be interpreted as a recognition that teachers and educators are crucial to framing young people's experiences of education, but that they are not necessarily seen as being directly influential in terms of employment outcomes for young people.

Regardless, we were advised that many (if not most) people who have positive memories of education may recall an **inspiring or influential teacher** who changed the trajectory of her or his life course: 'if the educator is inspirational, it will be the most important influence on a young person's life, even more so than their family. They can turn them down a good path. Or if they are bad, they will turn them off' (Q16R18).

**Expectations and perceived roles** of teachers and educators noted by participants include:

- providing guidance and leadership for students;
- inspiring students;
- having high expectations of and aspirations for their students, which support them to be the best they can be;
- encouraging students to 'stick with it';
- making classes interesting;
- providing relevant life skills and soft skills; and
- enabling students' understanding of employment pathways.

A few participants indicated that **teachers may struggle** to fulfil these roles due to a sense of decline in respect for teachers and the teaching profession; the struggle to keep up with shifting norms and standards; and the difficulties of being innovative in an 'old-fashioned' or 'test results-driven' education system. Behavioural challenges in the classroom mean that teachers may consistently need to 'play the part of the enforcer', making it difficult for them to form positive relationships with some students (Q16R19).

Participants who had had negative experiences in education as young people highlighted that **teachers' expectations of students** could either remove or create barriers, depending on if they assumed the student was capable. Teachers may stereotype students on the basis of background or behaviour, providing irrelevant or inappropriate advice, which, in some cases, may be designed to prevent disappointment (Campbell 2014):

I was told by teachers from about Year 9 that, if I worked hard, I could hope to get a good bank job or [a job] in a good shop, such as Myer, rather than in a supermarket. While my family were supportive of my education, my potential was not highlighted to me, and so I assumed this was my appropriate pathway. I think for many young people, [there are unintended] consequences [stemming from] well-meaning teachers and parents [not wanting] to set kids up to fail ... Because of the limited job opportunities, an implicit or explicit message is sent that, "this is as good as it will be for you" ... The exception is for young people who have a role model, mentor, or family member who has broken out of that stereotype, and this provides them with realistic goals they can work towards (Q8R20).

One participant suggested that limits in teachers' own life experiences may affect their abilities to provide advice relevant to or meaningful for a young person in other and particular sets of circumstances. Another thought that many young people do not take up opportunity to benefit from teachers' guidance.

#### **4.3.5 Influence of mentors**

Mentorship emerged as an important theme. Perceptions of employees featured strongly in the literature (see Section 5.2.4), but the role of mentors in educational attainment was not as common. Mentors were seen as people who could **encourage the pursuit of dreams** and help young people lay out a path to get there.

The most powerful points related to the **availability of mentors**, first to support education-to-employment transitions for young people, especially those with minimal family guidance or support; and second in the workplace, to teach and guide young employees to build their skills and experience. Research has demonstrated the positive influence of mentorship in a young person's career trajectory (Alegre et al. 2015; Berryman 2015; DeLuca et al. 2015).

Participants thought that mentorship was not nearly as widely available as would be ideal. One participant cited statutory challenges, saying that the process of going through Working with Vulnerable People checks and other administrative requirements could be time consuming and stressful for people who simply want to help but are unaccustomed to or unfamiliar with such requirements.

Participants wanted to see **peer role models** for young people, especially those role models with entrepreneurial skills or working in innovative industries. Some participants felt that the absence of Year 11 and Year 12 role models for those in younger grades prevented younger students from seeing positive examples of emerging adulthood. The obverse may also apply, where young people with certain skill sets are able to mentor older people. Example skills for young mentors to pass on include learning a second language or digital literacy, among myriad others. In this respect, one participant suggested that **volunteering** was a sound path toward finding mentorship, in that it offered to young people a window into the reality of working in a given field, but concerns often arise in relation to insuring volunteers (Q16R9).

There was some concern that **older people** did not have digital literacy levels to offer knowledge that seemed relevant to young people; this observation may speak to a larger crisis of connection across generations. Arguably, each generation has its own identity, but personal advice now competes with the wealth of information on topics from work to relationships that can be found online. Questions remain of what advice or guidance young people believe older people can offer them that is relevant to a technology-driven world. This topic is becoming increasingly important with an ageing population in an era of rapid change.

#### 4.3.6 *Influence of community*

The concept of community appeared most often alongside discussions about Tasmania and its particular strengths. Participants' expressions of the role of community and its influence were inconsistent and generally non-specific. For the purposes of this discussion, it can be thought of as the **social and spatial fabric** a young person lives within, as well as the non-governmental organisations that provide services in that space.

Communities are complicated in terms of the various enablers and barriers to education-to-employment transitions they may present, depending on prevailing **attitudes to school and work**. If there are general societal expectations about attainment and excellence, and positive examples are set by local role models, community is seen to have a positive influence. If young people know of no one who has aspired to or reached high levels of attainment, or who has had a job, then, community will have a negative effect and cause young people to work to that status quo. There is, then, a 'need to ensure the whole community sends a strong message to young people that they are valued and we will support them' (Q17R7).

Participants saw the **role of the community and non-profit sector** as providing:

- leadership and advocacy;
- lateral thinking, collaboration, partnerships and aligning strategies across sectors;
- work placements, internships, and volunteer opportunities;
- help with identifying gaps in knowledge or services;
- support programs for young people, educators, and employers;
- information to interested and relevant parties; and
- to young people a range of healthful and engaging activities.

Others saw the role of community as **empowering young people**: 'how does a society transform itself so people in general do not feel as if they are a victim of their circumstances, but rather they are in charge of their own future and pathway forward'? (Q13R30). Another response stated:

It is simplistic to think this is about poverty or locational disadvantage. Rather, it is about the entire community, including the educational community, clearly and consistently and emphatically communicating the entitlement of all students to a full twelve years of school education, and the expectation that they all can and will achieve a meaningful qualification at the end (Q11R23).

#### 4.3.7 *Other influences*

Media and technology were named as other key, socially-based influences on young Tasmanians' education-to-employment pathways. The way media platforms present certain issues determines what some people think of certain sectors of society. One response suggested the media have a responsibility to publish positive coverage of success stories to inspire young people (Q16R4). The same response noted that choices about terminology influence how people perceive certain

phenomena and was pleased to see that a number of Tasmanian news outlets had ceased referring to Year 10 celebrations as ‘leavers’ dinners’.

Some thought that online study options had a negative influence on social support networks: ‘while we can help young people explore their options online, it is real role models, real examples, and real experiences that they can relate to that will help to inspire and motivate them’ (Q8R20).

The role of a young person’s social world in enabling or blocking successful transitions can be summarised in the following quote about ‘how the world of work is (or isn’t) modelled to young people’:

The exposure and modelling experienced in turn affect the beliefs and motivation of a young person. A motivated person, with supports and networks (in fact, a motivated person seeks networks) will overcome these barriers to their potential. Often, I believe our education and career pathway services are targeting the wrong audience ... Focus on those individuals that are influential in the decision making of a young person—don’t just focus on the young person alone (Q12R41).

#### **4.4 Political and economic contexts**

‘Global and national policies, economics, and globalisation all shape labour market conditions and influence the transition from education to employment for youth’ (DeLuca, Godden, Hutchinson & Versnel 2015, p. 190). This section considers the broader systems that influence how young people experience the education-to-employment transition. It examines the influence of the education system in Tasmania, the influences of governance systems and economic conditions, the influence of Tasmanian job market conditions, and the ways in which global-scale shifts, in turn, affect these issues in Tasmania.

##### ***4.4.1 Influence of the educational systems and attainment***

Participants underlined the importance of education at all levels of attainment, and in terms of high school and college, focused mainly on attainment levels and the content of the curriculum.

Tasmania’s **Year 12 completion rates** were consistently highlighted as the dominant issue in education. This recurring theme surfaced in many responses and across a range of questions. Participants thought that young people finishing school at Year 10 would struggle to be competitive in a marketplace with increasingly fewer unskilled positions, especially given increasing digital literacy requirements across sectors. The challenge of re-engaging in college-level education after time away from formal education was cited as a concern, and the literature shows that the longer the break, the more difficult and unlikely it is to return (Salvà-Mut et al. 2015).

The **historical decision to finish school at Year 10** was cited as being **cultural**. Many compared Tasmania to mainland Australia in terms of what constitutes a ‘full’ education, referring to ‘attitudes long entrenched in the Tasmanian community which regard leaving school at Year 10 as sufficient’

(Q7R46). Another claimed that Tasmania's education system has not kept up with national or global changes, and argued that the lag is based on the high proportion of people in disadvantaged, rural, and regional settings (Q10R41). Many thought it important to work towards the assumption of Year 12 attainment.

**Structural impediments** to fluidly transitioning from Year 10 to college were highlighted, among them the break between high school and college, the celebration of the completion of Year 10 at 'leavers' dinners', and the lack of exposure to Year 11 and 12 role models. The move to college was seen as helpful for students who wanted the change, and yet it disrupted the continuity of education for young people with a fragile or negative relationship with learning.

These responses speak to a potentially problematic way of thinking about the decision of whether to continue schooling beyond Year 10. They suggested a reliance on a **deficit model** of thinking about these young people. Barely mentioned or not mentioned at all were issues that Beswick et al. (2012) have identified as potentially propelling early departure from school, among them struggles with grades and test performance, strained relationships with teachers or administrators, or class characteristics, size of class included. Crucially, Salvà-Mut et al. (2015, p. 3) note that 'the greatest percentage of reconnection with the education system occurs within the year following drop-out and decreases progressively over the years'.

One participant suggested that the **growth of the non-state school sector** meant that state schools were losing (well-behaved and motivated) students of higher socio-economic status. Irrespective of the reasons, it is clear that the balance of enrolments between non-state and state schools is a looming issue in Australian education (Reid 2016).

**High school and college curricula** received some mention. A number of participants thought that the split between academic and vocational education occurs too early, when young people have not yet had the chance to learn the value of core skills or what fields they might be best suited to. Some mentioned limited support for varying learning needs, where busy teachers need to work to the 'lowest common denominator', making it difficult to give the individual attention that supports understanding of a young person's full workforce potential.

Comments on **vocational education** focused on the increasing complexity of the system, especially with the increase in the number of private providers.<sup>11</sup> There was a perception that obtaining and managing **apprenticeships** has become challenging in recent years, the declining availability of quality apprenticeships and the increasing costs of employing apprentices named as key issues. One participant questioned how low national apprenticeship completion rates (55 per cent Australia-wide) could affect the employment options and aspirations of a young person who had not completed Year 12 (Bednarz 2014). However, it is important to note that Tasmania has a 'strong culture of support for traditional apprenticeships', with a completion rate of 67 per cent for 2007 commencements—the highest in the country (Bednarz 2014, p.11).

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<sup>11</sup> Khare (2014) notes that, in the Indian context, an increase in the number of education providers aiming to fill particular niches jeopardised both quality and equity in that country.

Another participant thought that trades and university education need not be mutually exclusive, and that the stigma against trades in terms of their intellectual rigour was inaccurate, writing that ‘an apprenticeship is no different from going to university’ (Q10R19). Another suggested the need for more fluidity across trades, theory, and life skills:

Years 11 and 12 are seen only as a pathway to university, which I think is a mistake. Vocational educational training can be incorporated [into] Years 11 and 12 so that students continue to study and learn to improve their communication skills, literacy skills, and numeracy as they also obtain vocational training. Vocational training needs to be seen as a fluid option—yes, I may train for carpentry today, but I still can “advance” from there if I so desire. Continual training ... and learning need to be part of the culture (Q10R31).

**University education** was not itself discussed as being problematic, except when participants mentioned the idea of ‘degree inflation’, where there are an increasing number of qualified people competing for fewer jobs. This trend is interesting given the high volume of scholarly literature evaluating the effectiveness of specific degree programs and of university education generally (Bathmaker et al. 2013; Daly et al. 2015; Fenesi & Sana 2015). The issue of degree inflation is a burgeoning one in Australian education policy, as students become increasingly concerned about ‘the need to add value and distinction to these credentials, mainly as a way of “standing apart” from other graduates with similar profiles and achievements’ (Tomlinson 2008, p. 55).

One key issue was the pressure for young people to go to university, even if they are unsure of what fields of employment interest them, leading to more qualified people who are unsure of what they really want to be doing for work, who are also competing for the limited number of jobs available. Cardoso and Moreira (2009) noted a positive correlation between, on the one hand, goal setting and identity with a vocation, and on the other, career planning and goal attainment, for students as they progressed from Grade 9 to Grade 12. The decrease in the number of graduate work programs and the limited number of courses available within Tasmania surfaced as issues inhibiting successful transitions to employment. The increasingly high cost of university degrees was also seen to affect the types of jobs young people might want, for example, higher paid positions to help manage payment of university debt. As employability is no longer represented by formal credentials alone, young people are considering the soft credentials, or extracurricular achievements, that improve their marketability in a highly competitive job-seeking environment (Tomlinson 2013).

The importance of **work integrated learning, work placements, and internships** was highlighted in most responses. Many participants saw this point as absolutely critical to young people obtaining post-qualification employment. One reason was the requirement of experience to succeed in a competitive job market, and many participants thought that unpaid experience was critical to meeting this requirement. It is important, however, that such experience be linked to local job market conditions (Alegre et al. 2015; Berryman 2015) and that internships are genuinely of benefit to the intern, leading to paid employment, or, at the very least establishing solid professional networks (Cooke 2016).

A number of participants noted a barrier to young people participating in work experience is the lack of employers willing and able to provide quality work experience. Small businesses were thought not to have the capacity to train and manage young people: ‘the old fashioned local family business that was interested in supporting some local youths seems to be on the decline, although the chain stores have much more structured training and systems which can be more easily transferable’ (Q942). Incentives to support increased offerings of work placements were suggested.

Less important but still mentioned were **schemes or programs supporting education-to-employment transitions for young people**. Two participants thought that losing Pathway Planners would have a detrimental effect on outcomes. Many thought that there was limited or irrelevant preparation for navigating career pathways, limited support to learn generic workplace skills, such as networking, capacity building, interviewing, and a lack of youth-friendly supporting organisations. Others noted the potential that resides in the My Education system, which seeks to provide ‘supportive and inclusive approach to career education’ and to support ‘students to identify their personal interests, values, strengths and aspirations’ and use ‘this knowledge to make decisions about their future learning, work and life opportunities’ (My Education 2016).

Participants citing the **lack of employment pathways planning** at a State level, one saying that they did not know of a strategy, policy, or legislation specifically attributing responsibility for pathways planning. Another noted a lack of plans in place to help transition the jobs for workers whose industries have faded. One participant thought that the focus on taking a statutory approach to driving reform made it challenging to see how individuals could create change.

#### **4.4.2 Influence of governance and economic conditions**

The influence of macro-scale trends in governance and economic conditions in Tasmania were seen to influence job market conditions and therefore transitions to employment. Government, especially at State level, were seen to have the following roles and responsibilities in supporting education-to-employment transitions:

- ensure that resources and funding are effectively directed;
- provide leadership and work beyond election cycles to take a long-term approach to education;
- provide frameworks, strategies, policies, and quality assurance;
- support community programs;
- provide social welfare safety nets;
- recognise the entrenched nature of educational issues;
- support well-rounded education—learning how to learn rather than only being job ready;
- work to remove barriers to staying in school; and
- hold other sectors accountable for their use of government resources.

**Federal Government** was specifically seen as responsible for implementing Gonski funding, providing schemes for youth employment, and providing incentives to support successful education-to-employment transitions.



**State Government** was seen as having the most important role for supporting these transitions within Tasmania, one participant saying that, ‘a state government needs to pass policies that promote the type of society the leaders have a vision for’ (Q20R26).

**Local Governments** were seen to have a more community-based function, where their role is to communicate confidence in and aspirations for young people, as well as to support the community and NGO sector in supporting transitions.

**Providing funding** was the most commonly cited role of government. One participant noted that the need for, ‘funding and policy development—not on the run, but informed, evidence-based, and individualised to circumstance, not a one-size-fits-all approach’ (Q17R25).

Loss and challenges to the allocation of funds were frequently cited, for example, participants referred to defunding of programs that support vulnerable youth; an inflexible funding model that is unable to respond to changing market conditions; and the short-fall of university funding and disappearance of free university education.

Responses to **economic conditions** in Tasmania focused mostly on an economy in transition, where ‘disruption is now normal and constant’ (Q9R38). A number of participants highlighted the following key features of the current Tasmanian economy, one citing the RDA Tasmania Regional Development Plan (2015, Version 3):

- it is detached from the Australian resource boom;
- few industries benefit from growth in Asian markets;
- the strong Australian dollar reduces Tasmanian export competitiveness;
- falling commodity prices negatively affect the performance of primary industries such as forestry;
- low levels of consumer and business confidence affect productivity and investment;
- retail and construction sectors are relatively weak compared to mainland counterparts;
- State Government GST receipts have been reduced;
- private investment and public spending have decreased;
- reduced public spending;
- wages are persistently low compared to mainland states;
- industry advocacy groups have replaced unions in some industries;
- Tasmania is experiencing net out-migration and population stagnation; and
- the employment sector faces persistent challenges, including (a) low participation rates, with people not attempting to work who might if appropriate opportunities were there; (b) high unemployment rates, with many people competing for few opportunities; (c) high underemployment rates: people looking for more or better work; and (d) high youth unemployment rates.

Tasmania has a **relatively small economy**, making it easy to reach market saturation in terms of qualified aspirants. For employers, there is a limited job seeker pool: ‘even if an information-centred industry were to move to Tasmania because of its location and lower education and housing costs

than the mainland, could they find enough educated workers to fill their positions’? (Q11R30). The effectiveness of initiatives to employ young people is bounded by local economic conditions (Alegre et al. 2015).

One participant connected economic conditions to the educational system, writing: ‘I think things are much harder for young people here, because the economy has left our schooling system behind, whereas elsewhere the schooling system is being used to drive the economy forward’ (Q13R25).

Some participants wanted to see the State Government lead the way in shifting to more innovative forms of economic activity, one describing the:

attachment of successive governments of different political persuasions—reflecting the opinions of a large proportion of the Tasmanian population—to traditional forms of economic activity (in particular, energy and low-skill, labour intensive commodities processing and manufacturing), which they, in turn, see as relieving them of the need to do much to foster alternative sources of economic activity and employment, or of enabling people to acquire the skills and knowledge that would improve their chances of gaining employment in other fields (Q12R37).

The shift to tourism, hospitality, and niche value-add agricultural industries was seen as promising but limited in its capacity to improve employment outcomes, where the ‘increasing reliance on tourism in its various forms ... Although there are various spin-offs, [there is] nothing that could be considered a major employment opportunity. Should we stop becoming a tourism destination, we will be in serious trouble’ (Q13R17). A number of participants thought that young Tasmanians in general did not seem interested in making a lifelong career in these sectors, and pointed out that the loss of a single industry had far-reaching impacts in a State with a relatively low population.

Participants saw the **private sector** as having the following roles and responsibilities in supporting education-to-employment transitions:

- provide (meaningful) employment opportunities;
- commit to providing entry level positions;
- provide work placements and graduate programs;
- provide training and send a strong message that learning is important;
- provide career pathways and progressions;
- partner with schools, colleges, universities;
- provide mentoring, advocacy, and support;
- invest in staff;
- be understanding of young people and their needs;
- communicate with other stakeholders;
- invest financially and avoid reliance on government funding;
- ensure diversity in the workplace;
- encourage a mentality of generosity and abundance;
- be brave and driven by possibility; and

- build ‘higher expectations in people, showing it can be done, and generally having an interest in lifting outcomes’ (Q17R29).

One participant stated hopefully:

I don’t think the message has been clear as to what businesses can do. Whilst some businesses get involved in their communities, the majority just get on with running their business. If we want the private sector to take more responsibility, then we need to be clearer about what their investment should be and what return on investment they could expect (Q17R26).

#### 4.4.3 *Influence of trends in the job market*

Economic conditions influence the availability and nature of employment. Trends in the *Tasmanian job market were seen as the single greatest barrier to young people successfully transitioning from education to employment within the State*. As Fouad & Bynner (2008, p. 245) explain, ‘each new generation is ... subject to the particular combination of influences that surround the period of birth and growing up ... historically defined policy contexts affect different cohorts differentially over time’. There were a number of factors at play.

By far the most significant theme to emerge, and one with connections to global trends of youth unemployment, is the **changing structure of the market** to one with:

- fewer unskilled jobs (i.e. jobs suitable for Year 10 attainment levels);
- fewer and lower-quality entry level jobs;
- fewer graduate positions and graduate programs (with notable exceptions, such as nursing and teaching);
- fewer full time positions;
- need and push for entrepreneurialism;
- high competition for vacancies;
- high staff turnover;
- uncertainty; and
- an increasing casualization of the work force.

Participants explained that uncertain and highly competitive job market conditions, which have persisted over time, are becoming all that young people have ever known—the new normal (Butler 2015). There is no longer certainty of a ‘job for life’ in areas such as the public sector. A degree or qualification no longer guarantees a suitable position will be found. Positions in Tasmania are ‘hard won and usually pay less than mainland counterparts’ (Q13R17), which, in turn, influences young job seekers’ motivation and aspiration.

According to one participant:

Despite these changes now being long-term, the cultural approach to education and employment has not changed. People know the jobs are gone but have not made the cultural

transition to changing the way they think about or do education. It's all just a bit hopeful that a young person will find work and an acceptance if they don't—after all, it's a common outcome and often intergenerational. This is quite adaptive behaviour given the poor employment prospects for many low-educated/low-skilled young people (Q10R40).

The increasing promotion of **entrepreneurialism** as a solution comes with the reality, noted in a study from the United States, that 90 per cent of start-ups fail, often (42 per cent) due to the lack of a market for the product (Griffith 2014). Young people first need to gain business management skills in order to succeed on this path. At the same time, entrepreneurs may experience higher returns to formal education than employees (Van Praag et al. 2013).

The '**grey ceiling**' was seen as contributing to such challenges, where the job market is shrinking and older workers are hanging on to their positions. There is a need to compete with more highly qualified, older workers for lower-grade jobs due to the limited number of places. High-pay, high-responsibility positions that young people would aspire to are increasingly out of reach.

Discussions about **perspectives on and perceptions of employers** focused on a reciprocal relationship between employers and young employees. There was a sense that employers need support in order to effectively hire and work with the current generation of young people:

I think we need to have more faith and confidence in young people, and employers have a large role to play in supporting young people. We need to be more inventive and supportive and getting young people into the workforce with employer incentives and support for both (Q9R20).

Participants encouraged employers to **actively engage in supporting young people**, both the benefit of the business and the overall Tasmanian community. They noted that young employees, especially, need supervision, feedback, and mentorship—it is not enough simply to be given a job if young people are to grow and flourish. One participant suggested that employers should 'invest and support the future; don't expect a perfect fit' (Q16R11). They recommended understanding and embracing the differences between generations, as well as between individual young people, each of whom has their unique strengths and talents. They also advocated that employers also embrace **changes in working culture**, for example by providing, 'flexibility in the workplace to cater better for young people who want to do more than just work for a living' (Q7R37).

One participant summed up the **role of the employer** to retaining youth population, writing: 'employers who can provide entry points, career paths, on-the-job learning, mentoring, and interesting jobs will be vital to keeping people in the State' (Q16R1).

The responses indicate that employers need support to effectively employ young people, but they also need to take responsibility for their role as community members supporting young people. This point mirrored the same perception of young people as need support but also needing to be accountable for their own decisions.

#### 4.4.4 *Influence of global shifts*

‘Many of the challenges that the 15 to 25-year-olds in this state face are the same [as] in other states and territories and in similar parts of the world’ (Q13R20). This observation is reflected in the literature based elsewhere in Australia and throughout the world, especially since the Global Financial Crisis (GFC) (Alegre et al. 2015; Bathmaker, Hutchinson & Kettlewell 2015; Butler 2015; Campbell 2014; Cardoso & Moreira 2009; Corliss, & Heaslip 2015; Daly, Lewis, & Devlin 2013; Fenesi & Sara 2015; Görlich & Katznelson 2015; Bathmaker et al. 2013; Jackson 2013; Khare 2014; Maguire 2015; Robinson 2012; Salvà-Mut et al. 2015; Straková 2015; Van Praag et al. 2012; Walsh 2013).

Although participants generally did not draw direct comparisons between Tasmania and other locations, specific links were made with post-GFC Europe, Singapore, and Western Sydney, as well as regional areas:

Youth unemployment is a national issue, particularly for regional areas, because they have less diversified economies compared to [metropolitan] areas. One of the things to think about is how Tasmania is trending compared to other areas. We might all have problems at the moment, but if we are in decline while others are in ascension, that is a big issue (Q13R33).

One participant suggested global economic and employment conditions can be thought of as in decline or in transition, as experiencing disruption or innovation, depending on perspective or on ‘how you spin it’ (Q7R43).

Technology is a specific influence affecting employment markets globally. The changing landscape of **social media**, including the presentation of self online, requires high-level literacy skills and an ability to navigate complex systems of privacy controls, among other features. The pressure to engage in and manage social media can be menacing for many young people seeking employment.

**Automation** is another feature of global employment markets with serious local implications. Up to 40 per cent of Australian jobs are estimated to be highly affected by automation within the next 10 to 15 years (Foundation for Young Australians 2016).

A number of participants suggested that there is less awareness in Tasmania than elsewhere of the influence automation could have on job prospects, especially for those in traditionally ‘white collar’ jobs, such as accounting:

One issue I see in talking to some parents and teenagers is that they do not understand the changing nature of work and technology. Even farming, aquaculture, and large industrial employers need employees with reasonable literacy and numeracy skills to be able to work with increasing computerisation and comply with Work Health and Safety. The days of secure, unskilled labouring jobs are no longer (Q7R47).

Automated aspects of job searching, such as filling in online application forms, may be taken for granted by young people experiencing relative levels of advantage. Young people with low literacy levels and/or little or no internet access may be unable to engage in these platforms, and their parents may be unable to help.

**Uncertainty about the future of work** was described as simultaneously exhilarating and terrifying: ‘I believe young Tasmanians today have a very exciting time ahead of themselves, but I do feel this immediate group may be caught between the old world of “clock[ing] on and clocking off” and the new world of being embraced for their creativity’ (Q8R16).

Some participants remarked that the jobs that may be prevalent in the future do not exist yet, which present opportunities for innovation, creativity, and entrepreneurialism, but it means that ‘young people are finding it increasingly difficult to imagine the future and where they will be in that future’ (Q8R13).

Of critical importance for the outcomes of this study is the assertion that ‘the notion of “pathways” and of career advice [are] outdated concepts, since the pathways are no longer clear nor reliable nor even very helpful, given the extent of the change now and that it will be escalating into the future’ (Q8R26). This view is supported by Denny and Churchill’s (2016, p.8) evaluation of youth employment trends in Australia, who state that, policy has assumed that ‘young people make a series of linear transitions’, despite ‘decades of research that have demonstrated that transitions for young people in the contemporary labour market are anything but linear’.

Supporting both consistency and adaptability for young people will prove to be both challenging and necessary in the changing world of work.

#### **4.5 Space and place**

Where and how do all of the influences, challenges, and barriers named present themselves? This section examines the influence of space (physical—location and access) and place (psychological—sense of or connection to) on education-to-employment challenges. It concludes with Tasmanians’ particular strengths and weaknesses in dealing with these challenges—many of which have place-based or spatial roots (Butler 2015).

Participants generally thought of **spatial challenges** in one, some, or all of four ways:

- urban vs. rural;
- regions vs. centres;
- low-socioeconomic status (LSES) areas vs. high-socioeconomic status areas; and
- Tasmania vs. mainland Australia.

The **places or regions** where participants thought education-to-employment challenges were most pronounced were the North, Northwest Coast, West Coast, East Coast, Far South and East,

Midlands, Bass Strait Islands, and the northern suburbs of Hobart and Launceston. In sum, the most affected locations were anywhere in the State apart from Hobart (especially) or Launceston.

One participant wrote: ‘this is all relative, from a completely rural area (such as the Midlands) to more urban, industrial areas (such as the NW Coast), to the cities of Launceston and Hobart (which also do not offer the choices of bigger cities on the mainland, or even more choices overseas)’ (Q11R31).

Only two participants highlighted the influence of history, saying, for example, ‘I don’t think I need to go into this as it is so long established and so embedded and well-known’ (Q11R38).

While the North and Northwest were most frequently mentioned, the Midlands and East Coast regions of Tasmania experience the slowest (especially youth) population growth (Abbott-Chapman, Johnston & Jetson 2014). A recent study on youth unemployment hotspots was mentioned more than once, with the note that the suburbs of Hobart and Launceston fared worse than the Northwest (Brotherhood of St Laurence 2016).

#### **4.5.1 Space: location and access**

Participants referred to Tasmania’s unique spatial context. It is an archipelago, characterised by specific challenges related to distance and access and perceived and actual isolation. The population is highly dispersed, and many residents identify strongly with one of three regions (Northwest, North, and South). There are many small towns at long distances from urban centres, and especially from the capital city in some cases. One participant noted that the idea of young people moving from Tasmania to one of Australia’s major urban centres, such as Sydney or Melbourne, may elicit a psychological response for parents and families more pronounced than if they lived in a mainland State; this because of the necessity of having to cross a large body of water.

The first major challenge and influence is related to the contrast between Tasmania’s urban and rural, regional, and remote areas. For one participant, ‘obviously, anywhere outside of Hobart is suffering. There are small spotlights of success, but this is usually based around a single entity like agriculture or tourism’ (Q11R17).

Challenges affecting **rural, regional, and remote areas** named by participants include:

- a depressed economy in some regional areas;
- difficulty attracting talented employees to rural and regional areas, especially the North and Northwest;
- a lack of experts in some fields;
- population decline, leading to contraction or collapse of some sectors;
- difficulty responding to changes in economic conditions, mainly to a service-oriented economy where regional areas have limited competitive advantage;

- limited access to transport, meaning parents need to drive young people to school and/or work, or they need to drive themselves or use public transport (which also carry issues of cost and availability);
- not being seen as ‘happening’ enough relative to urban centres, especially in terms of cultural events and professional and governance activities;
- limited exposure to ‘outer world’ influences makes for a more insular, rather than worldly outlook;
- limited reach of some specialist services (for example, mental health and drug rehabilitation); and
- limited access to telecommunications services (for instance, mobile phone coverage and NBN) and, in some cases, limited knowledge of how to use them where they are available, leading to an increase in isolation, rather than of connection.

Research has shown that rural areas have also been historically affected by low level of Year 12 completion, high unemployment for school leavers, and low participation in vocational education (Abbott-Chapman & Kilpatrick 2001).

Participants highlighted improvements in these same areas:

- more jobs now in coastal areas, due to the expansion of tourism and aquaculture industries;
- increased opportunities to access education and training in the regions in recent years;
- the success of some industries, such as dairy and aquaculture, means regional Tasmania is doing comparably well relative to other Australian regional areas; and
- there are increasing opportunities to work remotely.

One participant noted that Tasmania’s major urban areas do not have the population size of their urban counterparts in order to support regional hinterlands:

I have seen research that says that these issues in Tasmania are not that different to [those] in regional areas in other states. What such research fails to get to grips with is that young people from other states can gravitate to their capital cities—most of which have a pretty booming economy. Their size means they generate, just by population growth, many new employment opportunities. Although the economy of Hobart is on the rise, our size and lack of in-migration reduces the opportunity of the city to be a big generator of employment (Q13R38).

Indeed, ‘it could be said that the “isolation” experienced by young Tasmanians is not as pronounced as [in] other places in Australia and overseas. Travel distances in Tasmania [are] not as pronounced as [in] many other places given its geographic size and dispersed population centres’ (Q13R16).

The **globalisation of work** has meant that, in theory, young people all over the State have information about and access to employment in locations outside their postcode of residence. Young Tasmanians can ‘cast their nets’ wider than they could previously, but are competing with an international workforce. At the same time, they may also face family or community pressures to take local, lower-skilled jobs, or jobs requiring different skill sets, than what they might like—an effort to get them to stay nearby.



Many young people in suburban, rural, regional, and remote areas of Tasmania may need to move as they progress through schooling and employment. Although this need is set to change in some areas with the roll-out of expanded Year 11 and 12 offerings, young people may still need to **move to attend college** after completion of Year 10. Participants highlighted the financial difficulties associated with seeking housing and other support far away from their families or communities. They may not yet have the life skills required to flourish as young people living independently from family homes. It can also be culturally challenging to move to a new educational dynamic: any young person in a school that where many students do not successful completion of Year 12 is ‘at risk of “not fitting in” when they leave their school and move to a college or other school’ (Q11R25).

Participants recognised that young people may need to **move to seek employment**. In many cases, they suggested that young people should learn to adapt to the need to be mobile: ‘the further young people progress with education, the more flexible they should be in locations for employment options’ (Q7R48). Conversely, ‘people who want to stay here need to understand what industry options there are and respond accordingly’ (Q13R40). One suggested that urban young people also need to consider rural opportunities (Q11R41).

Participants wrote about a sense of **resignation** on the part of young people and their parents that they would need to leave their families, regions, or perhaps the State in order to find meaningful employment in their area of interest. It was recognised that some jobs are predicated on a population larger than Tasmania’s. Some parents may support this journey, but it may also lead them to discourage—or at least not actively encourage—further study and career progression .

#### **4.5.2 Sense of and connection to place**

Sense of place can be defined as, ‘a combination of characteristics that makes a place special and unique. [It] involves the human experience in a landscape, the local knowledge and folklore. Sense of place also grows from identifying oneself in relation to a particular piece of land on the surface of planet Earth’ (Art of Geography 2016).

Tasmanians are widely known as having a strong sense of place, where ‘people from all walks of life express their affectionate identification with the Island without embarrassment, often without reservation’ (Reynolds 2006). Tasmania’s unique landscape, from its temperate rainforests and dolerite towers to the river valleys of its major cities, is not found anywhere else in the world.

However, there are also negative associations or stereotypes that Tasmanians sometimes place on others or on themselves based on where they live. These often have to do with the real or perceived geographical or cultural isolation and parochialism of those living there.

One response noted the positive elements of living in rural areas, which are thought to be in some ways disadvantaged due to their isolation, saying that ‘rural schools—with the intimacy and nurturing relationships that can occur with the closeness of...community where teachers, parents and children all know each other—can inspire great achievements, too’ (Q11R5).

Absent from the majority of responses was the connection to history in providing background about how communities and education have changed over time and how people (mis)understand one another (Campbell 2014). History has also informed mainland views of Tasmania, especially in its reputation as a rural ‘backwater’ (Alexander 2006). One response said that , ‘historically, [these issues] really [go] back to settlement of Australia and British war crimes and arrogance’ (Q10R8).

These views, regardless of whether young people personally subscribe to them, can still affect how they feel about connection to place. While these sentiments may be abstract and difficult to quantify, they hint at deep-seated challenges of identity that can, even if subconsciously, draw young people to or away from Tasmania.

It is important to consider that the challenges facing young people in Tasmania are little different from rural and small city challenges elsewhere in Australia or like jurisdictions; ‘not just a Tasmanian issue’ (Q13R42).

## **5. ROUND TWO INTERVIEW FINDINGS**

The second round interview questions comprised the second and final part of the Delphi process. The aim of subsequent rounds is to confirm or disconfirm the researchers’ understanding of the previous round(s)’ results and highlight which of the findings the participants deem most powerful. If the first round questions are often open-ended, with the goal of generating or revealing themes organically, subsequent rounds provide opportunities to rank or rate the importance of the various themes that have emerged. The results of these subsequent iterations can then lead to recommendations for concrete actions or further research.

As described in [Section 3.4](#), the second round interviews took the form of five-point Likert scale questions. The advantage of the five-point Likert scale is its capacity to rate the importance of each factor both individually and relative to the other factors listed in each question. Each of the factors listed were based on the themes drawn from participant responses from the first round. We provided a glossary of key terms at the beginning of the survey, to help participants differentiate between terms with subtly different definitions, as applied to this study. The glossary as it appeared for participants can be found in [Annex 3](#). This section describes the key findings resulting from each set of questions.

The list of factors was randomised for each question to avoid any one factor appearing more important for all participants. Participants were required to rate every factor before they could move on to the next question.

### **5.1 Influences**

This cluster of questions focused on the influences affecting young people’s experiences of transitioning into meaningful employment in Tasmania. In referring to experiences, we adopted the

Oxford English Dictionary definition, ‘an event or occurrence that leaves an impression on someone’. The subtext was whether the experience of transitioning from education to employment might leave a positive or negative impression in a young person’s memory, which could thus influence future choices, directions, or opportunities.

There were five clusters, each speaking to a particular category of answer choices, as defined in the first round analytical approach: individual, social and cultural, education and learning, political and economic, and space- and place-based issues. The rationale for dividing the influences into sections was first for readability, as the first round analysis yielded a relatively lengthy list of 31 potential influences. The second reason was to prompt participants to consider varying scales and types of influences, so that they would, in turn, be prompted to add additional factors to each category that perhaps had not been captured in our analysis, or to provide other comments. The final reason was to maintain consistency with the structure of the first round report for ease of integrating second round findings into the overall conclusions.

Each category of factors in the first question was phrased in the following way: ‘*Contributors noted the following (e.g. individual) factors as having profound influence on education-to-employment transitions for Tasmanians aged 15 to 25. How influential do you think each of these factors would be on a young person’s experience of transitioning into meaningful employment in Tasmania?*’.

The findings are summarised in the following tables, with factors ordered in descending order of weighted average; that is, the most influential factors listed first. There were 31 total responses to this section.

**Table 5** outlines the findings about individual factors, a list which emerged from the overall analysis of open-ended questions, noting that 49 per cent of Round 1 respondents indicated the individual context in general was an important factor.

We asked about socio-economic status as one individual factor that is socially based, which 95 per cent of respondents chose as a factor of influence in the first round (by way of comparison, the next highest factor was chosen by only 40 per cent). For Round 2, we refined this further to ask about socio-economic status from two perspectives: the personal experience of disadvantage and advantage. That the average participant rating for these factors was 4.68 and 4.29 out of five, respectively, underlines the importance that participants place on this topic. These two factors, combined with that of personal background (average rating 4.13) demonstrate that a young person’s life and experience outside of school has profound influence on education-to-employment experiences. It also speaks to a ‘luck’ factor—the situation that young people are born into or find themselves in, regardless of whether they chose to be there.

Related to these factors are those of personal attributes and communication skills (average rating of 4.58 and 4.29 respectively). A young person’s sense of self, and how they are (un)able to present that self to others, affects their performance at school and their ability to navigate social systems related to work and gaining requisite experience.

**Table 5: Individual factors influencing the experience of education-to-employment transitions**

Answer options	Not at all influential	Slightly influential	Moderately influential	Very influential	Extremely influential	Rating Average
<b>Personal attributes</b> (e.g. self-confidence; personal aspirations; adaptability; resilience; motivation; perseverance)	0	0	1	8	22	4.68
<b>Currently experiencing disadvantage</b> (e.g. disrupted schooling; financial hardship; family disruption or excessive responsibilities; abuse of self or immediate family members; personal illness or disability; refugee status; language difficulties)	0	1	2	6	22	4.58
<b>Communication skills and style</b> (e.g. oral and written communication; language usage; accent (whether or not English is a 'first' language))	0	0	3	16	12	4.29
<b>Currently experiencing advantage</b> (e.g. financial affluence; stable home life; opportunities to participate in extra-curricular activities or travel; continuous schooling; family members with high levels of educational attainment)	0	0	5	12	14	4.29
<b>Personal background or life story</b> (e.g. experiences of loss or trauma; criminal record; mental health history; work experience)	0	0	4	19	8	4.13
<b>General-application, 'soft', or 'enterprise' skills</b> (e.g. digital literacy; financial literacy; critical thinking; creativity)	0	1	8	18	4	3.81
<b>Personal identity</b> (e.g. cultural, ethnic, or racial identity)	1	8	11	8	3	3.13
<b>Position in the life course</b> (e.g. gap years; desire for travel/adventure; emerging adulthood; desire to expand experiences)	2	7	12	7	3	3.06
<b>Gender and sexuality</b> (e.g. gender or gender identity; sexual orientation or identity)	1	12	10	7	1	2.84
<b>Personal beliefs</b> (e.g. religious; political; ethical)	6	13	8	4	0	2.32

**Table 6** outlines the findings about social and cultural factors. Consistent with the Round 1 responses, where 84 per cent of respondents named it as an influence, family was perceived to be the most important factor by far, with all but one participant naming it as very or extremely influential.

The other highest rated factors of networking, culture of education and learning, friends and peers, and community, further underline the importance of relationship dynamics in nurturing positive employment pathway outcomes for young people. The combination of these factors largely determine young people's views of education, learning, and career pathways. Combine these factors with the individual factors of (dis)advantage and personal skills and attributes, and a clearer picture emerges of how young people acquire and assess information about school and work.

Ratings are strikingly high for the whole category, with greatest emphasis placed on the influence of teachers and educators (consistent with the 62 per cent of respondents who deemed it an important factor in Round 1).

**Table 6: Social and cultural factors influencing the experience of education-to-employment transitions**

Answer Options	Not at all influential	Slightly influential	Moderately influential	Very influential	Extremely influential	Rating Average
<b>Family</b> (e.g. views on and values about education; approaches to raising children; aspirations for children; skills and experience; awareness of opportunities; ability for parents/guardians to 'let go' as children grow up)	0	0	1	13	17	4.52
<b>Networking</b> (e.g. connections to decision makers; access to people working in areas of interest; access to knowledge about opportunities)	0	0	7	17	7	4.00
<b>Culture of education and learning</b> (e.g. what constitutes a 'complete' set of qualifications; expectations about attainment levels; value placed on lifelong learning; promotion of or stigma against certain pathways)	0	0	6	20	5	4.00
<b>Friends and peers</b> (e.g. experiencing bullying/intimidation; level of educational and employment aspirations; chosen activities; practice on ways to interrelate and resolve conflict)	0	1	10	12	8	3.97
<b>Community</b> (e.g. expectations for its young people; empowerment of young people; social connections; role models)	0	3	6	14	8	3.87
<b>Perceptions of young people as employees</b> (e.g. work ethic; ability to relate to managers; skill levels; expectations about salary and responsibilities; level of knowledge about career pathways; level of commitment to workplaces)	0	0	14	12	5	3.87
<b>Mentors</b> (e.g. professional mentors; peer role models; older community members)	0	1	12	14	4	3.71
<b>NGO and community sector</b> (e.g. volunteer opportunities; providing work placements; engaging in partnerships and collaboration to do with education; providing support programs; providing leadership and advocacy)	0	4	16	9	2	3.68

**Table 7** outlines the findings about the influence of factors of systems of education and learning.

That factors of pre-tertiary, vocational, and university education, along with work-integrated learning, are all rated highly demonstrates the perceived importance of systems of learning, knowledge-sharing, and skills acquisition. Interpreted in conjunction with key individual and socio-cultural factors, young people need positive and supportive learning environments through which to apply their personal attributes and social understanding of the importance of education. Teachers and educators are the conduits through which knowledge passes in the formal sense; passionate and knowledgeable teachers provide the inspiration and encouragement young people need to make the most out of school.

The structures of pre-tertiary education provide the framework within which teachers and educators share their knowledge. That framework can act as an enabler or a barrier depending on what is deemed a priority, and to what degree young people have the opportunity to receive individual attention directed at their personal needs and talents.

Pathways into vocational education and university, augmented or supported by work-integrated learning, in turn inform the opportunities that young people have to develop, express, and discover their skills and talents.

**Table 7: Factors to do with systems of education and learning influencing the experience of education-to-employment transitions**

Answer Options	Not at all influential	Slightly influential	Moderately influential	Very influential	Extremely influential	Rating Average
<b>Teachers and educators</b> (e.g. expectations they have for students; life experience; ability to provide advice and guidance; passion for teaching; personal view of job and profession)	0	1	4	10	16	4.32
<b>Work-integrated learning, work placements, and internships</b> (e.g. availability of quality opportunities; relevance of opportunities to employment market; quality of supervision; networking opportunities)	0	0	4	19	8	4.13
<b>Vocational education</b> (e.g. availability and quality of apprenticeships and traineeships; type of qualification selected; skills developed)	0	0	6	17	8	4.06
<b>Structural features of pre-tertiary education</b> (e.g. transition point between high school to college; availability of courses and qualifications; school and college curricula; testing such as NAPLAN)	0	2	7	11	11	4.00
<b>University education</b> (e.g. type of degree program selected; skills developed)	0	1	10	17	3	3.71

**Table 8** outlines the findings about the influence of social and cultural factors. The ratings in this set of factors are interesting when considered alongside findings from the literature review, Round 1 responses, and related Round 2 responses. In Round 2, the role of employers received an average ranking of four, or very influential. The individual factor (Table 5) of how young people are perceived as employees received an average ranking of 3.87, on the border between moderately and very influential—a notably but comparatively weak rating when compared to factors such as (dis)advantage.

Meanwhile, just 30 per cent of Round 1 respondents named employers as an important factor. Open-ended questions painted a different picture, however, with many participants discussing the importance of the way in which employers view young people as employees, some expressing concern about the topic, with others explicating raising concerns about young people’s (perceived) lack of commitment, motivation, and perseverance.

This inconsistency, both within and between Round 1 and Round 2 responses, demonstrates that factors of employer-employee dynamics are more uncertain and perhaps more important than what respondents explicitly stated.

**Table 8: Political and economic factors influencing the experience of education-to-employment transitions**

Answer Options	Not at all influential	Slightly influential	Moderately influential	Very influential	Extremely influential	Rating Average
<b>Economic conditions in Tasmania</b> (e.g. type and health of industries; emerging and declining industries; size of economy)	0	1	4	15	11	4.16
<b>Employer roles</b> (e.g. supervision; feedback; mentoring; training; workforce development; investment in business and employees; collaborating across sectors; providing meaningful opportunities; providing security)	0	1	6	16	8	4.00
<b>Job market trends in Tasmania</b> (e.g. youth unemployment and underemployment levels; 'casualisation' of the workforce; number and quality of positions; competition; ageing workforce)	1	1	6	13	10	3.97
<b>Governance</b> (e.g. well-directing funding; leadership; provision of frameworks, strategies, and policies; support for programs; accountability; planning for employment pathways; coordination between federal, state, and local levels and other actors)	1	2	10	10	8	3.71
<b>Broad- or global-scale trends affecting the nature of work</b> (e.g. digitisation of the workplace; push or trend toward entrepreneurialism; globalisation of the economy; rise of social media; increasing automation; uncertainty about the future of work)	1	3	9	18	0	3.42
<b>Media</b> (e.g. the number, type, and quality of stories about young people, job market, and education)	1	6	13	8	3	3.19

Governance is another factor demonstrating conspicuous inconsistency. As **Table 15** will show, enablers related to long-term, multi-partisan approaches to education governance was rated as having on average the highest priority. In this cluster of questions about influence, governance factors rated an average of just 3.71.

Finally, the inconsistency between respondent views of, on the one hand, Tasmania's economic conditions and job market, and, on the other, the perceived influence of global-scale trends, is striking. Findings from the literature, which have applications to Tasmanian industry sectors ranging from agriculture to social services, show that trends such as automation, uncertainty, and globalisation are having profound effects on Australia's economy, as well as young people's education, employment, and the transition between the two. That Round 2 respondents did not place



the global and the local at equal levels of importance perhaps demonstrates the influence of broad-scale trends is perhaps underestimated (see [Section 2.2](#)).

In sum, the inconsistency of responses in this category, as compared to the consistency in responses to individual, socio-cultural, and educational factors, suggests that the participants, in aggregate, demonstrated more certainty at the micro level than the macro level. There would certainly be individual exceptions to this trend, and it should not be expected that all participants would engage directly with macro-scale issues of education-to-employment pathways. These findings do, however, highlight the importance of awareness-raising, communication, and well-planned policy intervention at the macro level. If community thought leaders at times struggle to consider these highly complex issues, it would be even more challenging for young people not working in this space or at this level to understand how to prepare for macro-scale shifts that may deeply influence their lives.

**Table 9** outlines the findings about the influence of factors of space and place. Space can be thought of the geographic layout of these factors (location) and the spatial connections between them (access). Place can be thought of as the unique identity of and connection to a location. Spatial themes rated more highly, consistent with Round 1 findings that described anywhere outside the urban centres of Hobart and Launceston as presenting unique or more intense challenges.

**Table 9: Factors to do with space and place influencing the experience of education-to-employment transitions**

Answer Options	Not at all influential	Slightly influential	Moderately influential	Very influential	Extremely influential	Rating Average
<b>Spatial themes</b> (e.g. location in rural, regional, remote, or urban areas, or in certain postcodes; access to transport, services, and amenities; perception of Tasmania relative to regional areas in Australia and globally)	0	1	9	9	12	4.03
<b>Place-based themes</b> (e.g. young people's perceptions of Tasmania as a place to live; connection to or love of Tasmania; uniqueness of Tasmanian landscape and culture; perceptions of isolation)	0	1	17	11	2	3.45

Space- and place-based factors highlight how influences can manifest in unique ways depending on location. All of the previously mentioned categories apply differently across areas of Tasmania. They also profoundly affect what young people may think about transitioning to employment in this State, described in greater detail in [Section 5.4](#).

## 5.2 Challenges

This cluster of questions focused on the barriers to transitioning into meaningful employment in Tasmania.



The question was designed to create redundancy. Many, but not all, of the challenges listed were also named as potential influences in the first cluster of questions.<sup>12</sup> The purpose of this redundancy was to ascertain whether certain factors were consistently deemed important or unimportant in the view of participants. To support this endeavour, we did not divide the challenges into sections, but instead listed 41 potential challenges that when randomised, would not necessarily appear next to like challenges and would appear in a different order for each participant.

The challenges listed were derived from the list of influences and from the findings drawn from Round 1 open-ended responses. In some cases, they represent one aspect of a larger phenomenon listed in the question on influences. For example, casualization of the workforce appeared as a stand-alone factor in the challenges section, where it appeared as a subset of a general category of job market conditions in the first round. This approach was designed to add rigour to the analysis, teasing out which aspects of each influence participants thought would most profoundly affect education-to-employment transitions.

It is important to reiterate that, in several ways, one person's barrier can be another person's advantage. For example, if one person's outcomes are negative influenced by experiencing disadvantage, it follows that another person's outcomes could be positively influenced by experiencing advantage. Alternatively, experiencing disadvantage could, in some cases, provide a young person with the opportunity to learn core life skills such as resilience and adaptability.

The question was phrased as: *'Contributors noted the following challenges affecting education-to-employment transitions for Tasmanians aged 15 to 25. To what extent do you think each of these challenges would act as a barrier to a young person's ability to transition into meaningful employment in Tasmania?'*

The findings are summarised in the following tables, with factors ordered in descending order of weighted average, i.e. the most influential factors listed first. There were 30 total responses to this section. The answer options are allocated into the same sections as in the analysis of influence for ease of reading.

The discussion that follows is limited to highlighting consistency or inconsistency with the findings related to influence that were outlined in Section 5.1.

**Table 10** outlines the findings about individual challenges. Consistent with the findings outlined in Table 5, challenges to do with experiencing (dis)advantage, communication skills, sense of self, and employability skills feature most strongly.

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<sup>12</sup> At the same time, some of the influences listed were not framed as challenges by participants. The list of challenges was therefore not designed to have one-to-one correspondence with the list of influences.

**Table 10: Individual factors potentially acting as barriers to education-to-employment transitions**

Answer Options	Not a barrier	Slight barrier	Moderate barrier	Significant barrier	Extreme barrier	Rating Average
Having limited oral or written <b>communication skills</b>	0	0	1	12	17	4.53
Currently experiencing <b>disadvantage, trauma, or abuse</b>	0	0	1	13	16	4.50
Having limited or no knowledge and <b>skills related to applying for jobs</b> , such as CV/resume writing, interviewing, personal presentation, salary and position description negotiation, responding to selection criteria, filling out online job applications	0	1	0	16	13	4.37
Having low <b>aspirations</b> , self-confidence, adaptability, perseverance, motivation or resilience	0	0	4	12	14	4.33
Having a <b>history of experiencing disadvantage, loss, or trauma</b>	0	0	3	16	11	4.27
Being <b>unaware of career pathway options and strategies</b>	0	0	8	16	6	3.93
Having limited ' <b>enterprise skills</b> ', such as digital literacy, creativity, critical thinking, problem solving, team work, and presentation skills	0	1	12	10	7	3.77
Struggling to manage <b>experiences of failure or disappointment</b>	1	2	9	14	4	3.60
Identifying as being from a <b>culturally and linguistically diverse background</b>	0	8	8	9	5	3.37
<b>Negative stereotypes or perceptions of young people</b> as employees, such as having high position and salary expectations and low levels of commitment and perseverance	0	9	11	8	2	3.10
Having ' <b>life experience</b> ' that does not directly or easily translate to a specific vocation or profession or entry requirements thereof	2	6	15	6	1	2.93
Identifying as an <b>Aboriginal young person</b>	3	11	7	4	5	2.90
Having limited or no experience with <b>social media or smartphones</b>	1	13	11	4	1	2.70
Having a <b>desire to travel, experience the world, or take a break</b> from school or work	6	11	9	3	1	2.40
Having <b>skills or qualifications beyond what is required</b> for positions available	5	13	10	2	0	2.30

That challenges to do with identifying as being from a culturally or linguistically diverse or Aboriginal background rated as moderate by comparison. These ratings were inconsistent with Round 1 responses, which rated these factors as second most important after socio-economic status, as well as a number of individual responses that highlighted particular challenges to do with the experiences of Aboriginal young people in formal education and learning environments or negative impacts based on historical disadvantage and/or oppression.

**Table 11** outlines the findings about social and cultural challenges. Consistent with Table 6 findings, family rated most highly. Limited opportunities for networking rated more highly in this question (as compared with an average of 3.29 in Table 6).

**Table 11: Social and cultural factors potentially acting as barriers to education-to-employment transitions**

Answer Options	Not a barrier	Slight barrier	Moderate barrier	Significant barrier	Extreme barrier	Rating Average
Having limited or no <b>family support</b> for education and/or employment	0	0	3	12	15	4.40
Having <b>friends</b> who do not aspire to high levels of educational attainment or career advancement	0	4	6	14	6	3.73
Having limited or no access to <b>mentors or role models</b> to support personal growth, aspirations, and learning	0	2	9	16	3	3.67
Having limited or no access to personal or professional <b>networks</b> that link to employment opportunities	0	3	11	11	5	3.60
Having experienced <b>bullying and intimidation</b> at school or in another setting	0	6	10	12	2	3.33
Having a desire to live or <b>remain close to family and friends</b>	0	5	13	10	2	3.30
Having limited or no access to <b>volunteering</b> opportunities	1	9	13	6	1	2.90

**Table 12** outlines the findings about educational and learning challenges. These challenges did not rate nearly as highly as the same types of factors when listed as influences. This inconsistency could be due to the challenges named not reflecting what respondents perceived the barriers to be (although they did not name alternatives or additions in the space provided to do so). It could also be due to the perception that, although these systems are influential, respondents do not believe that the greatest barriers or challenges are to be found in this space.

**Table 12: Factors to do with systems of education and learning potentially acting as barriers to education-to-employment transitions**

Answer Options	Not a barrier	Slight barrier	Moderate barrier	Significant barrier	Extreme barrier	Rating Average
Having limited or no <b>trust in educators or educational institutions</b> to provide knowledge and skills relevant to obtaining meaningful employment	0	4	6	14	6	3.73
Having limited or no access to <b>work-integrated learning, work placements, or internships</b>	0	4	13	8	5	3.47
Selecting a vocational qualification with <b>limited opportunities for apprenticeships or traineeships</b>	0	2	15	11	2	3.43
Being <b>guided into selecting</b> 'academic' or 'vocational' options at too young an age	2	4	10	12	2	3.27
<b>Disconnect</b> between vocational education and academic education	0	6	12	10	2	3.27
Having limited or no opportunities to participate in <b>extra-curricular activities</b> , such as sports or the arts	0	7	15	5	3	3.13

**Table 13** outlines the findings about political and economic barriers. That limited access to entry level positions is deemed most important is broadly consistent with the findings outlined in Table 8, which indicated that local job market conditions were highly influential. Issues of governance featured more strongly in Round 1 responses received after the deadline, so they perhaps did not feature as strongly by comparison as they might have if all responses had been factored into the findings that were received in time for analysis and therefore inclusion as elements of the second round questions. Although not included in the list of challenges, no participants added issues of governance to the list of challenges in the space provided to do so.

**Table 13: Political and economic factors potentially acting as barriers to education-to-employment transitions**

Answer Options	Not a barrier	Slight barrier	Moderate barrier	Significant barrier	Extreme barrier	Rating Average
Having limited or no opportunities to secure an <b>entry level position</b>	0	1	3	18	8	4.10
Decrease in the <b>ability or commitment of employers</b> to train, mentor, and provide meaningful opportunities and security for young employees	0	3	8	11	8	3.80
Being unprepared to deal with the <b>fast pace of workforce and industry change</b> , such as automation	0	4	12	12	2	3.40
<b>Casualisation</b> of the workforce, where full-time jobs are replaced with part-time, casual, contract, and flexible positions	0	6	13	8	3	3.27
<b>Uncertainty</b> about the future of the job market and economy in Tasmania and globally	1	8	12	9	0	2.97
Selecting a university degree program or other <b>qualification that does not directly correspond with a specific employment outcome</b>	3	8	9	9	1	2.90
<b>Media coverage</b> of young people and who or what they should 'be' or 'do'	2	11	8	9	0	2.80
Necessity to compete in a <b>globalised employment marketplace</b>	4	6	17	2	1	2.67

**Table 14** outlines the findings about place- and space-based barriers. Consistent with Round 1 and Round 2 findings, rural, regional, and remote areas were perceived as facing additional or higher intensity of challenges. That access to transport featured most strongly is notable and perhaps presents an area that would benefit from further investigation.

**Table 14: Factors to do with space and place potentially acting as barriers to education-to-employment transitions**

Answer Options	Not a barrier	Slight barrier	Moderate barrier	Significant barrier	Extreme barrier	Rating Average
Having limited or no access to public or private transport	0	1	2	17	10	4.20
Living in rural, regional, or remote areas	0	0	8	16	6	3.93
Having a desire to work in an area with limited study opportunities or employment positions in Tasmania	1	1	12	13	3	3.53
Living in urban or semi-urban areas other than the urban centres of Hobart and Launceston	1	6	18	5	0	2.90
Tasmania's small population relative to other Australian states or similar jurisdictions	3	8	13	5	1	2.77

### 5.3 Enablers

This section focused on ways of overcoming challenges that could support positive transitions into meaningful employment.

In the first round, participants responded to an open-ended question that asked them to name short-term (12 months), medium-term (five years), and long-term (10 years or more) measures that, in their view, could improve education-to-employment pathways for young Tasmanians. The responses were generally non-specific and focused on broad-scale changes in attitudes toward education in Tasmania.

This question, therefore, comprised a mix of responses given during the first round and findings from the literature review, with the aim of drawing out responses to current happenings in youth employment policy and research. We named 17 possible initiatives or ideas applicable at a range of levels of intervention.

The question was phrased as: *‘We have identified the following ways of potentially overcoming challenges that face young Tasmanians aged 15 to 25 transitioning from education to employment in Tasmania. What level of priority would you give to pursuing the following ideas for supporting positive transitions to meaningful employment for young Tasmanians?’*.

The findings are summarised in **Table 15** with factors ordered in descending order of weighted average, i.e. the most influential factors listed first. There were 30 total responses to this section.

The summary of the findings below is that participants find initiatives related to governance, employability skills, communication, and to a lesser degree, opportunities to be the most important. An interesting inconsistency between sections is that limited opportunities for entry level positions were rated an average of 4.1 as a barrier, but only 3.43 as an area for intervention.

**Table 15: Potential enablers for overcoming challenges affecting education-to-employment transitions**

Answer Options	Not a priority	Low priority	Medium priority	High priority	Essential	Rating Average
Investigate ways of supporting <b>long-term, multi-partisan approaches</b> to improving educational attainment that span beyond election cycles	0	1	2	9	18	4.47
Directing resources toward programs or initiatives that support young people developing <b>skills in oral and written communication, job application strategies, and financial and digital literacy</b>	0	0	6	11	13	4.23
Supporting young people to gain <b>enterprise skills</b> (such as critical thinking, creativity, digital literacy, and teamwork)	0	1	4	14	11	4.17
Pursuing changes to the <b>Education Act</b> that support increased levels of Year 12 attainment	1	2	6	9	12	3.97
Supporting efforts to foster <b>positive communication and collaboration</b> between industry, government, the community and NGO sector, education providers, young people, and other related stakeholders	0	1	7	14	8	3.97
Providing <b>information to parents and families</b> about education-to-employment pathways relevant to their location	0	2	6	14	8	3.93
Directing resources toward meaningful <b>work-integrated learning</b> , work placement, and internship positions	0	1	9	12	8	3.90
<b>Supporting employers and workplaces</b> to effectively hire, manage, and engage with young people	0	2	8	12	8	3.87
Support programs or initiatives that promote a <b>culture of both formal and informal 'lifelong learning'</b>	0	2	10	9	9	3.83
Directing resources toward programs for young people about education-to-employment transitions that provide <b>adaptable and transferable skills</b> for changing job markets	0	0	10	16	4	3.80
Providing young people with <b>information about career pathways</b> and career progression in a rapidly changing job market	0	2	9	14	5	3.73
<b>Publicising positive and inspiring stories</b> about educational attainment in Tasmania	0	3	10	12	5	3.63
Supporting programs for <b>group or one-on-one mentoring</b> or professional guidance	0	2	14	11	3	3.50
Directing resources toward the creation of <b>entry level positions</b>	0	4	13	9	4	3.43
Supporting groups, programs, or 'guilds' designed to provide <b>peer-to-peer support</b> for young workers and professionals	0	7	16	6	1	3.03
Providing targeted advice about <b>business management for young entrepreneurs</b>	0	11	12	7	0	2.87
Providing young people with opportunities for or guidance about engaging in meaningful intrastate, interstate, and overseas <b>travel</b>	4	8	10	7	1	2.77



## 5.4 Decisions to return to Tasmania

This section of questions focused on factors that may influence young Tasmanians' decisions about whether to return to Tasmania after spending time outside of the State. This question was designed to speak directly to elements of the Tasmanian Population Strategy through the lenses of workforce development and personal growth.

In the first round, participants consistently and repeatedly noted that spending time away from Tasmania had the potential to expand young people's horizons and provide them with the opportunity to develop skills in alternate settings. They also pointed out that having the initiative and motivation required to move elsewhere translated well to work in sectors requiring innovation, creativity, and problem solving skills. In a globalised world where workforce migration has become the norm, *not* moving at some stage can reduce competitiveness in the employment marketplace. These perspectives were corroborated by findings from the literature, as noted earlier.

In order for Tasmania to retain and attract young people with wide-ranging skills and experiences, it is important to gain an understanding of what factors might encourage them to return, having gained interstate or overseas experiences. Simply working to retain young people discounts the well-documented notion that experiences of pilgrimage and travel may be some of the most formative of a young person's life. Many participants noted that they felt drawn to Tasmania from elsewhere having gained an appreciation of the culture and natural beauty of the State. In the words of Petrin, Schaftt and Meece (2014, p. 30), it is important to create 'local environments that young people felt connected to and valued by, and to which at least some of these youth (or others like them) could ultimately envision returning'.

To capture some of this nuance, we juxtaposed the findings from this question against first round responses to questions about participants' own reasons for staying in Tasmania. We then compared them to Denny's (2014) report, *The Tasmanian diaspora: A snapshot*, and the Youth Network of Tasmania's (2013) report, *Should I stay or should I go? What young people say about staying or leaving Tasmania*. In designing the question, we used the terminology adopted by Denny (2014) for ease of comparison, integrating additional factors gleaned from the first round and from our own understanding of decision making during young adulthood.

The question was phrased as: '*Contributors noted that spending some time outside of Tasmania may provide young Tasmanians with experiences and skills that may ultimately benefit Tasmanian workplaces. How important do you find the following factors in whether young Tasmanians decide to return to Tasmania?*'.

The findings are summarised in **Table 16**, with factors ordered in descending order of weighted average, i.e. the most influential factors listed first. There were 30 total responses to this section. Interestingly, the factors rated as most important had to do with place-based themes, which was rarely mentioned in other Round 1 and Round 2 questions, except where we directly asked participants about their personal reasons for staying in Tasmania. Participants *own* reasons are broadly reflected in their responses about why *young people* would choose to stay.

**Table 16: Potential factors influencing whether young Tasmanians living outside of Tasmania may decide to return**

Answer Options	Not at all important	Slightly important	Moderately important	Very important	Extremely important	Rating Average
Lifestyle opportunities/liveability	0	0	5	15	10	4.17
Feeling that it is 'home'	0	2	4	12	12	4.13
To be close to family	0	1	4	16	9	4.10
To achieve work/life balance	0	0	3	22	5	4.07
To start a family or raise a young family	0	2	5	14	9	4.00
Tasmania's natural environment and sense of	0	2	7	14	7	3.87
Housing affordability	0	1	9	13	7	3.87
Employment opportunities	0	7	7	4	12	3.70
Tasmania's family-friendly environment	0	3	7	16	4	3.70
The sense of community and identity that Tasmanians are known for	0	4	6	16	4	3.67
To be close to friends	0	3	15	6	6	3.50
To be close to a romantic or life partner	1	4	9	12	4	3.47
Because the cost of living is thought to be lower than other locations	0	6	10	11	3	3.37
Safety afforded here	1	4	11	13	1	3.30
Because their desire for (interstate/overseas) adventure or exploration has been fulfilled	1	8	6	11	4	3.30
Motivated by a desire to return to a 'comfort zone', where they feel a more secure sense of self than in	2	4	12	8	4	3.27
Availability of personal and professional support	0	7	10	11	2	3.27
Access to wilderness-based pursuits, such as bushwalking and recreational opportunities	0	7	12	8	3	3.23
Availability of employment options with comparable salary and responsibility levels as positions available interstate or overseas	2	8	7	8	5	3.20
Availability of professional development and career progression opportunities	1	11	4	11	3	3.13
As a logical expression of the loyalty or connectedness to place that they feel	1	8	11	8	2	3.07
Because of business opportunities or the ability to fill a niche as an entrepreneur	2	6	12	10	0	3.00
In response to pressure from family or friends	2	8	12	5	3	2.97
Access to quality services (such as health and	0	13	8	7	2	2.93
Increasing opportunities to engage with arts and	2	8	12	7	1	2.90
Income potential	4	9	8	6	3	2.83
Tasmania's climate	2	9	15	2	2	2.77
Access to further education and training in fields relevant to area of work	4	7	11	8	0	2.77
Because they lacked the funds or income to live	3	12	7	6	2	2.73
To pursue educational opportunities unique to	3	9	13	4	1	2.70
Access to professional networks	0	13	14	3	0	2.67

The importance of place-based themes is corroborated by the Youth Network of Tasmania's (2013) report, *Should I stay or should I go?*, which found that the majority of young people who think about leaving Tasmania also want to return and that Tasmania's environment and sense of community are key motivating factors in this decision—but that work and study options are limiting factors.



Denny's (2014) report also showed that many in the Tasmanian diaspora identified place-based themes as factors that would influence their decision to return to Tasmania. As in the Youth Network of Tasmania's report, employment opportunities were a major factor—the strongest factor in this case—in whether they would ultimately choose to do so.

## 6. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### 6.1 Concluding remarks

The findings discussed in prior sections of this report demonstrate the complexity and non-linearity of education-to-employment transitions for young people. These transitions are not seamless or unidirectional. They are influenced by myriad interacting and overlapping factors, and there are as many experiences of transitioning from education to employment as there are people in the world. This complexity, while fascinating from a storytelling perspective, poses challenges for creating specific policies to address challenges in education-to-employment transitions.

An effective approach would likely provide a base for young people to work from, where they are provided with the chance to succeed through having positive experiences with as many influential factors as possible. Initiatives that support, for example, resilient skill sets, confidence, breadth and depth of knowledge and experience, family and peer group support, impassioned educators, and employment opportunities that challenge and support young people to grow into experts at their crafts would intervene at varying scales of influence. In theory, at least, the more positive experiences a young person has in relation to influential factors, the greater the chance of a healthy, fulfilling, and successful working life. As with educators who pass on expertise in their subject areas, young people are conduits through which their own knowledge passes. Each young person's understanding of the world of work will be unique and thus valuable in its own way, and it can develop further with the support of guidance and accountability.

In terms of supporting young Tasmanians in their **transition from education to employment and/or further education**, it is worth noting that a number of state and national systems, policies and programs are currently evolving toward addressing many of the factors that the participants in this study deemed important. These include:

- the Extending High Schools to Years 11 and 12 Program;
- *My Education* career and life planning initiative;
- *The Australian Curriculum: Work Studies*;
- TASC accredited courses;
- STEM strategy;
- *University College* Program;
- *High Achievers* Program;
- Years 9 to 12 Review; and
- VET initiatives, such as Australian School-based Apprenticeships and Trade Training Centres.

The **Extending High Schools to Years 11 and 12 Program** is part of the Tasmanian Government's plan to increase retention rates and support young Tasmanians as they prepare for employment. The Tasmanian Government has acknowledged that post-Year 10 education, training, and skills qualifications are critically important to, among other aspects of life, enhancing young people's employment prospects (Rockliff 2016). From the beginning of 2017, an accelerated roll-out of this program will mean that some 30 urban and regional schools will extend to Years 11 and 12. Increases in young Tasmanians' employability have both individual and community-scale benefits, as described in previous sections.

**My Education** is a whole-of-school approach to career and life planning in Tasmanian Government schools. The *My Education* strategy is based upon four foundational principles (My Education 2016):

- career and life planning are most effective when they are introduced in the early years of schooling, building employment-related skills, knowledge and understanding through to Year 12;
- career and life planning are most effective when they are embedded in the curriculum;
- all teachers are teachers of career and life planning; and
- career and life planning is a shared partnership between the child, their parent/carer, the school and the broader community, including industry.

The *My Education* program is designed to support students to make informed choices about their education and learning, connecting them with their life and career goals and aspirations. In particular, it broadens students' perspectives about fields of and approaches to work relevant to their dreams and talents, as well as the opportunities that are available to them locally, nationally and globally (My Education 2016). The program focuses on opportunities to develop transferable skills that will enable young people to transition through different life stages and respond to changes in employment markets. The framework for **My Education** has been designed using the nationally endorsed policy including the **Australian Blueprint for Career Development and Core Skills for Work Developmental Framework**.

In addition, various non-government organisations are supporting student engagement and job readiness in ways that align with *My Education*. For example, the Beacon Foundation has received funding to support schools to connect with industry.

The **Australian Curriculum: Work Studies, Years 9–10** program has been written in response to key work-related issues currently facing young people and other factors that may affect them in the future. The program's website frames the initiative thusly:

The curriculum helps young people plan for and shape their future and make a contribution to the wider community by providing them with the essential knowledge, understanding and skills for participation in the rapidly changing world of work.

Students begin preparation for the working world by developing understanding of themselves in relation to work, recognising their aspirations, their rights and responsibilities as workers, as well as employer expectations and the diversity of work opportunities. They learn to

understand what work is, how and why it is changing and what this means for their future in working for others or themselves. They engage with the career management processes needed to adapt to multiple transitions in work and life, and use opportunities to transfer their developing knowledge, understanding and skills to a range of work-related contexts and projects.

Through exposure to work-related learning, students develop the self-knowledge, contemporary work skills and entrepreneurial behaviours and resilience necessary to thrive in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. They appreciate the role of collaboration, creativity and analytical skills in workplaces and the importance of cultural diversity and ethical practices (ACARA 2016b).

In general, the Australian Curriculum emphasises general capabilities such as literacy, numeracy, information and communications technologies (ICT), critical and creative thinking, personal and social capabilities, and ethical and intercultural understanding (ACARA 2016a).

In Years 11 and 12, **TASC-accredited<sup>13</sup> courses**, such as **Personal Pathway Planning** and **Work Readiness**, help young people develop the skills and awareness required to transition from education to employment. The Project Implementation course<sup>14</sup> provides students with the opportunity to engage in a group learning activity that is practical and community-based. It can incorporate vocational and/or community-based learning, such as visiting a workplace; liaising with coaches, advisors or business people; and assisting community groups. Linking students with the wider community provides an opportunity for specific skills to be learned in areas such as: design; construction; event management; performance; and community relations. It also enables students to increase their understanding of community-based resources and to develop their communication skills. Student-directed inquiry encourages in-depth exploration of topics of personal interest to students. The course promotes learning skills and ways of thinking that are essential for the development of the self-directed, self-managing, lifelong learners that thrive in current employment market conditions.

The development of resources to support government schools to provide all students with engaging and challenging **Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM)** learning is another strategic funding initiative. It is estimated that STEM competencies will be needed for an estimated 75% of future jobs (PwC 2015).

It has been reported that the Department of Education is developing a STEM implementation strategy, based on international research and practice, to guide teaching practice from K-12. The draft strategy aligns closely with the Department of State Growth's key industry sectors in which Tasmania has a competitive advantage. It is worth noting that the University of Tasmania is also committed to STEM education and has announced the development of a flagship science and technology precinct in the Hobart CBD, costed at \$400 million.

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<sup>13</sup> Office of **Tasmanian Assessment, Standards and Certification (TASC)**: an independent statutory body, responsible to the Tasmanian Minister for Education and Training, that serves both government and non-government schools.

<sup>14</sup> See Tasmanian Department of Education, Courses for Development in 2017, <https://goo.gl/Tf3is7>.

The **University College Program** is offered in partnership with schools and senior secondary colleges and provides an opportunity for Years 11 and 12 students to study university-level units concurrently or in addition to their TCE studies. Individual University of Tasmania faculties and schools deliver programs within the overarching UCP structure. Units are delivered through a combination of online and independent study undertaken at school or home, supported by on-campus workshops (UTAS 2015b).

The University of Tasmania **High Achiever Program (HAP)** provides high-achieving Tasmanian senior secondary school students with the opportunity to enrol in university units to complement and extend their Tasmanian Certificate of Education (TCE) or International Baccalaureate (IB) studies. According to the program website (UTAS 2015a), the aims of the program are to:

- enrich educational opportunities for Years 11 and 12 students;
- extend the University's high quality courses and teaching to Years 11 and 12 students; and
- develop links between the University, students and their schools and colleges.

Both programs support current studies and offer students incentives for further study through contribution to TCE points and to the ATAR calculation, as well as credit transfer into an undergraduate degree. They provide opportunities for eligible students to kick-start their careers through early commencement of post-secondary study.

An **independent review of curriculum and assessment policy and provision Years 9 to 12**, which was open to tender in June 2016 for completion by year's end, will analyse structural and pedagogical possibilities in order to engage more young people in education to the end of Year 12. The objectives of the review are to provide a report and recommendations to the Minister for Education by the end of 2016 on:

- current curriculum provision, attainment data, and pathway information for students Years 9-12 in all Tasmanian schools, including vocational education;
- the effectiveness of current curriculum provision including the breadth and depth of the curriculum and the design and delivery of the curriculum from the perspective of teachers and students, together with business and industry;
- the alignment and effectiveness of assessment and moderation practices from Years 9 to 12; and
- proposed future direction with regards to Years 9-12 curriculum provision and design that aligns with the Australian Curriculum P-12 and a national review of VET in Schools.

In terms of **vocational education and training (VET)**, VET offerings in schools allow secondary students to gain practical work experience and nationally recognised qualifications as part of their education. Tasmania's VET-in-Schools program provides students in Years 11 and 12 with the opportunity to undertake vocational education and training to assist them in achieving their career goals. Students may complete part or all of a nationally-accredited qualification while still attending school. Vocational Placements are structured industry placements that enable students undertaking a VET-in-schools program to practice and acquire skills and knowledge in a real-world context.

An **Australian School-based Apprenticeship (ASbA)** or Traineeship is an employment-based training arrangement where a Year 10, 11 or 12 student, as an apprentice or trainee, has the opportunity to combine employment with school and training. This scheme provides students with an ‘earn-and-learn’ pathway that offers them a head start on a chosen career. ASbA students enter into a contract of training and undertake a VET qualification as a trainee or apprentice while completing their secondary and senior secondary education. An ASbA pathway allows students to continue to attend school and study the Australian Curriculum and/or Tasmanian Certificate of Education (TCE) whilst at the same time undertake a nationally recognised qualification while in paid employment. ASbA students are required to undertake a minimum of 600 hours and a maximum of 800 hours annually of combined off-the-job education and training. This provision includes both Australian Curriculum or TCE study at school and the ASbA VET qualification delivered by the RTO under the contract of training.

**Trade Training Centres**, or Trade Skills Centres, are specialist facilities designed to offer training in a range of national skills shortage areas including construction, electrotechnology, automotive, metals, engineering, cookery, aquaculture, horticulture and agriculture. Although centres are located on school sites, training is available to both young and older Tasmanians seeking skills for employment or to build on existing skills. These centres operate in George Town, Scottsdale, Bridgewater, Smithton, Huonville, St Helens, St Marys, Deloraine, Sorell, Triabunna, Tasman and Queenstown.<sup>15</sup>

A range of other initiatives, such as Launching into Learning, Child and Family Centres, and Learning in Families Together, are aimed at the early years. These community-based initiatives are based on the premise that children’s experiences in the earliest years of their life are critical to their ongoing development. These experiences have a significant impact on their future achievements at school and the extent to which they are able to take advantage of opportunities later in life.

It is clear that the Tasmanian Government is already engaging with a number of the areas highlighted by participants as having important influences on education-to-employment transitions. However, further research could provide insights into the experiences and initiatives of particular schools or employers that may complement or connect to such programs.

Regardless of the programs and initiatives currently in place, a number of participants pointed out that even under perfect conditions, it is still the individual’s responsibility to take advantage of the opportunities that are presented to them, or to find opportunity where it may not seem to exist. The findings of this study reflect that attitude, however social, cultural, educational, political, and economic influences inform and largely determine what young people believe they are capable of and what they perceive their options to be.

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<sup>15</sup> Not all courses areas are offered at all sites.

## **Key insights and areas where further consideration should be given**

The remainder of this section will provide a summary of the most important insights emerging from the analysis in Sections 4 and 5. In response to these factors, we offer recommended areas or topics where further consideration should be given based on participants' responses across both interview rounds and our own understanding of the key issues affecting education-to-employment transitions for Tasmanians aged 15 to 25.

It is important to note that these insights and recommended areas for further consideration, whilst grounded in the literature, are formulated based on the perceptions of community leaders and stakeholders. As key influencers within the State, their views matter and provide a strong indication as to how energy can be directed toward mitigating some of the challenges named. Undertaking to act on any of the initiatives outlined should be grounded in further analysis as to how best to apply these insights to varying Tasmanian contexts and in consideration of government, private, and community sector initiatives already proposed or in progress.

### **6.1.1 Individual context**

The **strongest points** in the theme about the individual are influences and challenges to do with:

- experiencing (dis)advantage, trauma, or abuse;
- having or lacking communication skills;<sup>16</sup>
- having or lacking a strong sense of self, demonstrated through attributes such as confidence and resilience; and
- having or lacking employability skills to do with first, the job search, and secondly, to do with transferable or enterprise skills, such as problem solving, critical thinking, team work, and creativity.

**Further consideration should be given to:**

- continuing to provide both explicit and implicit support for young people experiencing disadvantage, by investigating best practice in support programs, determining the key factors that define advantage and disadvantage in the Tasmanian context, and reframing references to socio-economic status so that it is understood as a temporary impermanent state of affairs;
- supporting the development of communication skills through their integration in a variety of subjects and interactions with educators;
- supporting young people's sense of self by helping key figures in their lives to have high aspirations and expectations for them;
- considering creative ways of instilling employability and enterprise skills amongst young people, with applications to varying industries, so that young Tasmanians can succeed in the current employment market paradigm requiring them to be both specialists and generalists;
- factoring in the experiences of Aboriginal and cultural and linguistically diverse people (as well as other identity-related factors, such as gender and sexual identity) as having profound influence

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<sup>16</sup> For a comprehensive discussion of the influence of communication skills, please see a detailed individual participant response received during the first round, provided in full in Annex 4.

on the education-to-employment experience, especially as there appear to be inconsistent community perceptions about whether challenges exist for those groups of young people; and

- supporting young people to accept, have pride in, overcome, and/or find strength in elements of their personal background and story that they may have difficulty in reconciling with themselves (for example, experiences of abuse, criminal record, bullying, or past academic performance).

### **6.1.2 Social and cultural context**

The **strongest points** in the theme pertaining to social and cultural context are influences and challenges to do with:

- family support and understanding of education and career pathways; and
- how friends, peers, communities, and networks feed into young people's perceptions and opportunities.

**Further consideration should be given to:**

- supporting families to support children, by providing information and guidance that helps them to understand pathways relevant to their locations and/or to the desires and goals of their children or relatives; and
- thinking creatively about options for mentorship and networking, especially for those young people who may not have the opportunities or the confidence to seek them out themselves—help young people find people like them who have lived interesting lives and succeeded in areas of interest to them.

### **6.1.3 Systems of education and learning**

The **strongest points** to emerge from the theme pertaining to systems of education and learning are influences and challenges to do with:

- teachers and educators and the expectations they have for their students, as well as their own life experiences, their ability to provide advice and guidance, their passion for teaching, and their personal view of their job and profession;
- structural challenges in pre-tertiary education, including standardised testing, the influence of pathway planning, and the high school-to-college transition; and
- limited opportunities for work-integrated learning, in both the VET and university sectors.

**Further consideration should be given to:**

- how teachers are best able to engage with each student, and leadership teams' roles in ensuring those ends;
- supporting the development of meaningful work-integrated learning programs across industries, where interns, apprentices, and trainees work to employer needs at the same time that they derive benefit from their placements;
- the importance to young people of having educational opportunities that enable them to apply their skills to varied contexts, including those related to work and to life matters such as securing transport, housing, insurance, and so on; and

- providing support for the development of an ambitious state-wide brokerage for integrated workplace learning and engagement for those from Year 10 to university, including VET.<sup>17</sup>

#### ***6.1.4 Political and economic context***

The **strongest points** in relation to the political and economic context of this study are influences and challenges to do with:

- the role of employers in training and supporting young employees;
- Tasmania's economic position and job market, especially relative to Australian states with larger urban centres; and
- governance in education and in Tasmania more broadly.

#### **Further consideration should be given to:**

- supporting employers to provide meaningful supervision, feedback, mentoring, training, and professional development to young employees;
- encouraging a shift away from negative perceptions of young people as having high expectations and low motivation, especially given that their expectations may come from having engaged in high levels of education or training, pathways which have been both explicitly and implicitly encouraged during periods of economic downturn;
- at a broad policy level, assigning the same level of importance to young people as to women, older workers, and migrants when it comes to increasing workforce productivity;
- supporting the provision of entry level positions and training in entrepreneurial skills for young people so that they can successfully transition to their employment situation of choice;
- raising awareness across industries about the broad-scale economic and other trends influencing Tasmania, such as automation and globalisation, supporting understanding of these issues, and how they affect varying types of people;
- alerting young people to changes in the employment market, so that they can gain an understanding of and prepare for the uncertainty and flexibility that will continue to characterise work in Australia, including how to gain relevant but transferable skills for the many jobs they are likely to hold throughout their lifetimes;
- continuing to investigate changes in legislation and policy to support young people to gain minimum standards of meaningful pre-tertiary education; and
- the influence of media in how young people perceive themselves and their employment options, especially within Tasmania.

#### ***6.1.5 Space and place-based issues***

The **strongest points** in the context of space and place-based issues are influences and challenges to do with:

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<sup>17</sup> As part of its remit, the Underwood Centre is now in the early stages of developing a framework for how this specific insight could be progressed.



- spatial features of the outer suburbs of Hobart and Launceston and rural, regional, and remote areas of Tasmania;
- access to public and private transport, for getting to school or work; and
- the sense of place that inspires or motivates people to live in Tasmania.

**Further consideration should be given to:**

- raising awareness about key spatial and place-based issues affecting young people transitioning from education to employment in Tasmania, given Tasmania’s dispersed population;
- undertaking research into young people’s access to safe, efficient transport to school and work;
- supporting connection to place through education that is integrated with the surrounding landscape and community, such as field trips, nature-based, and outdoor education, which encourage young people to gain an understanding of what makes their locations unique, special, and globally important; and
- supporting young people to travel and experience Tasmania, Australia, and the world, so they can engage in the personal growth, skills development, and work experience that may then have innovative applications to the Tasmanian context.

**6.1.6 Broad-scale recommendations**

Some overarching themes are most effectively applied across domains, such as:

- the culture of education and learning in Tasmania, including motivation and options for lifelong formal and informal learning;
- perceptions and expectations of and aspirations for young people among employers, educators, and community members; and
- collaboration between governmental, non-governmental, and industry sectors in support of positive education-to-employment transitions for young Tasmanians.

**Further consideration should be given to:**

- establishing how initiatives and interventions targeted at varying aspects of each domain can work to positively support and transform the culture of lifelong learning in Tasmania, including by providing pathways to recognition of informally acquired skills and experience;
- supporting intergenerational understanding through mentorship and empathy;
- investigating how all sectors of the Tasmanian community can share knowledge, experience, and data to support positive education-to-employment transitions for young Tasmanians, including in relation to discussions about how both public and private sectors can have a role as community members providing guidance to and opportunities for young people to flourish within the State.

## 7. GLOSSARY OF KEY TERMS

<b>Key terms as defined in this study</b>	
Challenge	‘A task or situation that tests someone’s abilities’ (Oxford English Dictionary).
Barrier	‘A circumstance or obstacle that keeps people or things apart or prevents communication or progress’ (Oxford English Dictionary).
Youth/young people	People aged between 15 and 25.
Tasmanian	A person currently residing in the State of Tasmania who identifies as being Tasmanian.
Education	‘The process of receiving or giving systematic instruction, especially at school or university’ (Oxford English Dictionary).
Employment	‘The state of having paid work’ (Oxford English Dictionary).
Transition	The period between completing all or part of a level of educational attainment and securing employment. Common transition points in Tasmania are at the conclusion of Year 10, Year 12, a trade or certificate qualification, and varying levels of university study.

<b>Types of employment</b> (Fair Work Ombudsman 2016)	
Full-time employee	Works on average approximately 38 hours per week on an ongoing basis and is entitled to benefits, such as sick leave.
Part-time employee	Works generally fewer than 38 hours per week on an ongoing basis and is entitled to the same benefits as a full-time employee on a pro rata basis.
Casual employee	Works on an ad-hoc, irregular basis, with no entitlements, guarantee of hours, and the employment can end without notice .
Shift worker	Works shifts (the definitions of shifts vary by industry) and is paid extra for working what is often outside the standard 9 am to 5 pm business hours.
Permanent employee	Employed on an ongoing basis until either party terminates the relationship.

Contract employee	Employed for a specific period or task, for example a fixed term of 12 months, and the work ends at the completion of the named time period or task.
Flexible working arrangements	An agreement between the employer and employee that may include changes to hours (e.g. starting/finishing times), patterns (e.g. split shifts or job sharing) or locations of work (e.g. working from home).
Apprentice/trainee	Formal training arrangements that combine work with study toward the end of receiving a qualification. Apprenticeships (for trade qualifications) typically last three to four years and traineeships (for certificate qualifications) one to two. Both involve pay and entitlements.
Work placement	Approved work experience that is done as a requirement of an education or training course.
Internship	An unpaid position that provides work experience whose main purpose is to support the intern, rather than to carry out the day-to-day operations of the organisation. A paid internship benefits the organisation through the intern completing tasks normally assigned to a paid employee, so the intern is paid as such.
Volunteering	An unpaid contribution of time and effort to a not-for-profit organisation for the purpose of benefitting that organisation. As for internships, a volunteer should be a paid employee if the role and expectations reach a level of formality associated with an employee-like relationship.

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## 9. ANNEX 1: FIRST ROUND DELPHI PROCESS QUESTIONS

-- *Personal experiences*<sup>18</sup>

Please take a moment to recall **your experiences** of transitioning from education to employment in your own life. Be as detailed as you feel comfortable with in your responses below.

1. Were you born and/or educated in **Tasmania**? Did you stay in Tasmania throughout your life, go away and come back, or move to Tasmania from elsewhere?
2. What are/were some of the positive (or even negative) **anchor points** that have kept you in the State? If you are based outside of Tasmania, please feel free to note that fact and apply this question to your own location.
3. When did you make the education-to-employment transition(s)? [year, age, context]

-- *Articulating the challenges*

4. What **challenges face Tasmanians**, aged 15 to 25, who are **transitioning from education to employment** *within* Tasmania?
5. With these challenges in mind, what are some **similarities and differences** between your own experiences and what the transition might be like for today's young Tasmanians? Please share some thoughts on what it might be like currently for young Tasmanians as they grow and develop in their working lives.

Please make a mental note of your responses to these two questions. The rest of this survey asks you for specifics about what you think these challenges are like for young people across the State.

-- *Origins and historical influences*

6. Reflecting on the past five years (since the last Census, or from 2011 to today), **how** and **why** have these challenges developed or evolved?
7. Thinking further back than the initial five years to 2011, what **historical influences** do you think might affect young people's transitions from education to employment? The timeframe can be as long or short as you wish, based on your own knowledge and experiences.

-- *Location and social factors*

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<sup>18</sup> NB: -- + [description] denotes a page break and page title on Survey Monkey

*The next two [Survey Monkey] pages focus on how location and social factors might influence education-to-employment transitions and pathways.*

*Some of the factors might intersect with or influence other factors. If there are specific combinations (for example, a specific type of person in a specific type of place) that you think are important or notable, please feel free to discuss those combinations anywhere in your responses.*

*-- Location*

8. Can you think of any **specific places, locations, or areas** in Tasmania where the challenges you've named are most pronounced?

Examples include particular regions or postcodes, urban vs. rural areas, inner city vs. outer city areas. You could also talk about whether there are any other factors to do with location or housing, such as homelessness, transport distance to services, and similar.

9. In your view, **why** are these places, locations, or areas particularly affected in comparison to others within Tasmania?
10. In thinking of the State as a whole, how do you think young Tasmanians' challenges within the State compare with those facing 15 to 25-year-olds living **elsewhere** in Australia, or in other similar parts the world?
11. School leavers and graduates from both VET and university programs may seek short or long-term employment or other life experiences away from Tasmania. In your view, what are the factors that influence young people's decisions to stay in Tasmania, move away, continue living outside the State and/or to return? Would the challenges and influences you've named so far be the same for **young Tasmanians who leave the State**?

*-- Social factors*

12. The following list names several examples of **specific social factors** that could influence the challenges you've named. Please select **at least three (3) factors** that you think are the most important and comment on **how and why** they might enable, complicate, or influence the education-to-employment transition for 15 to 25-year-old Tasmanians in Tasmania.

- Socio-economic status
- Cultural, ethnic, or racial identity
- Linguistic background or accent
- Religious (non-)affiliation or belief
- Political (non-)affiliation or belief
- Gender or gender identity
- Sexual identity, orientation, or background
- Physical, mental, or other ability

- Relationship or family status
- Parental or caregiving status or responsibilities (incl. aged care, pregnancy and breastfeeding)
- Experiences of mental, emotional, and/or physical trauma
- Criminal record
- Other (please describe)

13. The following list names several examples of **levels of social organisation** that could influence the challenges you've named. Please select **at least three (3) levels** that you think are the most important and comment on **how and why** they might enable, complicate, or influence the education-to-employment transition.

- Individual
- Family
- Peer group
- Community members
- Educators
- Employers
- Mentors
- Other (please describe)

14. *In your view, what are the responsibilities of the following key organisational stakeholders in education to employment transitions:*

(a) **federal, state, and local governments?**

(b) **community and NGO sector?**

(c) **private sector** (from small- to medium-scale enterprises through to large corporations)?

(d) Are there any others? For example, is there a role for **social entrepreneurship** (i.e. innovation that draws upon business techniques to address social or social justice issues), and what might it be?

-- *Tasmania's key strengths and weaknesses*

1. What are Tasmania's key **strengths or assets** in responding to the challenges of transitioning from education to employment?
2. What are Tasmania's **key weaknesses** in responding to these challenges?

-- *Overall reflections*

*Reflect briefly on your responses to the questions so far and share your thoughts on:*

3. Who **creates and influences** the challenges you've named?

4. Whose **responsibility** is it to deal with these challenges?

-- *Potential ways to overcome the challenges you've described*

5. What **three measures** do you think would be the most effective for improving education to employment pathways? Are they **short-** (12 months), **medium-** (5 years), **or long-term** (10 years or more)?

-- *Additional thoughts*

6. Is there **anything else** we should have asked? Please share any **additional thoughts** you have.

-- *Demographic questions*

7. May we ask your **gender**?

8. And your **age** cohort?

(a) 15-19

(b) 20-24

(c) 25-29

(d) 30-34

(e) 35-39

(f) 40-44

(g) 45-49

(h) 50-54

(i) 55-59

(j) 60-64

(k) 65-69

(l) 70-74

(m) 75-79

(n) 80-84

(o) 85+

9. What is the **postcode of your primary workplace**?

10. What is the level of the **highest year of school** you've completed?

(a) Year 9 or below

(b) Year 10

(c) Year 11

(d) Year 12

11. What is the level of your **highest non-school qualification**? Where did you obtain it and when?

(e) Certificate I/II

(f) Certificate III/IV

(g) Advanced diploma/Diploma

- (h) Bachelor degree
- (i) Graduate diploma/Graduate certificate
- (j) Postgraduate degree
- (k) Other (please specify)

12. **Where** did you obtain it and **when**?

## 10. ANNEX 2: SECOND ROUND DELPHI PROCESS QUESTIONS

*[The following five questions used a five-point Likert scale, with the following answer options for each factor: Not at all influential, slightly influential, moderately influential, very influential and extremely influential]*

1. Contributors noted the following individual factors as having profound influence on education-to-employment transitions for Tasmanians aged 15 to 25. How influential do you think each of these factors would be on a young person's experience of transitioning into meaningful employment in Tasmania?
  - Personal background or life story (e.g. experiences of loss or trauma; criminal record; mental health history; work experience)
  - Personal attributes (e.g. self-confidence; personal aspirations; adaptability; resilience; motivation; perseverance)
  - General-application, 'soft', or 'enterprise' skills (e.g. digital literacy; financial literacy; critical thinking; creativity)
  - Personal identity (e.g. cultural, ethnic, or racial identity)
  - Gender and sexuality (e.g. gender or gender identity; sexual orientation or identity)
  - Personal beliefs (e.g. religious; political; ethical)
  - Communication skills and style (e.g. oral and written communication; language usage; accent (whether or not English is a 'first' language))
  - Position in the life course (e.g. gap years; desire for travel/adventure; emerging adulthood; desire to expand experiences)
  - Currently experiencing disadvantage (e.g. disrupted schooling; financial hardship; family disruption or excessive responsibilities; abuse of self or immediate family members; personal illness or disability; refugee status; language difficulties)
  - Currently experiencing advantage (e.g. financial affluence; stable home life; opportunities to participate in extra-curricular activities or travel; continuous schooling; family members with high levels of educational attainment)
  
2. Contributors noted the following social and cultural factors as having profound influence on education-to-employment transitions for Tasmanians aged 15 to 25. How influential do you think each of these factors would be on a young person's experience of transitioning into meaningful employment in Tasmania?
  - Family (e.g. views on and values about education; approaches to raising children; aspirations for children; skills and experience; awareness of opportunities; ability for parents/guardians to 'let go' as children grow up)
  - Mentors (e.g. professional mentors; peer role models; older community members)

- Perceptions of young people as employees (e.g. work ethic; ability to relate to managers; skill levels; expectations about salary and responsibilities; level of knowledge about career pathways; level of commitment to workplaces)
- Friends and peers (e.g. experiencing bullying/intimidation; level of educational and employment aspirations; chosen activities; practice on ways to interrelate and resolve conflict)
- Community (e.g. expectations for its young people; empowerment of young people; social connections; role models)
- NGO and community sector (e.g. volunteer opportunities; providing work placements; engaging in partnerships and collaboration to do with education; providing support programs; providing leadership and advocacy)
- Culture of education and learning (e.g. what constitutes a 'complete' set of qualifications; expectations about attainment levels; value placed on lifelong learning; promotion of or stigma against certain pathways)
- Networking (e.g. connections to decision makers; access to people working in areas of interest; access to knowledge about opportunities)

3. Contributors noted the following factors to do with systems of education and learning as having profound influence on education-to-employment transitions for Tasmanians aged 15 to 25. How influential do you think each of these factors would be on a young person's experience of transitioning into meaningful employment in Tasmania?

- Teachers and educators (e.g. expectations they have for students; life experience; ability to provide advice and guidance; passion for teaching; personal view of job and profession)
- Structural features of pre-tertiary education (e.g. transition point between high school to college; availability of courses and qualifications; school and college curricula; testing such as NAPLAN)
- Vocational education (e.g. availability and quality of apprenticeships and traineeships; type of qualification selected; skills developed)
- University education (e.g. type of degree program selected; skills developed)
- Work-integrated learning, work placements, and internships (e.g. availability of quality opportunities; relevance of opportunities to employment market; quality of supervision; networking opportunities)

4. Contributors noted the following political and economic factors as having profound influence on education-to-employment transitions for Tasmanians aged 15 to 25. How influential do you think each of these factors would be on a young person's experience of transitioning into meaningful employment in Tasmania?

- Governance (e.g. well-directing funding; leadership; provision of frameworks, strategies, and policies; support for programs; accountability; planning for employment pathways; coordination between federal, state, and local levels and other actors)
- Economic conditions in Tasmania (e.g. type and health of industries; emerging and declining industries; size of economy)
- Job market trends in Tasmania (e.g. youth unemployment and underemployment levels; 'casualisation' of the workforce; number and quality of positions; competition; ageing workforce)
- Employer roles (e.g. supervision; feedback; mentoring; training; workforce development; investment in business and employees; collaborating across sectors; providing meaningful opportunities; providing security)

- Broad- or global-scale trends affecting the nature of work (e.g. digitisation of the workplace; push or trend toward entrepreneurialism; globalisation of the economy; rise of social media; increasing automation; uncertainty about the future of work)
  - Media (e.g. the number, type, and quality of stories about young people, job market, and education)
5. Contributors noted the following factors to do with space and place as having profound influence on education-to-employment transitions for Tasmanians aged 15 to 25. How influential do you think each of these factors would be on a young person's experience of transitioning into meaningful employment in Tasmania?
- Spatial themes (e.g. location in rural, regional, remote, or urban areas, or in certain postcodes; access to transport, services, and amenities; perception of Tasmania relative to regional areas in Australia and globally)
  - Place-based themes (e.g. young people's perceptions of Tasmania as a place to live; connection to or love of Tasmania; uniqueness of Tasmanian landscape and culture; perceptions of isolation)
6. Can you think of any others we haven't listed? Please name them and provide a few details. You may also use this space to comment on any of the responses you provided above.

-- [Challenges]

*[The following five questions used a five-point Likert scale, with the following answer options for each factor: Not a barrier, slight barrier, moderate barrier, significant barrier and extreme barrier]*

7. Contributors noted the following challenges affecting education-to-employment transitions for Tasmanians aged 15 to 25. To what extent do you think each of these challenges would act as a barrier to a young person's ability to transition into meaningful employment in Tasmania?
- Having friends who do not aspire to high levels of educational attainment or career advancement
  - Struggling to manage experiences of failure or disappointment
  - Having limited or no trust in educators or educational institutions to provide knowledge and skills relevant to obtaining meaningful employment
  - Media coverage of young people and who or what they should 'be' or 'do'
  - Having limited or no access to work-integrated learning, work placements, or internships
  - Having limited or no access to volunteering opportunities
  - Necessity to compete in a globalised employment marketplace
  - Being unprepared to deal with the fast pace of workforce and industry change, such as automation
  - Selecting a university degree program or other qualification that does not directly correspond with a specific employment outcome
  - Selecting a vocational qualification with limited opportunities for apprenticeships or traineeships
  - Being guided into selecting 'academic' or 'vocational' options at too young an age
  - Disconnect between vocational education and academic education
  - 'Casualisation' of the workforce, where full-time jobs are replaced with part-time, casual, contract, and flexible positions
  - Uncertainty about the future of the job market and economy in Tasmania and globally
  - Tasmania's small population relative to other Australian states or similar jurisdictions

- Decrease in the ability or commitment of employers to train, mentor, and provide meaningful opportunities and security for young employees
  - Having limited or no knowledge and skills related to applying for jobs, such as CV/resume writing, interviewing, personal presentation, salary and position description negotiation, responding to selection criteria, filling out online job applications
  - Having limited or no access to public or private transport
  - Having limited or no access to personal or professional networks that link to employment opportunities
  - Having limited or no experience with social media or smartphones
  - Having skills or qualifications beyond what is required for positions available
  - Having 'life experience' that does not directly or easily translate to a specific vocation or profession or entry requirements thereof
8. Can you think of any others we haven't listed? Please name them and provide a few details. You may also use this space to comment on any of the responses you provided above.

-- [Ways of overcoming challenges]

*[The following five questions used a five-point Likert scale, with the following answer options for each factor: Not a priority, low priority, medium priority, high priority, essential]*

9. We have identified the following ways of potentially overcoming challenges that face young Tasmanians aged 15 to 25 transitioning from education to employment in Tasmania. What level of priority would you give to pursuing the following ideas for supporting positive transitions to meaningful employment for young Tasmanians?
- Supporting young people to gain enterprise skills (such as critical thinking, creativity, digital literacy, and teamwork)
  - Providing information to parents and families about education-to-employment pathways relevant to their location
  - Directing resources toward meaningful work-integrated learning, work placement, and internship positions
  - Directing resources toward the creation of entry level positions
  - Pursuing changes to the Education Act that support increased levels of Year 12 attainment
  - Supporting employers and workplaces to effectively hire, manage, and engage with young people
  - Providing young people with opportunities for or guidance about engaging in meaningful intrastate, interstate, and overseas travel
  - Supporting groups, programs, or 'guilds' designed to provide peer-to-peer support for young workers and professionals
  - Supporting programs for group or one-on-one mentoring or professional guidance
  - Providing young people with information about career pathways and career progression in a rapidly changing job market
  - Publicising positive and inspiring stories about educational attainment in Tasmania
  - Providing targeted advice about business management for young entrepreneurs
  - Directing resources toward programs or initiatives that support young people developing skills in oral and written communication, job application strategies, and financial and digital literacy
  - Supporting efforts to foster positive communication and collaboration between industry, government, the community and NGO sector, education providers, young people, and other related stakeholders



- Support programs or initiatives that promote a culture of both formal and informal 'lifelong learning'
  - Investigate ways of supporting long-term, multi-partisan approaches to improving educational attainment that span beyond election cycles
  - Directing resources toward programs for young people about education-to-employment transitions that provide adaptable and transferable skills for changing job markets
10. Can you think of any others we haven't listed? Please name them and provide a few details. You may also use this space to comment on any of the responses you provided above.

-- [Attracting and retaining young people]

*[The following five questions used a five-point Likert scale, with the following answer options for each factor: Not at all important, slightly important, moderately important, very important, extremely important]*

11. Contributors noted that spending time outside of Tasmania may provide young Tasmanians with experiences and skills that may ultimately benefit Tasmanian workplaces. How important do you find the following factors in whether young Tasmanians decide to return to Tasmania?
- Employment opportunities
  - Lifestyle opportunities/liveability
  - To be close to family
  - To achieve work/life balance
  - Tasmania's natural environment and sense of 'space'
  - To be close to friends
  - Income potential
  - Housing affordability
  - Because the cost of living is thought to be lower than other locations
  - Access to quality services (such as health and education)
  - Tasmania's family-friendly environment
  - Because of business opportunities or the ability to fill a niche as an entrepreneur
  - Safety afforded here
  - To pursue educational opportunities unique to Tasmania
  - Tasmania's climate
  - To start a family or raise a young family
  - In response to pressure from family or friends
  - To be close to a romantic or life partner
  - As a logical expression of the loyalty or connectedness to place that they feel
  - Motivated by a desire to return to a 'comfort zone', where they feel a more secure sense of self than in another context
  - Because they lacked the funds or income to live elsewhere
  - Because their desire for (interstate/overseas) adventure or exploration has been fulfilled
  - Feeling that it is 'home'
  - Increasing opportunities to engage with arts and culture
  - Access to wilderness-based pursuits, such as bushwalking and recreational opportunities
  - The sense of community and identity that Tasmanians are known for
  - Access to professional networks

- Availability of professional development and career progression opportunities
  - Availability of employment options with comparable salary and responsibility levels as positions available interstate or overseas
  - Availability of personal and professional support networks
  - Access to further education and training in fields relevant to area of work
12. Can you think of any others we haven't listed? Please name them and provide a few details. You may also use this space to comment on any of the responses you provided above. *(NB: Work in this section is indebted to prior research by Lisa Denny at the University of Tasmania, in her report *The Tasmanian Diaspora: A snapshot (2014)*.*

-- [Verifying or modifying your responses]

13. We sent you a copy of your responses to the first round of questions. Having read what others had to say and revisited some of the key topics, would you modify or change any of your responses? Are there any other reflections you'd like to note?

This question comprises the member checking component outlined in your participant information and consent. Member checking is when we invite you to reconsider your responses, so that we can improve the accuracy and validity of the study results.

There is no requirement to respond to this question, but we welcome any additional insights you would like to share.

## 11. ANNEX 3: SECOND ROUND DELPHI PROCESS GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Definitions of key terms used in Round 2<sup>19</sup>:

- **Challenge:** A task or situation that tests someone's abilities
- **Barrier:** A circumstance or obstacle that keeps people or things apart or prevents communication or progress
- **Education:** The process of receiving or giving systematic instruction, especially at school or university
- **Experience:** An event or occurrence which leaves an impression on someone
- **Factor:** A circumstance, fact, or influence that contributes to a result  
Influence: The capacity to have an effect on the character, development, or behaviour of someone or something, or the effect itself  
Meaningful employment: The state of having paid work that is suited to a person's interests, needs, skills, abilities, and qualifications
- **Tasmanian:** A person currently residing in the State of Tasmania who identifies as being Tasmanian  
Transition: The period between completing all or part of a level of educational attainment and securing employment. Common transition points in Tasmania are at the conclusion of Year 10, Year 12, a trade or certificate qualification, and varying levels of university study.
- **Youth or young people:** People aged between 15 and 25

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<sup>19</sup> Definitions for 'challenge', 'barrier', 'education', 'experience', and 'factor' referenced the Oxford English Dictionary.

## **12. ANNEX 4: ROUND 1 INDIVIDUAL RESPONSE DISCUSSING THE INFLUENCE OF COMMUNICATION SKILLS**

In making preparation to respond to this survey, I have several times read the questions and given thought to them in the light of that which I feel I can contribute from my professional and personal experiences. Thank you for providing me with opportunity to do so.

### **Scope**

This reflection has led me to think that my most useful contribution is likely to arise from narrowing the scope of my responding to those challenges which I see in two areas: 1) challenges for school-leavers who are ill-equipped for the named transition, and ill-equipped for the workforce because of lower levels of competence in language, literacy and communication skills (drawn from my professional background as a speech pathologist); 2) challenges arising for aspirational university graduates, with some addition of extra thoughts arising for young people pursuing careers in the trades (drawn from my sons' experiences and those of their friendship groups and my friends' children's experiences). For ease of reference throughout the survey I will refer to the former group as 'bell curve left' (BCL) and the latter group as 'bell curve right' (BCR).

### **Introduction**

Insofar as I have experience and influence to give any message in this survey, this is it: that the underpinning essentiality of oral language competence and social communication competence are not well understood by policy makers at all levels of education and employment; and that this has direct, powerful, pervasive and highly negative impact upon every aspect of transition from education to employment for young BCL Tasmanians both now and into the future until such time as the reality of this lack is addressed through change in policy and cultural narrative. Snow and Powell (2011) state that there is a "growing body of evidence, both in Australia (CRC funded) and overseas that identifies oral language competence as a key competency that needs to be acquired early in life, so that important interpersonal, academic and vocational goals can be achieved in pro-social ways". A paradigm shift is required.

### **What is Oral Language Competence?**

Oral language competence refers to the talking and listening skills which, in most young people have been acquired in a well-understood trajectory from birth onwards - but which for many young people - the BCL group - have not been adequately acquired, despite inherent potential to do so. Oral language competence refers to competency in both the comprehension and expression of language through knowledge of, and skill in, vocabulary; processing and giving of instructions; and oral narrative (story-telling) - and all of this within the social requirement to nuance communicative interpretations and responses with awareness of the emotional and social needs of the 'other'.

Literacy - which is usually more clearly seen by policy makers as fundamental to education and vocation - is the written outworking of oral language competence. Literacy is simply language. It is

language upon a page or screen using a code based on the speech sounds. Oral language competence underpins literacy - and hence the need to awaken policy makers to the foundation that oral language competencies – if a difference is to be made in literacy levels.

Oral language competence is both a pillar of support for educational and employment successes, and a pillar of protection against their failure. It needs to be placed centrally in our frameworks and systems and understood as the core of human accomplishment. Language affords the human creature the symbols with which to think. It is a fundamental enabler of human capacity. With very few exceptions, it can be further developed in anyone, at any level, at any age. It is biologically influenced, but it is not inflexibly biologically determined. The processes of language development are through direct engagement with language, in the nurture of secure and trusted relationship.

### **Blindness in the Systems and Narrative**

My experience has revealed to me that little is known or understood about oral language competence and the processes by which it can be developed, at all of the following levels: government ministers; administration of the Department of Education and Justice Department; school, TasTAFE and UTas administrations; school and TasTAFE classrooms; UTas disability support; and registered training organisations. Further, that which is understood is interpreted in culturally-entrenched ways of making meaning - ways which too-often stimulate punitive or patronising responses. The persons in the various key positions of all of these organisations are able to make surface responses as if they do understand that communication is important, but my engagement with all such persons of influence at all of these levels has revealed to me that their understandings are inadvertently narrow, and do not point them toward a change in praxis which will maximise the BCL group broadening its opportunities for successful transitions from education to employment.

I am conscious that at first read the foregoing statement must seem outrageously arrogant and critical - and from within what might seem to be a narrow scope. However, I would wish to express clearly that the skills of communication are not of narrow scope - they are of the very broadest human scope - for they form the base of all human engagement and accomplishment. In spite of their foundational position, oral language and social communication competence are not currently being addressed in our systems and cultural narrative from within a scholarly framework informed by the science and evidence bases of the assessment, development and use of communication skills.

I believe there are three reasons that understandings about oral language and social communication competence are narrow within policy makers:

- 1) persons holding these positions are high-level communicators themselves and have unconscious competence in their own skills;
- 2) within a culture which values individualism and self-determination, there is not a generous consciousness of how deeply and fundamentally one's communication skills are a product of relationship with others, and how relationship with others has stimulated their growth over time;
- 3) our culture has entrenched narratives which conflate communication competence with an amorphous notion of general intelligence in a biologically deterministic way; and

- 4) further, as earlier stated, but repeated for emphasis, these narratives are often contained within interactive approaches which are generally punitive or patronising in nature rather than inspired by abundance and hope for change.

Thus the narrow understanding held amongst key influencers is not a criticism of those personnel, for it results from factors to which the present systems and culture within which all of us work, are currently blind.

*'Talkers have always ruled. They will continue to rule. The smart thing is to join them'.*

*~ Bruce Barton, congressman and author*

### **Universality of Transitions-Challenge**

Almost all persons find transitions challenging in some way. Communication skill mediates transition. Those who successfully transition to anything, at any time in life, use their language and social skills to mediate those transitions - they seek information, give information, clarify, self-talk, make social approach to others, convince and rationalise. If skilled communicators find challenge in making transitions, what becomes of those whose skills are weak?

### **Oral Language Competence and the BCL Group**

Society's lack of understanding about the fundamental nature of communication skill is most deeply problematic for the BCL group. As they make transition from education to employment, they attempt to do so without the necessary language, social skills and knowledge which help mediate that transition. And this is redoubled in difficulty - including personal fear, confusion, frustration - if they do not have successful relationships upon which to draw for kind and supportive assistance.

For the BCL group the social culture and employment culture demand the presence of oral language competence; but they do so – just as the education culture did (see damning Senate Committee Report, 2016) –with little tolerance for the lack of that competence because of an individual's diminished skill; and with little patience and process for the enhancement of communication. From these situations, punitive or patronising interactions too often follow. I have many times seen this happen in all of the above institutions; including those places which we hold to be purposefully nurturing - classrooms.

In situations in which some patience has been demonstrated about a young person's diminished oral language competence, there is still not widespread or realistic awareness of the time and nurture required to grow those skills. The lower skills within the BCL group are too often assumed by the more competent to reflect not language skill, but negative attitude and 'low intelligence'. With these culturally-informed judgments in place, the unique and original contributions which can be nurtured from within the BCL group are too often shut-down. With that shutting down, this group becomes marginalised. Marginalisation is more likely to lead to lack of aspiration and anti-social behaviours including crime.

## **The Challenges**

Challenges for the BCL group in transitioning from education to employment: Reduced oral language competence Reduced literacy skill Reduced social communication competence Limited aspiration - directly related to the foregoing Reduced self-esteem - directly related to the foregoing Reduced personal/relational support to access the processes of transition - directly related to the foregoing Experience of overwhelm and reduced mental resilience - directly related to the foregoing Unsupportive and difficult relationships Greater risk of criminal behaviour – and this may already have been modelled by peers and family Current systems do not address these issues at their root causes for the BCL group

Challenges for the BCR group in transitioning from education to employment: Reduced opportunity in Tasmania to find employment in many specialised fields Jobs pool too small Reduced access to internships within Tasmania Reduced self-esteem can also be a problem for this group Unsupportive and difficult relationships can also be a problem.

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