Post-school pathways for Blue Mountains young people

Research report
October 2019

BMEE acknowledges that the City of Blue Mountains is located on the traditional lands of the Darug and Gundungurra Nations.

Disclaimer

The details provided in this report are based on information available at the time of preparation and terms of reference of the project. All statements made are given in good faith and in the belief that such statements are not false or misleading. All sources of information are detailed in the report. Readers are recommended to make appropriate enquiries and/or take appropriate advice before acting on information supplied in this report. BMEE, the Building Better Regions Fund, and Francesca Sidoti are not liable to any person for loss or damage incurred or suffered as a result of acting on or accepting any offer contained in this report.

Introduction

Since BMEE was established in 2012, education in the Blue Mountains has been one of our strategic focus areas.

In our region we are lucky to have a very strong selection of primary and high schools, yet after high school, there are fewer tertiary options for students than the number of local school-leavers could potentially support.

Statistics show that the proportion of people living in the Blue Mountains between the ages of 20 and 40 is below the state and national average, so it would seem that after school, many young people move away from this area to find a job, begin tertiary education or progress their careers.

With funding from the Australian Government's Building Better Regions Fund, this research report has gathered data and established critical insights into the current situation from young people's perspective. Educators, community groups and employers also contributed. This data and the insights gained can inform future strategies for the creation of post-school pathways for our young people.

We believe that the best results for a local community occur when educational institutions are well-connected to local business in related industries and that when this occurs, the whole local economy and community benefits. Innovative projects such as the Blackheath-based Pluriversity, and entities such as TAFE NSW, NSW Distance Education or the Country Universities Centre can form part of the solution, but local surveying and research provides information to develop a strategy that will work for us locally.

Thank you to Francesca Sidoti for her excellent research and project management skills, to the young people involved in reviewing the report and co-developing the research presentations and to all who have taken part in this project.

Bernard Fehon OAM
CEO, Blue Mountains Economic Enterprise

Table of contents

Figures and tables

Acronyms

ABS - Australian Bureau of Statistics

BMCC - Blue Mountains City Council

BMEE - Blue Mountains Economic Enterprise

BMIHMS - Blue Mountains International Hotel Management School

LGA - Local government area

MYST - Mountains Youth Services Team

TVET - Technical and vocational education training, denoting TAFE programs offered in schools.

VET - Vocational education training

Post-school pathways for Blue Mountains young people

Executive Summary

The focus of this report is Blue Mountains young people's experience of post-school pathways. The report finds that Blue Mountains young people, educational experts, community organisers, and business owners agree that access to post-school pathways is limited and a challenge for Blue Mountains young people, that there is a relationship between post-school pathways and youth out-migration but this relationship is complex and affected by other factors such as young people experiencing a lack of belonging in the Blue Mountains, and that there are several initiatives that could support Blue Mountains young people in accessing post-school pathways. Undertaken for the Blue Mountains Economic Enterprise (BMEE), this research was funded by the Australian Government's Building Better Regions Fund.

About BMEE

This report has been commissioned by BMEE, the peak regional economic development agency in the Blue Mountains. BMEE's mission is to stimulate economic development in the Blue Mountains through advocacy, investment and industry development, consistent with our competitive advantages. BMEE is funded by Blue Mountains City Council, works collaboratively with all levels of Government and the private sector and operates as an independent entity.

BMEE's vision is, by 2020, they will be the recognised economic development organisation for the Blue Mountains delivering significant and measurable contributions to the economy through: encouraging appropriate investment; positioning the City for business; and, strengthening a sustainable and diversified business community (BMEE, n.d.).

The project

Population data confirms that the Blue Mountains has a lower population of young people (for the purposes of this research, those aged between 16-24 years) than state or national averages, and that the net loss of young people continues until 35 years of age (.id 2016a).

Anecdotally, these population trends might suggest a relationship with the availability of and access to post-school pathways, such as further education and employment. This qualitative study examines how young people aged between 16-18, young people aged between 19-24, educational experts, community organisers, and business owners in the Blue Mountains perceive post-school pathways in order to collect empirical data to investigate these trends and as the basis for future strategic planning. Overall, representatives from 53 Blue Mountains organisations and 253 young people were engaged for this research.

Access to and availability of post-school pathways for Blue Mountains young people is perceived as limited

Post-school pathways for Blue Mountains young people are seen as limited, very limited, or non-existent by 78% of 16-18 year olds and 92% of 19-24 year olds. Business owners, education experts and community organisers, by and large, agreed that post-school pathways in the Blue Mountains are challenging for young people.

The significant increase in negative perceptions of post-school pathways between the 16-18 year cohort and the 19-24 year old cohort suggests that **the experiences of the two cohorts of young people are different, and policy and initiatives should be tailored to and specific for each group**. It also may suggest that the experiences of post-school pathways are harder than anticipated by the younger cohort.

Participants prioritised different areas of reform. A majority of educators and those aged 16-18 suggest that attracting a university campus to the Blue Mountains was the first priority, while the majority of 19-24 year olds, business owners and community organisers suggest that full-time employment and social and recreational opportunities require reform before the addition of a university campus. Participants identified transport as a critical concern.

There is an eagerness for information and support around post-school pathways. All groups are interested and invested in supporting young people in their post-school pathways. In addition to the required support for young people, the families of young people were identified as needing more information and support.

Post-school pathways are closely linked with perceptions and experiences of out-migration after higher school

There was an inclination towards out-migration in the sample. 30% of 16-18 year olds indicate they were planning to 'probably' or 'definitely' stay in the Blue Mountains. However, despite the data suggesting a clear orientation towards out-migration in the 19-24, 74% of those engaged in this research are still living in the Blue Mountains. This is potentially a result of the recruitment strategy; as the research was advertised locally, it may have drawn a larger proportion of young people living locally.

Young people move for a variety of reasons, not solely to access post-school pathways. While accessing post-school pathways was the major motivation for out-migration in both cohorts, young people also intended to move as a form of personal development - often described as 'growing' or seeing new things - or because they could not see a future in the Blue Mountains or felt they did not belong.

There is a normative culture of out-migration in the Blue Mountains, where **leaving is associated with success and remaining or returning is associated with 'failure' or being 'stuck'.** These discourses are evident in data from all groups, and have implications for young people's post-school pathways. Participants identified the need to challenge this discourse. Reform in other areas without addressing these discourses would, in all likelihood, be ineffective.

Rather than focusing on stemming out-migration, effective initiatives and policy could reframe around young people as supported to stay, supported to leave, and supported to return, as well as attracting young people from elsewhere to the area.

Access to necessities and financial resources impacts post-school pathways

There is a relationship between location and access to post-school pathways. The proximity of the Lower Mountains to Sydney ensures young people in these areas have greater access to post-school pathways. This may intersect with greater disadvantage and a lower median household income in the Upper Mountains.

Housing affordability and financial resources were identified as barriers to accessing post-school pathways. Community organisers identified socioeconomic resources as a major factor in a young person's access to post-school opportunities. 16-18 year olds identified financial barriers as the largest barrier to post-school pathways, and 45% of 19-24 year olds stated that they remained in the Blue Mountains for financial reasons.

Transport is a critical challenge. Difficulties with transport disproportionately affect young people in the Upper Mountains and young people living with a disability. Transport was also identified by both cohorts of young people as negatively impacting socialising, the vitality of towns, access to employment and education, and access to TVET, as well as prompting serious safety concerns. Participants suggested improving transport would encourage young people to commute, rather than leave.

University is the preferred pathway, but young people also want other options

University is the preferred post-school pathway for both cohorts, with 70% of those aged 16-18 nominating it as their preferred pathway and 76% of those aged 19-24 either attending university immediately after high school, attending university after a gap year, or applying for university.

Despite this preference, **many young people stated they would have liked to have received more information about alternatives to university while in school.** Educators supported this request, stating that TVET and strong links to industry remain a priority.

The accessibility of locally available vocational education, especially in trades, was identified as a concern. Education experts, business owners and community organisers all stated **a construction course at Wentworth Falls TAFE would address a significant gap.**

Local employment opportunities are seen as limited

While some young people felt there was a reasonable amount of locally available jobs, **employment opportunities in the Blue Mountains are generally seen as limited.** Tourism and hospitality are seen as the dominant industries of employment and neither industry is regarded as offering secure jobs or career progression.

Poor work conditions - such as underpayment, cash-in-hand, and job precarity - in hospitality and tourism were a consistent concern from young people, community organisers, education experts and some business owners.

The vast majority of business owners agreed local opportunities are limited, and some identified the provision of full-time employment as a method to retain or attract young people.

A majority of the business owners engaged in this research are invested in supporting young people. Many also experienced barriers in employing young people, including difficulties with recruitment, the work readiness of young people, and training.

Work experience and mentoring are critical initiatives and suggested by all groups.

Many young people feel they do not belong in the Blue Mountains. Improving the inclusiveness of the Blue Mountains is critical for post-school pathways and out-migration

There is extensive data to suggest many young people do not feel they belong in the Blue Mountains and that it is not a place 'for' young people. Experiencing a lack of belonging is a factor in youth out-migration and may decrease the likelihood of return.

Any reform to post-school pathways must be developed alongside initiatives designed to include young people in the community. Attempting reform to post-school options in the Blue Mountains without addressing the issues around belonging are likely to be ineffective.

Young people identified reform of transport and the support of more social opportunities as the two key interventions in addressing a lack of belonging.

Support for more socialising opportunities is a recurring and critical request from young people. The proposed model included the following aspects: support for transport options (including long-term transport reform); youth-oriented activities limited to those under 24 exclusively; ongoing and regular activities rather than one-offs; and, an inclusive space. Improved access to and diversity of nightlife was also a regular request.

Future directions

Several initiatives were identified as possible directions in future strategic planning:

- The creation of a transport reform advocacy strategy to address ease-of-movement between living, studying, working, and socialising locations;
- The development of a construction course at Wentworth Falls TAFE;
- The establishment of an organisation, or an individual within an organisation, that can support businesses in recruiting young people, provide HR support, and education to young people about their rights as workers;
- The establishment of a shared mentoring and work experience program;
- The establishment of regular activities for young people that are limited to those under 24 exclusively;
- The development of systemic 'familiarisation' initiatives, where young people are exposed to a variety of post-school pathways while in school;
- The facilitation of an initiative where the 19-24 age cohort discuss their own post-school pathway with the younger cohort, including modelling pathways outside of the dominant university and out-migration pathway;
- The development of more extensive information and support for families of young people, as well as young people themselves;
- A community consultation process/cross-functional working group commissioned to investigate the possibility of attracting a university campus, a university centre, or film and TV school to the Blue Mountains.

Most importantly, reform of post-school pathways must be integrated with the increased inclusion of young people in the Blue Mountains community. Effective reform - and the consequent improvement of post-school outcomes for Blue Mountains young people - is dependent on approaching these challenges as interrelated

1.0 Introduction

The Blue Mountains, in New South Wales, Australia, is a local government area bordering the west of Greater Sydney. Comprising 27 towns and villages, see Table 1, the Blue Mountains is home to an estimated 79,260 (.id 2018a) people. With approximately 70% of the area incorporated in the World Heritage Blue Mountains National Park, it is a place of great natural beauty and is a popular tourist destination.

There are significant differences within five planning areas of the Blue Mountains. Access to local employment and educational opportunities, proximity to Sydney and the possibility of commuting, the median household income, and levels of disadvantage vary greatly between these areas.

While the Blue Mountains is proximate to Sydney, especially for those living in the lower Blue Mountains, there is significant youth out-migration after secondary school. This out-migration is prolonged. As a result, the Blue Mountains has a lower-than-average population of young people between ages 19 and 35, see Figure 1.

The out-migration of young people after secondary school has long been a concern of regional and rural towns in Australia (Coffey et al. 2018; Gabriel 2002) and is an ongoing concern in the Blue Mountains as indicated in community consultations over the past decade (IRIS Research 2014, 2016a; Micromex Research 2018). The significant out-migration after secondary school suggests that there is a relationship between the availability and accessibility of post-school pathways and youth out-migration, although this has not been established in prior research.

Planning Area	Suburbs included
Planning area 1	Bell, Blackheath, Mount Irvine, Mount Tomah, Mount Victoria, Mount Wilson, Berambing (part), Megalong Valley (part)
Planning area 2	Katoomba, Leura, Medlow Bath, Wentworth Falls
Planning area 3	Bullaburra, Hazelbrook, Lawson, Linden, Woodford
Planning area 4	Faulconbridge, Hawkesbury Heights, Springwood, Sun Valley, Valley Heights, Winmalee, Yellow Rock
Planning area 5	Blaxland, Glenbrook, Lapstone, Mount Riverview, Warrimoo

Table 1: Blue Mountains planning areas and suburbs (.id 2016b)

Figure 1: **Age profile of the Blue Mountains, Greater Sydney, NSW and Australia (.id 2016a)**

Blue Mountains Economic Enterprise

Aims of this report

Despite the availability of statistical data and insights from community consultations - including those of the local youth representatives (BMCC 2016a) -, the need for a study that focuses specifically on Blue Mountains young people's post-school pathways has been identified.

This report aims to better understand the complexity of young people's post-school pathways experiences and motivations as a baseline for future strategic planning by Blue Mountains Economic Enterprise, who commissioned this research. The eventual goal is to understand youth out-migration, improve employment outcomes for young people who remain in the Blue Mountains, and attract additional young people to the region.

Data was collected on:

- Perceptions of post-school pathways and opportunities in the Blue Mountains;
- Young people's decision-making and planning about post-school pathways;
- Young people's experiences of post-school pathways;
- Available systems of support for young people's post-school pathways;
- Perceptions on what would improve post-school pathways.

Terminology

'Pathways' and 'out-migration' are two important concepts in the study of young people.

Pathways describes the processes by which young people move from secondary school to their post-school options. This process can also often be described as **transitions.**

Out-migration refers to the movement of people away from a location. One of the most concentrated areas of out-migration is the significant youth out-migration that occurs after secondary school in many non-metropolitan places.

Young people, in this report, are those aged 16-24 years of age.

Methodology

This research project drew on a qualitative methodology and methods, including: surveys; interviews; a literature review of available Blue Mountains research; and, collaboration with four young people as research assistants to review the report. Five groups were recruited as participants: young people between 16-18 years of age, young people between 19-24 years of age, Blue Mountains education experts comprising high school principals and representatives of further education institutions, Blue Mountains business owners, and Blue Mountains community organisers. Overall, representatives from 52 Blue Mountains organisations and 253 young people were engaged for this research.

Report structure

This report begins with a review of the demographic data on young people in the Blue Mountains, before briefly reviewing some of the relevant literature in youth out-migration, post-school pathways, and Blue Mountains research.

The report then turns to an examination of the data. Six areas have emerged as important in this discussion: perspectives and processes of post-school pathways; perspectives and processes of out-migration; necessities; further education; employment; and, belonging in the Blue Mountains.

The following section summarises the feedback from participants about various post-school options, and concludes with a summation of the key findings and suggested future directions.

The report also includes three identified case studies: Blue Mountains Pluriversity; Scenic World Shared, and Outdoor Explore. These case studies were chosen for two reasons: they all emerged from the data, where participants cited them as success stories, and they all build from identified Blue Mountains strengths.

2.0 Demographics

16-24 year olds comprise 9.6% of the Blue Mountains population, which is lower than Greater Sydney (11.9%), New South Wales (11.4%) and Australia (11.6%) (ABS 2016a)

● 16-18

● 19-24

● Other Blue Mountains residents

Figure 2 - Proportion of Blue Mountains population aged 16-24 (ABS 2016a)

Net migration

Figure 3 - Blue Mountains net migration (.id 2016a)
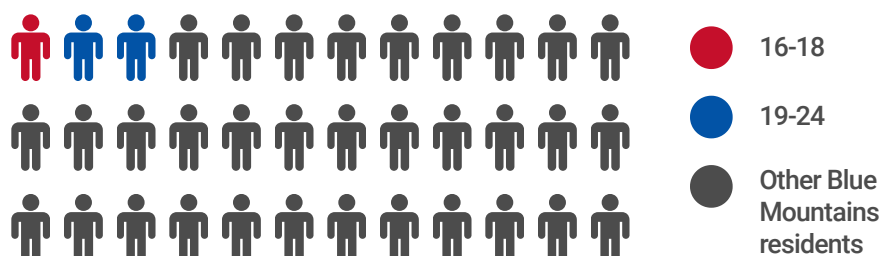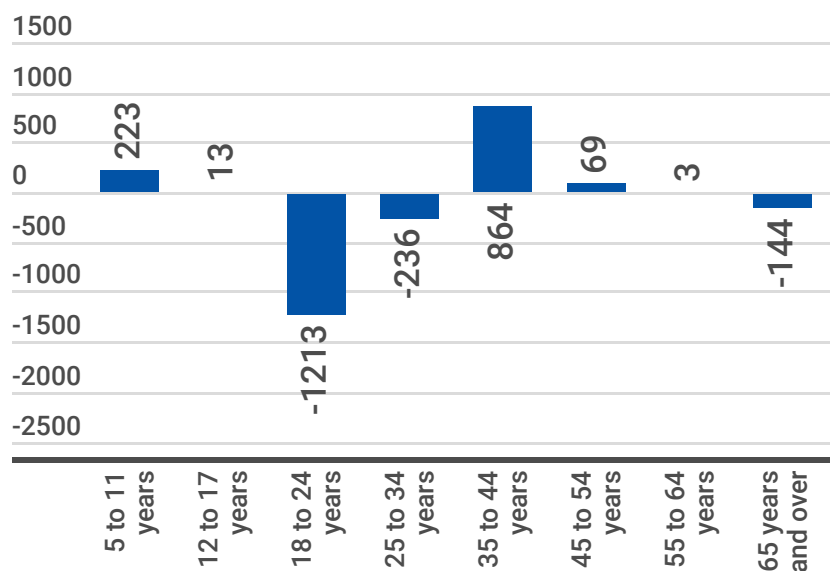
The Blue Mountains experiences significant out-migration, with a notable population shift after secondary school. Net in-migration does not occur until after 35.

In 2016, the Census recorded that the 18-24 year old population of the Blue Mountains had gained 623 people and lost 1,836 people since 2011 with a net out-migration of 1,213 people (.id 2016a). With 5,418 young people aged between 18-24 in the Blue Mountains (.id 2016b), this suggests approximately one-third of the population in this age-range leaves.

The median household income ranges from $1,081 per week in Planning Area 1 through to $1,995 in Planning Area 5. The national median is $1,431 (.id 2016c).

Levels of engagement in employment, education or training

Engagement status	16-18	19-24
Fully engaged (in full-time work, full-time study, or a combination of work and study)	85.61	67.52
Partially engaged (in part-time work or part-time study)	5.69	16.19
At least partially engaged (in either work or study, but unclear whether full or part-time	0.49	1.88
Not Engaged (unemployed, not in the labour force, and not in education)	4.82	10.39
Engagement status undetermined/Not Stated (engagement unclear or not stated)	3.12	3.88
Not applicable	0	0
Total	100	100

Table 2 - Levels of engagement in education and/or employment for 16-24 year olds in the Blue Mountains (ABS, 2016b)

It is crucial to consider the 16-18 year old and 19-24 year old age groups seperately, as the disengagement rate increases dramatically after 18. It is also worthy of note that disengagement rates are dependent on location, with youth disengagement rates increasing in the Upper Mountains (.id 2016d)

Labour force engagement

Labour force engagement	16-18	19-24
Employed, worked full-time	7.39%	33.34%
Employed, worked part-time	31.11%	35.71%
Employed, away from work	2.98%	2.66%
Unemployed, looking for full-time work	1.94%	3.68%
Unemployed, looking for part-time work	6.28%	3.39%
Not in the labour force	47.52%	17.32%
Not stated	2.98%	3.70%
Not applicable	0.00%	0.00%

Table 3 - Labour force engagement for 16-24 year olds in the Blue Mountains (ABS 2016c)

Again, it is imperative that policy and initiatives are aimed at specific age groups as experience varies greatly between cohorts.

Educational institution attending

Institution	%
Secondary - Government	15.10%
Secondary - Catholic	4.87%
Secondary - Other Non Government	5.62%
Technical or Further Educational Institution (including TAFE Colleges)	9.31%
University or other Tertiary Institution	22.16%
Other	1.03%
Not stated	4.50%
Not applicable	37.47%

Table 4 - Educational institution attending, Blue Mountains (.id 2016d)

People in the Blue Mountains are attending university at an increasing rate (from 4% of the population in 2001 to 4.5% in 2016) and attending TAFE at a decreasing rate (from 3.4% in 2001 to 2.1% in 2016). (id 2016e)
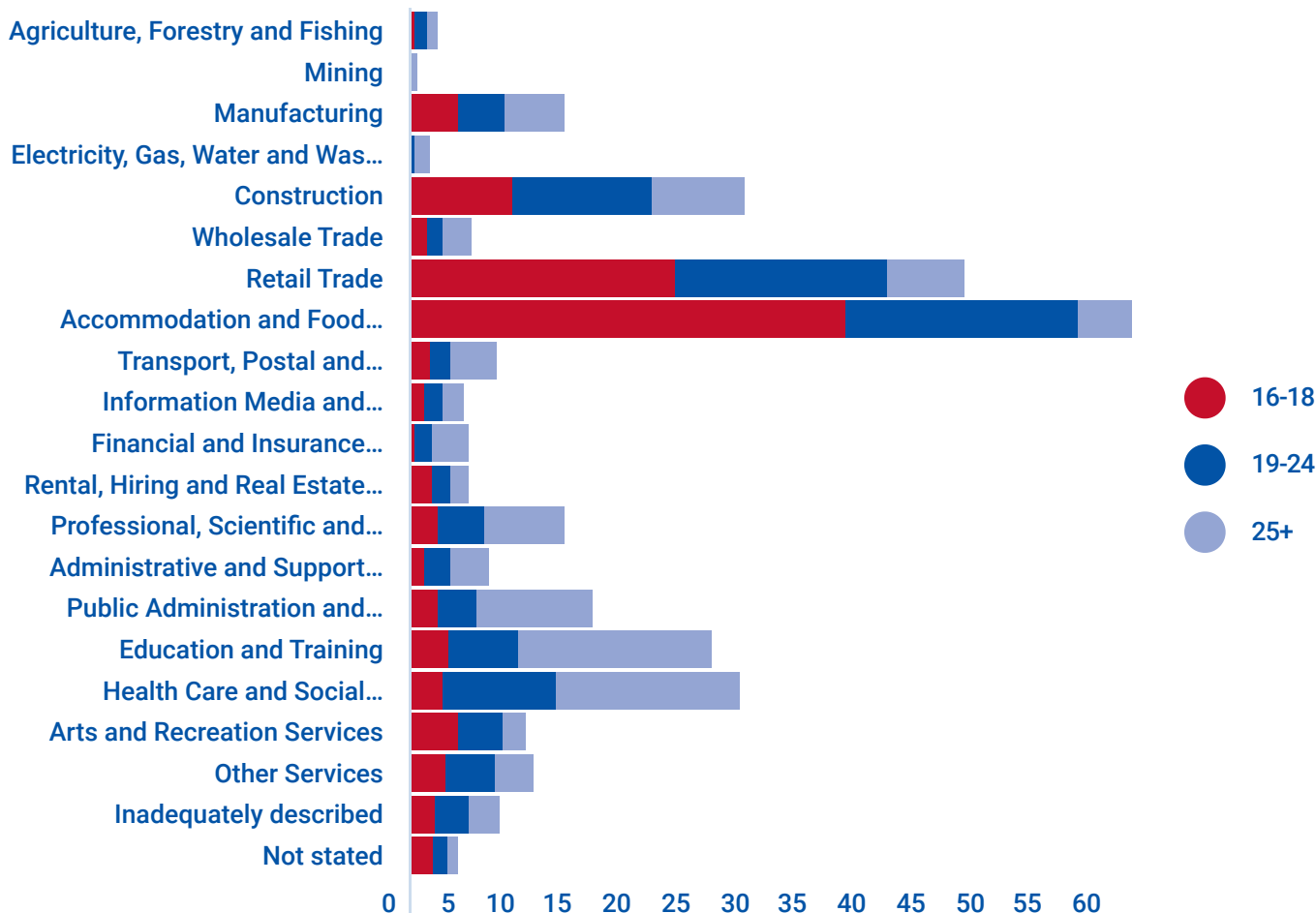
Industries of employment

Figure 4 - Industries of employment for 16-18, 19-24,, and 25+ year olds in the Blue Mountains in workforce (ABS 2016d)

3.0 Methodology

Our aims

This report on post-school pathways aims to better understand young people in the Blue Mountains' post-school pathways as a baseline for future strategic planning. The eventual goal of the strategic planning is to understand youth out-migration, improve employment outcomes for young people who remain in the Blue Mountains, and attract additional young people to the region.

The project was a qualitative study, with a focus on open-ended and semi-structured research methods. The methodology was chosen in order to complement the economic and demographic quantitative data already available to Blue Mountains Economic Enterprise. While quantitative data reveals broad trends, qualitative data is effective at producing insights into the nuances and complexity of the lived experience.

Who was involved

Five groups were recruited for this research: young people aged 16-18; young people aged 19-24; educational experts including high school principals and representatives from further education institutions; community organisers, and business owners. All were based in the Blue Mountains, except some young people who had migrated elsewhere.

Group	Survey	Interview
Young people 16-18	74	4
Young people 19-24	163	5
Education experts	4	10
Employers	13	17
Community organisers	4	17

Table 5 - Participant sample

The sample size is not generaliseable or representative; rather, our intention was to establish trends through qualitative methods as a basis for future strategic planning and research. While percentages have been included, these are intended as indicative of general trends and are not statistically representative. While the sample was not representative, every effort was made to include participants from a diversity of backgrounds. The sample of young people included a higher proportion of females to males in both cohorts.

Participants were recruited through Facebook and Instagram advertising, articles in the Blue Mountains Gazette, promotion of the research on community Facebook pages and the Blue Mountains Economic Enterprise, and email. The sample is therefore skewed towards those with access to digital technologies. Overall, we spoke with representatives of 53 Blue Mountains organisations and 253 young people. See Appendix A for a full analysis of the sample.

Central to this research was a comparison between young people aged 16-18, many of whom are not yet completed high school and are therefore still planning for post-school pathways, and young people who are 19-24, who are currently negotiating post-school pathways.

Ethics

Ethics approval to conduct the research was obtained from Western Sydney University, approval number H13196. Written and/or verbal consent was obtained from all participants, and data was immediately de-identified.

In the survey, all questions were optional with the exception of the initial screening questions. Participants were provided with a participant information sheet.

An example survey instrument can be found at Appendix C.

What we did

Literature Review

The initial research stage was a literature review of publicly available research and policy documents about the Blue Mountains, and a scoping review of current youth out-migration and post-school pathways literature. ABS data was also collected through the Tablebuilder database.

Online surveys

Online surveys were promoted through the Blue Mountains Economic Enterprise website, local networks, Facebook, Instagram, and the Blue Mountains Gazette. The surveys were mostly open-ended questions, with some demographic information. They were available through Qualtrics.

Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with participants from each of the 5 groups. Interviews lasted from 30-60 minutes. Two recruitment strategies were employed; some participants volunteered for interviews through the survey. Others were recruited through snowball sampling, a recruitment strategy where one participant recruits other participants in their networks..

Collaboration with young people

After the initial data collection stage, 4 young people were hired as research assistants to review the data and provide feedback on the report. This process included a "research methods" orientation, a review of the report, and the incorporation of feedback.

Data analysis

Data was thematically coded through nVivo, a qualitative data analysis software. Some qualitative survey responses were analysed using SPSS in order to establish basic trends in the data.

4.0 Background

Mobility and young people in Australia

Internal migration in Australia peaks in the young adult years and while internal migration is decreasing nationally over the long term (Charles-Edwards et al. 2018), internal migration has increased in both the 15-19 year old and 20-24 year age range over the past fifteen years (see Figure 5).
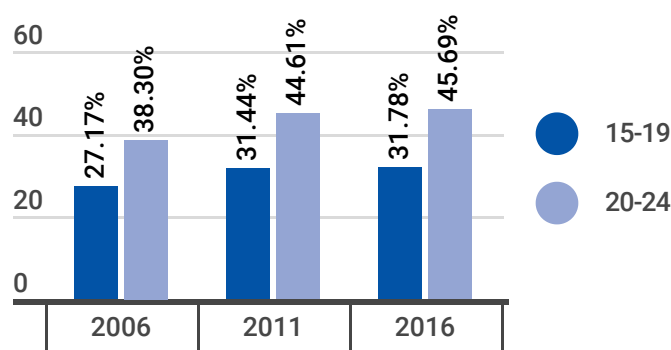
Figure 5 - Comparison of internal migration of 15-19 and 20-24 year olds, Australia, 2006-2016 (ABS 2016e)

Mobility and regional young people in Australia

Regional and rural young people are slightly more likely than their urban counterparts to migrate (Dufty-Jones and Argent 2018), which has been consistently identified over the past decades as a concern in the sustainability of towns outside of metropolitan centres, including exacerbating ageing population trends (Coffey et al. 2018). The intersection of local post-school pathways and regional and rural out-migration has interested Australian scholars for some time (Gabriel 2002; Argent & Walmsey 2008; Geldens and Bourke, 2008). Other work concentrates on the discourses that surround regional and rural out-migration. Much of this scholarship identifies the increasing dominance of urban life as normative (Cuervo & Wyn 2012) with rural - and, by extrapolation, regional - youth seen as 'other'. This, in turn, contributes to the trend Farrugia (2016) has identified where regional and rural young people increasingly feel that mobility is "imperative" as economic and cultural capital is concentrated in cities, and young people "equate leaving rural areas for urban centres with success and staying with failure" (Cook and Cuervo 2018).

Recommendations from the literature

A significant literature study by Foster and Main (2018) suggested the following recommendations While this study is an international example and focused on rural young people, the recommendations are thought-provoking in relation to the Australian regional context. Relevant examples from Australian research have been included.

1 **Out-migration is driven by personal and subjective factors, as well as objective and structural factors:** Foster and Main state that it's important to understand the non-structural and 'non-economic' aspects of these experiences, including values, routines, identities, sense of place, sense of home, significant relationships, inclusion in peer groups and communities, among others. This is consistent with the work of Farrugia (2016, 2019), and Cuervo & Wyn (2017).

2 **Young people should be supported to leave and supported to stay:** This review suggests that youth out-migration should be addressed by examining what is best for young people, rather than focusing on stemming youth out-migration as best for the community (Foster and Main, 2018). Policy should therefore should focus on young people as 'supported to leave' as well as supported to stay. This is consistent with Dufty-Jones and Argent's recent call (2018) to move away from a focus on why young people leave and concentrate on what barriers exist against return.

3 **To be young and in a rural or regional town is not 'failure':** Foster and Main identify discourses that suggest those who remain or return to rural or regional towns have 'failed' or are 'stuck'. 'Importantly, these ideas are supported and perpetuated by parents, teachers, and other authority figures' (p. 3). This is consistent with the findings of Gabriel (2002), and Farrugia's discussion of the mobility imperative (2016).

Young people's post-school pathways

Post-school pathways for Australian young people are changing. More young people are completing post-school qualifications than in previous years. Predominately, young people are aiming to go to university (NCVER 2013), with the engagement in vocational education decreasing by 43% in the past five years (Robinson 2019). Transitions into full-time employment are also becoming increasingly complex and young people are taking longer to gain full-time work (NCVER 2013, p. 7).

What do post-school pathways in Australia look like?

Ranasinghe et al. (2019) studied the trajectories of 3186 Australian young people in between 2006 and 2016 and identified 5 school-to-work pathways. Ranasinghe et al.'s study found that socioeconomic and demographic factors did influence individual transition pathways (2019, p. 33).

Mostly working part-time — 4%

Mixed and repeatedly disengaging — 5%

Mix of higher education and VET — 8%

Early entry into the workforce — 23%

Higher education, then work — 60%
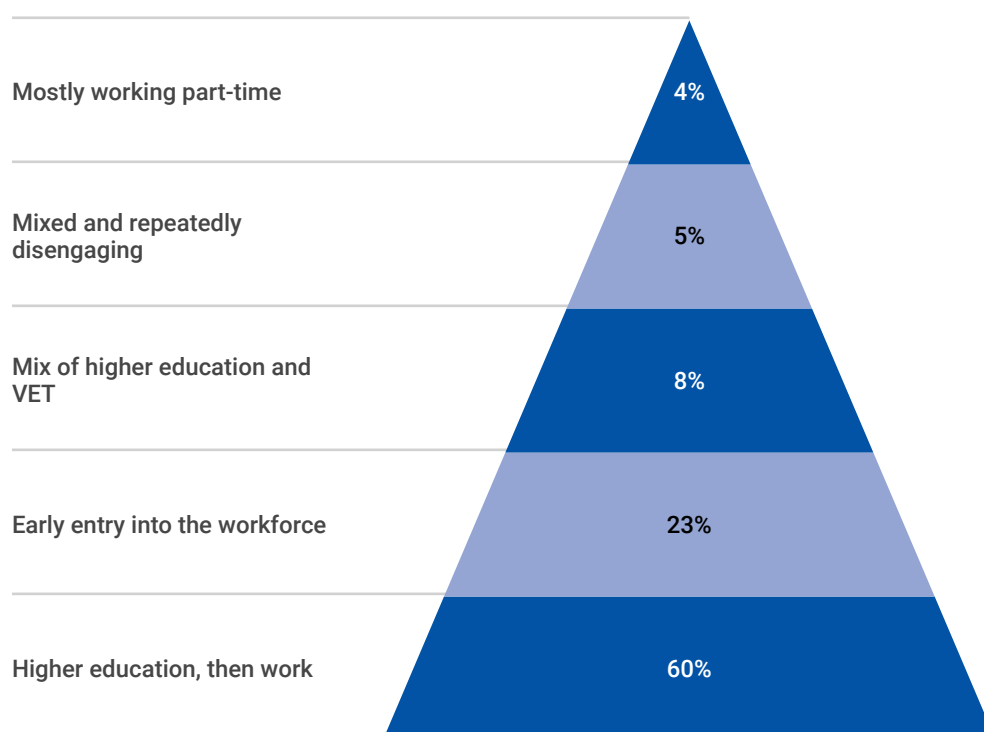
Figure 6 - Young people's trajectories in Ranasinghe et al. (2019)

What does a 'successful' post-school pathway look like?

In the literature, a 'successful' post-school pathway is often gauged by labour force engagement. Ranasinghe et al. found that those who took the 'early entry into work' pathway has the highest rate of employment by age 25 (97.4%) of any pathway, followed by those in the 'higher education, then work' pathway at 92.4% (2019, p. 19-20). The pathway with the lowest labour force engagement was those in the pathway 'mixed and repeatedly disengaging', with 46.9% employed by age 25.

Blue Mountains literature

The reviewed Blue Mountains literature, see Appendix B, suggests there is widespread consensus among the Blue Mountains community that there are significant challenges for Blue Mountains young people, especially in accessing post-school pathways, and that these challenges are linked with youth out-migration trends.

The Blue Mountains City Council Community Satisfaction Surveys have consistently cited concerns for the inclusion of and provision for Blue Mountains young people. 'Services and facilities for young people' has been one of the top three concerns of Blue Mountains residents for the past 6 years, in 2014, 2016 and 2018 (IRIS Research 2014, 2016a; Micromex Research 2018).

Significantly, analysis in the 2016 Community Satisfaction Report found that those aged 16 to 34 agreed less strongly than other age groups to the statement 'I feel I belong to the community I live in' (IRIS Research 2016a, p. 99).

The Blue Mountains distance from the CBD, and most major educational institutions, means that many young people move away from the area for education, career opportunities and to live a more urban lifestyle. Retaining and attracting younger people and encouraging families to the Blue Mountains will be increasingly important to ensure a balanced community structure with labour available for critical services

Blue Mountains City Council 2018b, p. 29

What does the literature identify as issues for young people in the Blue Mountains?

- Local employment opportunities and the need to commute for employment.
- Accessibility and transport including the lack of buses, regular train services and affordability.
- Housing affordability.
- Social and recreational opportunities, with community consultations revealing a recurring belief that there is "nothing here for the youth" (IRIS Research 2016a, p. 41).

What does the literature identify as opportunities to address the above issues for young people?

- The inclusion of young people in decision-making and consultation.
- The need for a space that is youth friendly and youth-specific.
- "Additional employment opportunities to retain young people in the Blue Mountains" (IRIS Research 2016a, p. 49), including possible industry expansion, co-working spaces and support for home-based businesses.
- Further education opportunities, including a university campus, extending or expanding courses at TAFE, and online education opportunities.
- Social and recreational programs. This suggestion accords with the need for provision of youth-friendly spaces.

5.0 Findings

5.1 Post-school pathways

What are the preferred post-school pathways for young people?

University is clearly the preferred pathway for Blue Mountains young people, with 70.8% of those aged between 16-18 years of age nominating it as their planned pathway (see Figure 7) and 76% of those aged 19-24 either attending university immediately after high school, attending university after a "gap year", or applying for university (see Table 6). Parents, peers and - to a much lesser extent - teachers are identified by 16-18 year olds as the ones they most usually engaged about pathways (see Figure 8).

Barriers to post-school pathways

Participants identified financial resources as the most significant barrier to their chosen post-school pathway. Other significant factors included difficulties with transport, moving away from parental and peer support, and challenges associated with mental health and living with disability. Barriers to post-school pathways are also exacerbated by location, especially for young people living in the Upper Mountains.

Do young people continue with their initial post-school pathway?

A little under half (49.7%) of 19-24 year olds had changed their post-school pathway by the time of this research (see Figure 9). Some change in post-school pathways is to be expected. The largest motivation for change was a desire for a different pathway (41.3%), see Figure 10. Two other motivations for change - an opportunity presenting itself (15%) and the progression to the next step of a pathway (8.7%) - also fit within an expected experience.

35% of participants had changed post-school pathways for less-than-positive reasons. Some young people changed pathways as a result of a lack of opportunity (20%), including the difficulty in pursuing the pathway from the Mountains, or as a result of life circumstances (15%), such as mental health issues or financial stress. Significantly, 7% of participants who had changed pathways described leaving their post-school pathway because of the difficulties with transport.

> "
> Finish school with a high atar, get into university preferably USYD, move closer to the city (parramatta or further), get a part time job
>
> *(16-18, survey)*

> "
> I had to put off uni for one year due to not being able to afford not working full time this year
>
> *(16-18, survey)*

> "
> I might miss my family too much and feel very homesick as I'm very close to my family.
>
> *(16-18, survey)*

> "
> I was unable to gain employment
>
> *(19-24, survey)*

> "
> I wanted to work and travel before making up my mind and committing moving to the city
>
> *(19-24, survey)*

> "
> I changed as a person? Discovered new passions and skills
>
> *(19-24, survey)*

> "
> I left university because the travel burnt me out
>
> *(19-24, survey)*

What do 16-18 year olds plan to do after high school?
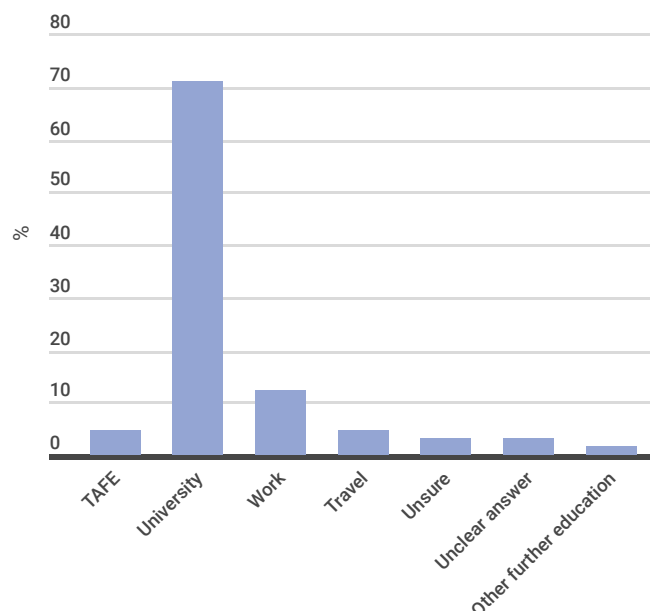
Figure 7 - Post-school plans for 16-18 year olds

Who do 16-18 year olds talk to about their post-school pathways?
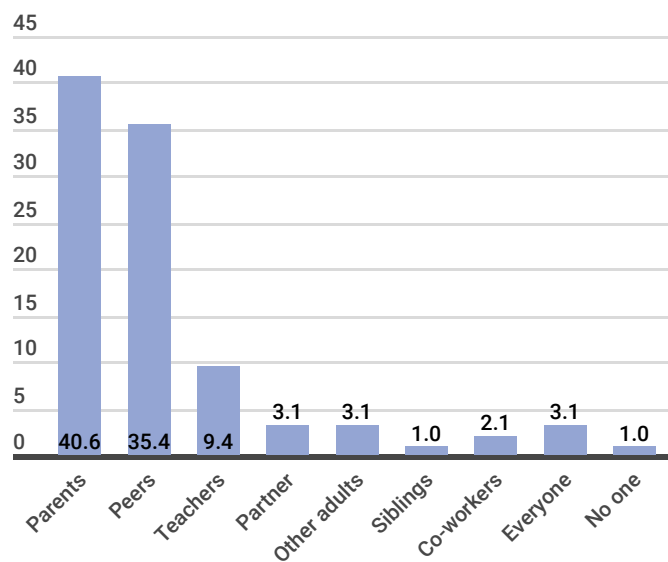
Figure 8 - Groups engaged about post-school pathways by 16-18 year olds

What was the immediate post-school pathway for 19-24 year olds?

Pathway	%
Full-time uni	54%
Gap year	21%
TAFE	8%
Full-time work	7%
Apprenticeship/trainee	4%
Part-time work	3%
Nothing	2%
Took time off to apply for uni	1%
Looked for work	1%

Table 6 - Immediate post-school pathways for 19-24 year

Are 19-24 still on the same post-school pathway?
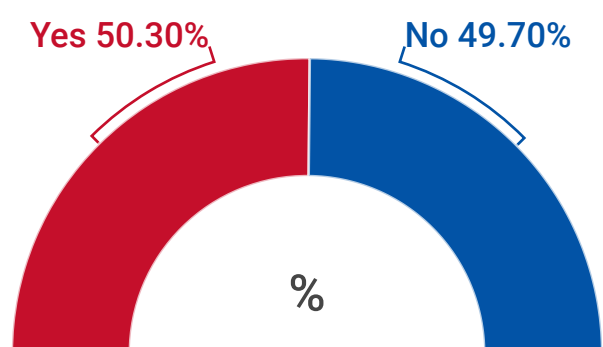
Figure 9 - Post-school pathway continuance for 19-24 year

Reasons for changing pathways

Wanted something else	Lack of opportunity	Found other opportunity	Life circumstances	Expected progression

Figure 10 - Reasons for change in post-school pathways for 19-24 year olds

Blue Mountains Economic Enterprise

How do young people feel about post-school options in the Blue Mountains?

Post-school pathways were seen as either limited, very limited, or non-existent by 78% of 16-18 year old participants, see Figure 11. More starkly, this figure is 92% among 19-24 year olds participants, see Figure 12. The major difference between the two cohorts is a significantly increased number who perceive post-school options as 'very limited'. This is a major finding of the research.

The increase in negativity about post-school pathways in the Blue Mountains between these two cohorts suggests:

- The needs and experiences of these cohorts are significantly different and must be addressed specifically;
- The experience of post-school pathways in the Blue Mountains are perhaps more challenging than expected by the younger cohort;
- There is an important intervention point before young people turn 18 as perceptions of post-school pathways become more negative over time;
- Further research is required to understand the complexity of this increase in negativity.

It is noteworthy that some participants felt there were post-school opportunities that were accessible in and from the Blue Mountains, especially with the availability of part-time work, the lifestyle, and the proximity to Sydney.

> "
> There aren't a lot of options, moving away from the Mountains is a popular choice
>
> 16-18, survey

> "
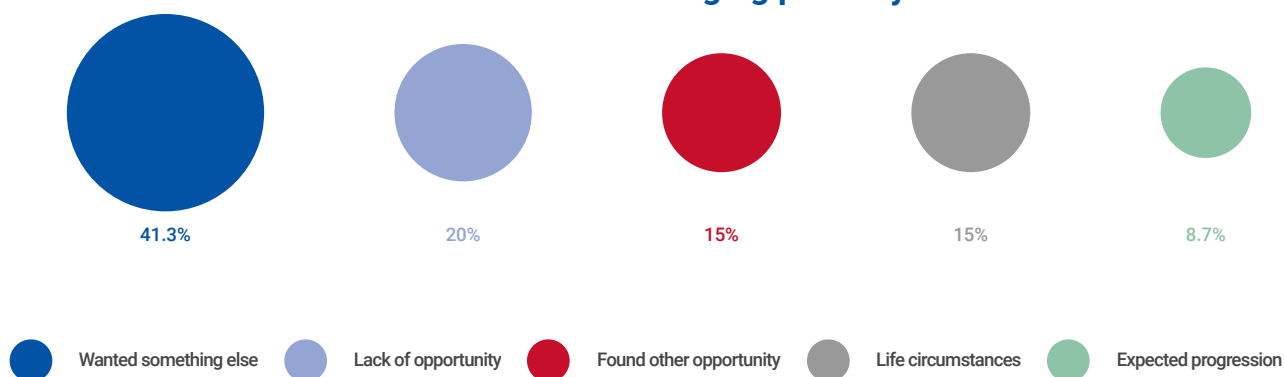> There's plenty of options for young people. There's plenty of part time work available in hospitality or retail, there's heaps of sports or activities available
>
> 16-18, survey

> "
> What options?
>
> 19-24, survey

> "
> There are many opportunities, most require travel elsewhere though.
>
> 19-24, survey

> "
> Most people I went to school with now see Sydney as their only option if they want to be "successful". There seem to be limited part time jobs for those studying. Hospitality work seems to favour those who can only work full time.
>
> 19-24, survey

How do educators, business owners and community organisers feel about post-school options in the Blue Mountains?

All groups were, by and large, in agreement with young people in viewing post-school options in the Blue Mountains as challenging for young people.

Community organisers and education experts employed a range of methods, see Tables 7 and 8, to support young people in their pathways. Several employers also cited their mentoring and support of work experience students.

Community organisers, in particular, drew attention to the disproportionate effect challenging and limited post-school pathways has on cohorts of young people in the Blue Mountains, especially young people living with disability, Aboriginal and Torres and Strait Islander young people, culturally and linguistically diverse young people and LGBTQIA+ young people.

> "
> [Successful post-school transitions] really depend on where they live, and on their parents' financial situation. So socioeconomic and geographical factors
>
> Community organiser, interview

> "
> I absolutely think that certain cohorts of people are disproportionately affected by these issues than others. For example, people living with disabilities and employment opportunities.
>
> Community organiser, interview

> "
> Young people who are vulnerable when they're in school are vulnerable when they're out of school.
>
> Community organiser, survey

How do 16-18 year olds feel about post-school options in the Blue Mountains?
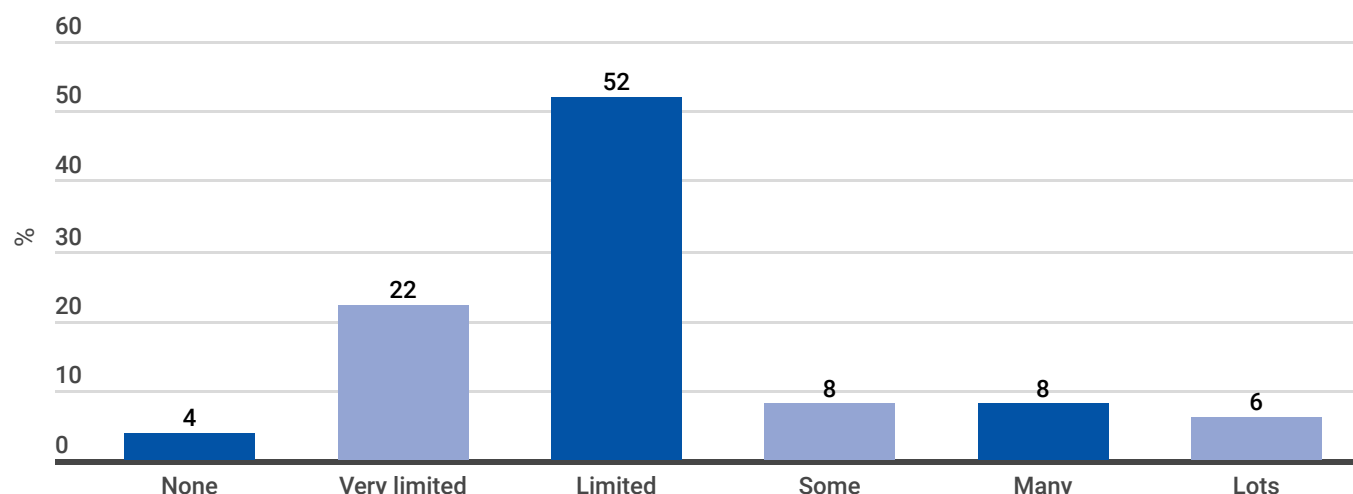
Figure 11 - Perspectives on post-school options in the Blue Mountains, 16-18 year olds

How do 19-24 year olds feel about post-school options in the Blue Mountains?
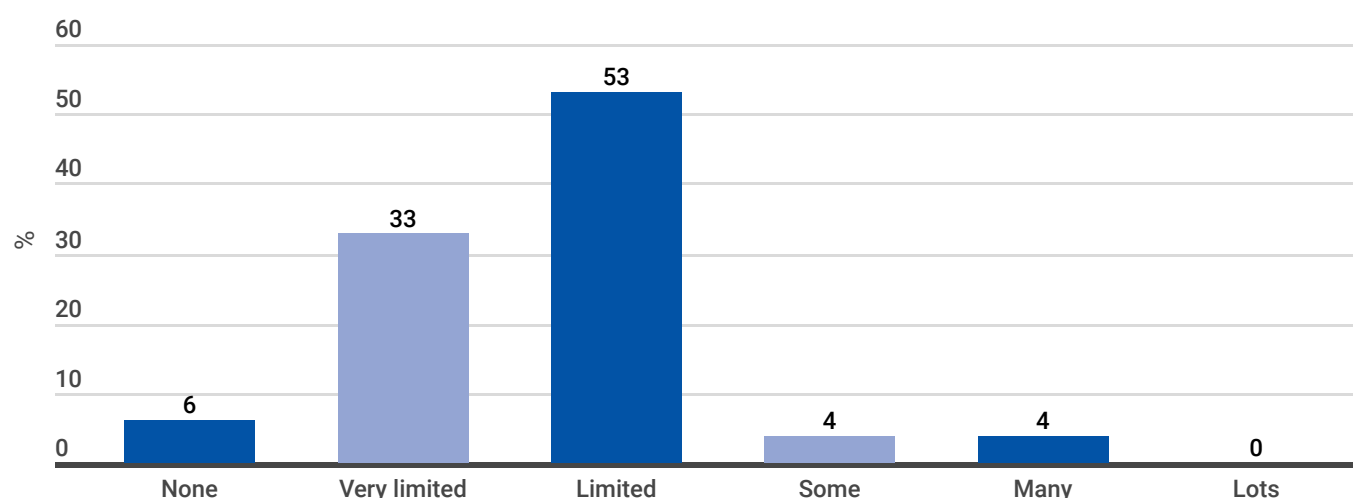
Figure 12 - Perspectives on post-school options in the Blue Mountains, 19-24 year

What strategies are used to support young people in post-school pathways?

Educators	Community organisers
Individualised guidance and mentoring	Transition to work programs
Visiting career days	Individual support
Building resilience and wellbeing programs	Referral to specialists or services
Communicating and liaising with families	Support in developing life skills
Work experience in Year 10	Supported learning options, including investigating TAFE pathways or advocacy with school
Incorporating VET opportunities	
Inviting guest speakers	Programs, i.e. 'Outdoor Explore' run by MYST
Careers advice	Research

Table 7 - Strategies to support post-school pathways, educators

Table 8 - Strategies to support post-school pathways, community organisers

Blue Mountains Economic Enterprise

5.2 Young people and out-migration

Are young people staying in the Blue Mountains?

The data in this section was surprising. Despite the qualitative open-ended responses revealing a clear orientation towards out-migration for a majority of participants, 30% of 16-18 year olds stated they would either 'probably' or 'definitely' stay in the Blue Mountains. This number was higher than expected (see Figure 13). Likewise, despite the clear inclination for out-migration described by the 19-24 year sample in open-ended questions, 73.8% are still living in the Blue Mountains. As 45% of 19-24 year olds responded that they remained in the Blue Mountains for financial reasons, see Figure 15, housing affordability, low wages in major Blue Mountains industries, costs of transport, and cost of living could contribute to the high figure. As this research was recruited through local networks, the sample may also comprise an overrepresentation of young people who remain in the Blue Mountains.

While there was no significant difference between how different genders felt about post-school pathways, a larger proportion of females in the 16-18 cohort planned to leave the Blue Mountains (53% as opposed to 36% of males) or were unsure (24% as opposed to 14%), and a larger proportion of females aged 19-24 had already left (26% as opposed to 11%).

Why stay and why go?

There are diverse reasons why participants decide to stay and go, as evident in Tables 9 and 10. A young person may migrate because they understand migration as a rite-of-passage - an opportunity to grow and develop - and because there are no post-school opportunities in the Blue Mountains. These reasons are not mutually exclusive. The most common motivation for leaving is to pursue post-school opportunities in education and employment.

As mentioned above, a significant finding from this section of data is that 45% of young people between 19-24 are staying in the Blue Mountains for financial reasons, often stating "I can't afford to leave home" (19-24, survey). When coupled with limited local post-school opportunities and challenges around transport, this group may be disproportionately affected

A second finding of interest is that 7.6% of 16-18 year olds and 14.6% intend to stay in the Blue Mountains because they like it and feel connected.

> Lots of young people believe they have to leave the Mountains to have a future .
>
> 16-18, survey

> My mum lives here. It is a friendly environment. It's beautiful. It's not overly busy
>
> 19-24, survey

> Because it's home, much prefer it to the city as it's slower and less going on
>
> 16-18, survey

> There is not many other young people or opportunities for young people to socialise. There is not a good university nearby. My siblings live in the city. I want better casual/partime work opportunities. The community here is also very conservative, unwelcoming to young people, especially those from diverse backgrounds.
>
> 16-18, survey

> Where my immediate family is. I love the area. Can't afford to move out
>
> 19-24, survey

> Because I can't escape
>
> 19-24, survey

> It has nothing here for me/depresses me
>
> 16-18, survey

> I have lived here my whole life. I love it but I need to explore the world
>
> 16-18, survey

> I moved to the city to be closer to uni and meet new people, be able to go out to gigs and cool pubs and bars, just have a more fun life
>
> 19-24, survey

Do 16-18 year olds plan to stay in the Blue Mountains?

Definitely yes 4.00%
Definitely not 19.00%
Probably yes 26.0

Might or might not 21
Probably not 30.00%
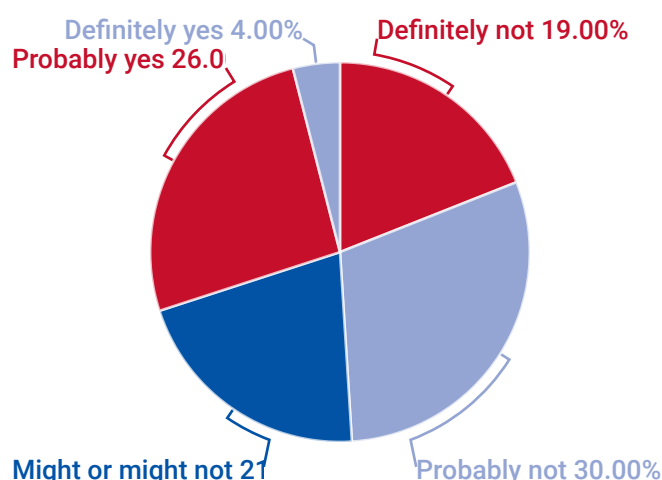
Figure 13 - Intentions for post-school location, 16-18 year olds

Of those 19-24, how many still live in the Blue Mountains?

No 26.20%

Yes 73.80%
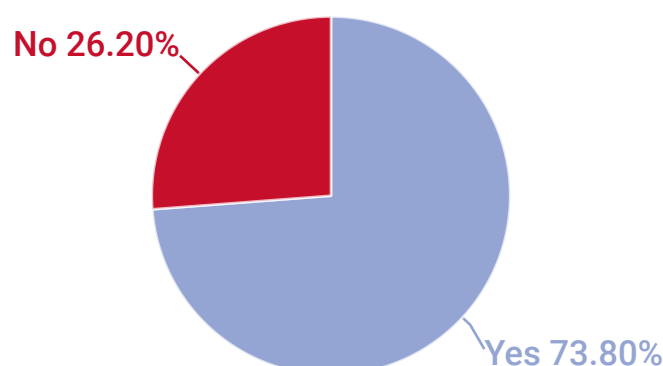
Figure 14 - Proportion of 19-24 year olds remaining in the Blue Mountains

Reasons young people stay in the Blue Mountains

16-18	%	19-24	%
I like the Blue Mountains	7.6	Financial reasons	45.0
Financial reasons	7.6	I like the Blue Mountains	14.6
I can access education and/or employment locally	5.7	I can stay close to my support networks	10.6
I can stay close to my support networks	3.8	I have no choice	2.7
Practical reasons other than financial	1.9	I can access education and/or employment locally	2.0
I have no choice	1.9	Practical reasons other than financial	1.4

Table 9 - Reasons sampled young people stay in the Blue Mountains

Reasons young people leave the Blue Mountains

16-18	%	19-24	%
I'm moving to pursue education and/or employment opportunities	30.2	I'm moving to pursue education and/or employment opportunities	15.2
I want to experience something else	11.3	I don't like the Mountains	2.7
There's no post-school opportunity in the Mountains	9.4	It's too hard to travel	2.7
I don't like the Mountains	5.7	There aren't enough socialising opportunities	2.0
There aren't enough socialising opportunities	5.7	There's no post-school opportunity in the Mountains	1.3
It's too hard to travel	3.8	I want to experience something else	0

Table 10 - Reasons sampled young people leave the Blue Mountains

How do 16-18 year olds perceive those who are in the 19-24 year old cohort?

For many 16-18 year olds, leaving the Blue Mountains is associated with success and staying with failure. While not universal - as is evident from the adjacent quotes - this perception was dominant. The association of "failure" with staying was sometimes linked with the lack of post-school opportunities and, therefore, a perception that those who stayed have not engaged with post-school markers such as further education or secure employment. In other instances, the "failure" was as much from a perceived inability to "get out" of the Mountains and achieve "success" through leaving. The concept of being 'stuck' recurs throughout the data. It is clear these processes are more complex than just the availability of post-school pathways.

Participants were mixed as to whether or not the trajectories of older peers influenced them. A significant minority said these trajectories didn't, while others emphatically agreed that they did. For those who agreed the trajectories of the older cohort affected them, often it was to encourage them to do the opposite. In some instances, seeing the older cohort's trajectories was helpful in terms of modelling available post-school possibilities.

It's important to consider what effect being able to 'see' successful post-school pathways, both locally and through out-migration, might be in improving these perceptions.

> A lot of people have just remained in the Mountains working casually. They haven't been to uni, they haven't studied... It's a big part of my decision to move away from the Mountains. I don't want to get stuck doing the same thing for the rest of my life which is what seems to happen in the Blue Mountains

> Most have stayed. Not really [influenced me].

> They often commute to and from work and uni everyday which I'm not keen on. They live with their parents and also want to leave the Mountains, but can't likely because they can't afford it.

> Many have completed university degrees despite of the distance to Sydney, proving that the distance should not be a barrier.

> Yes [this influences me] as it looks like they've "failed" because they haven't gotten out.

> Anyone who does leave, doesn't come back. They're the ones that make it, everyone else is stuck.

What advice would a 19-24 year old give to a young person in the 16-18 year old cohort?

There were two distinctive trends in the data. The first consistent theme was those in the younger cohort should prepare to either leave the Blue Mountains or travel, with 46% of responses along this theme.

The second recurring theme was that a young person should be prepared to make their own decisions, and not succumb to pressure around which pathway is best. Within this trend, there was a recurring mention of the legitimacy of trades as an option, an emphasis on serious consideration about whether university is the right option - including mention of parental pressure - and doing independent research.

The association of staying with "failure" was also recognised by those in the 19-24 year age group, with one participant stating "Move somewhere else or try and find something out of the Mountains because it's easy to get stuck" (survey).

> Look to move and travel because there isn't much future for a young person who wants to stay in the Blue Mountains which is upsetting.

> Move away as soon as you can!

> If you are interested in a trade, I'd suggest that over a university. Make sure your degree will result in a job unless you are able to study for fun.

> Take some time away from study to reevaluate what you want to do without the pressure of school and the HSC

> Get ready to travel because there's nothing in the Mountains

Perspectives from other groups

An interesting finding in this research has been the consistency across groups on the issues of youth out-migration and the availability of post-school pathways in the Blue Mountains. Business owners, education experts and community organisers all recognised the challenges for young people, including the strong incentive to leave and equally strong disincentive to stay.

There was a sense from some educators and community organisers that leaving was a "rite of passage" for Blue Mountains young people - one education expert suggested this was particularly true for Upper Mountains young people (interview) - and that this was distinct from the accessibility of local post-school options. Business owners focused more closely on post-school opportunities in the Blue Mountains, with several owners noting that more work or work with better conditions may improve youth retention and attraction.

There was also a sense from some participants in these groups that the young people who remain do so because they have no other option. The possibility that some young people may want to stay as a choice was not a common conception.

> I don't particularly have strong feelings about it, I think it's a good thing for kids to move away. Push/pull factors - if you're pulled, that's a great thing. But if you feel you're being pushed out, that's not so good
>
> Community organiser, interview

> On one hand, there's the joy of knowing that the city is there. And for certain personality types, there's an absolute lure to that. But for others, and that's a really interesting one, when you see the rise in anxiety and you see the school refusal, and you just go... "there are a lot of vulnerable young adults" and to then say "you have to move and go to the city" is the wrong thing to do until they are far more stable.
>
> Educational expert, interview

> The guys that I employ, who are gainfully employed, are more than happy to stay up here.
>
> Business owner, hospitality, interview

The relationship between post-school pathways and youth out-migration in the Blue Mountains

Three trends can be distinguished in the data:

- Out-migration in order to access post-school pathways;
- Out-migration in order to grow and develop, or as a rite of passage;
- Out-migration as there is "no future" in the Blue Mountains.

These trends are not exclusive, and they are not simple. Reform to post-school pathways must take into account the variance of experience and motivation. Indeed, some participants suggested that they loved the Blue Mountains and are trying to find ways to access post-school pathways and stay as a choice. While post-school pathways are interrelated with youth out-migration, it is not a simple causal relationship. The risk is that any provision of a post-school opportunity in the Blue Mountains without addressing the association between out-migration and "success" would ultimately be ineffective.

> That said, most people my age want to move to a city anyway, not just because they can't do what they want to do away from the city
>
> 16-18, survey

> With a rapidly ageing population, what future for the Blue Mountains is there if young people are forced out, and are not likely to return because they cannot see the area as a place that will support and sustain them into the future, being a lively and fulfilling place to live and raise a family?
>
> Educational expert, survey

The stereotype that "successful" young people leave the Blue Mountains is dominant, and must be addressed alongside other reform

5.3 Necessities

Geography matters

While post-school options are complicated throughout the Blue Mountains, young people in the Mid and Upper Blue Mountains are disproportionately affected as travelling to Sydney for education or employment opportunities is significantly more difficult than accessing these options from the Lower Mountains. This creates an additional pressure; "for the Upper Mountains, often the only opportunity is to leave if local TAFE doesn't offer what you want to study or you want to study it at a degree level" (business owner, arts and recreation, interview). The relative disadvantage of the Upper Mountains, including in accessing non-local opportunities, was recognised across all groups, and is consistent with socio-economic indicators that show disadvantage in the Blue Mountains increases the greater the distance from Sydney (.id 2016f) and the significantly higher median weekly income in Planning Areas 3, 4 and 5 (.id 2016c).

Housing

The lack of affordable housing, both locally and in Sydney, was frequently cited as a barrier to post-school pathways, independent young adulthood, and the overall wellbeing of young people in the Blue Mountains. Community organisers in particular noted the challenges around affordable housing, with one organiser stating "Affordable housing is the biggest barrier for young people [in the Blue Mountains]" (interview). This is consistent with the finding that 45% of 19-24 year olds remain in the Blue Mountains for financial reasons. Youth homelessness was also cited as one of the major issues for both age groups.

For young people moving out of home but remaining in the Blue Mountains, rental prices increase along with proximity to Sydney (.id 2016g). Participants were not asked directly about this experience, and it is an area for further research.

Family and financial resources

While some young people feel there are good local post-school options in the Blue Mountains, the majority do not. The intersection of geography, housing affordability, transport - as described below - are significant barriers to accessing non-local post-school pathways while remaining in the Blue Mountains. This encourages out-migration as an option. However, the data suggested those who are able to leave are those with familial resources who can be supported in their initial stages of out-migration.

"

The lucky ones that have the parents who have the time and ability to [support them], they get by. The ones who don't, it's a massive uphill battle for them and probably likely to be insurmountable

Community organiser, interview

"

If someone has a wealthy enough family who can fund them to be in Sydney, it's not so hard because they can go and study in Sydney without a job. But the others have to take time off to work or do something in order to be able to afford to go to Sydney. So that's the financial dilemma

Educational expert, interview

"

We are lower-middle class and cannot afford university

16-18, survey

In many instances, it is how these factors intersect with one another and are exacerbated by the geography of the Blue Mountains that has the most significant effect on young people's post-school pathways

Transport

Young people described many transport challenges:

- The train schedule, especially the lack of trains overnight and on weekends;
- The unreliability of trains;
- The exclusion of those who do not drive or own cars;
- The extensive commute time to access education or employment;
- The lack of buses;
- The lack of information about buses;
- The lack of affordable taxis.

These challenges cannot be overstated. Transport was cited as affecting young people's socialising, the vitality of towns at night, safety, access to employment and education, and access to TVET in schools. Several participants suggested transport reform could encourage young people to consider commuting, instead of out-migration, and could support young people in accessing post-school pathways.

The data supports this, as several participants left their post-school pathway as a result of difficulties with transport and commuting.

Transport was also regarded as a safety concern, an issue particularly raised by young women in the sample.

The lack of public transport and affordable taxis are challenges for many young people. However, these issues are especially challenging for those without access to a car, which was identified as a significant barrier, especially to employment.

Difficulties with transport was also cited as one of the major barriers against accessing post-school pathways by both young people living with disabilities and disability organisations.

Transport, the accessibility of post-school pathways, and the inclusion of young people in the Blue Mountains are interconnected challenges

> Public transport is the key for us to access better opportunities by travelling to them rather than forcing others to provide us with them
>
> 19-24, survey

> I left university because the travel burnt me out. I got some jobs locally but they were low pay and I lost money on one of them. So now I'm unemployed and looking to go back to uni next year
>
> 19-24, survey

> Every job wants them to have license and car. This affects every kid - this is a massive barrier.
>
> Community organiser, interview

> Transport is especially difficult [for people living with disabilities], how are you going to get them to the destination and the transport system can be really costly.
>
> Community organiser, interview

> If they go down to go out... the train's stop at 12 o'clock and then have to either get on that train or they have to wait. Until 6 o'clock in the morning to get back again. It's just nuts.
>
> Education expert, interview

> In terms of the night life, the main issue is the train timetable, with the last train back down the mountain from Katoomba being before 11pm it honestly makes Katoomba a no go for anyone living down the mountain. Katoomba really should be a hub of activity with a bustling nightlife as it is such a beautiful town with rich history but it's a shadow of what it could be.
>
> 19-24, survey

> Better staffed trains and train stations to help with safety would be nice. As a young woman, myself and most of my friends feel very unsafe getting trains from down the mountain at night because they are so quiet, and stations are nearly never staffed.
>
> 19-24, survey

5.4 Post-School Education

University - a popular pathway

University is the preferred pathway for a majority of the sample. Accessing university immediately presents the question of commuting or out-migration as the nearest universities are Western Sydney University at Kingswood or Charles Sturt University, Bathurst.

Although Western Sydney University's Kingswood campus is the closest, the data also suggests that many young people aspire to attend universities that are further away. The reasons for this are complex; the availability of specialised courses, the resourcing of different universities, the ranking and status of metropolitan universities compared to regional universities, and the "rite-of-passage" of out-migration. Some young people in the sample were conscious that universities in Sydney are "higher ranked" (19-24, survey), with education experts describing. difficulty in "trying to sell Western Sydney but they just want to go to Sydney Uni" (interview). Education experts and and some young people expressed concern as to the viability of a local university as their students "gravitate to Sydney" (education expert, interview).

The dominance of university as a pathway

A consistent finding from young people was that university was promoted as the premier post-school pathway, and other options were not canvassed extensively or at all. A frequent desire was that more information about non-university pathways be provided in schools.

Several participants mentioned they felt "really pressured" (19-24, survey) to go university instead of TAFE or the workforce, and that this is not necessarily a desirable pathway for everyone. One of the most consistent themes when 19-24 year olds were asked to give advice to the younger Blue Mountains cohort was to take time and consider what pathway, and to resist being pressured by anyone else.

This view was echoed by community organisers, educators and business owners.

"

I feel as though a lot of considerations that go to this aspect assume that everyone who graduates high school or even doesn't graduate wants to and should attend uni. It's true that they should be given as much of an opportunity to as possible but the choice to join a trade, become a parent, or work in hospitality or retail industries should be seen as a legitimate and valuable choice.

19-24, survey

TVET and links to industry is a valued option

While university is the preferred option for most young people, TVET and strong links to local industry remains a priority for educators and community organisations. This is valued especially for those unlikely to consider university as a pathway.

The lack of locally available courses in popular trades - including construction, carpentry, plumbing, electrician courses - was a consistent concern.

"

My number one priority would be to have constant links and access to industry and vocational settings, it's what they need.

Education expert, interview

TAFE

The most consistent finding in educational data was the request for a construction course at Wentworth Falls TAFE. This was mentioned by educational experts, community organisers, business owners and young people themselves. Providing a local construction course was regarded as critical in improving local options, especially for young men. Educational experts and community organisers consistently suggested that the resources required - motivational and organisational - to travel to Western Sydney or Ultimo TAFEs to undertake a course were often "absolutely impossible" (educational expert, interview) or "just too hard" (educational expert, interview) for many Blue Mountains young people, especially those without extensive resources. This finding was supported by young people.

The significant reduction of TAFE's resources and funding was noted and experienced across every group engaged with in this research. Many participants suggested that TAFE had played a positive role in post-school options.

> Students need to travel to Quakers Hill to do a TVET Construction course. This takes a lot of time out of their school day and study time
>
> Education expert, interview

> It's not so much a financial issue as there's financial help with travel for the disengaged, but the effort and motivation is takes to get there is significant
>
> Community organiser, interview

Perspectives on post-school pathways: educational experts

The need for mental health support for young people is increasing and significant
As one education expert stated, "If you speak to any principal in the Blue Mountains, the rising tide of mental health issues among young people is huge" (interview). This was consistently supported by both educators and community organisers, and the need for additional resources and services was expressed.

The entire family needs to be included and supported when planning for post-school transitions.
One educator noted, "What I have found, now that I've started giving parents and kids everything that I get, it's really been eaten up" (interview). Whole-of-family support and involvement has been identified as a significant recommendation.

Preparing young people for post-school pathways needs to begin early, in late primary or early high school.
This recommendation did not necessarily indicate a need for streamlined and vocationally focused education, but building confidence and familiarity with a variety of institutions from an early age. As one educator stated, "[We're] focusing on late primary school, early high school. Getting people as well as they can be, or having learnt a lot about them so they're well-resourced for that age. So people don't fall off the plank once they leave" (interview).

5.5 Employment

Some young people felt there were good local opportunities - especially "plenty of part time work available in hospitality or retail" (19-24, survey) - and that the commuting distance to work was manageable. Some young people in the sample had not experienced any difficulty finding employment. The vast majority, however, viewed local employment opportunities as very limited. This quote represents a large proportion of the data; [Work options are] terrible. It's either hospitality or retail and if you're in neither, you're unemployed or have moved away from the Mountains" (19-24).

For most participants, the possibility of a career or full-time work in the Blue Mountains was unlikely, with the "sense of any future of work is not good" (education expert, interview). Much of the data suggested, that young people felt staying in the Mountains and building a career or getting a full-time job through commuting was a more difficult pathway than leaving the Blue Mountains entirely. The majority of employers agreed employment options were limited, and some identified a lack of secure employment or careers as a barrier to staying.

> "
> I believe if you stay here for you're entire life you will never have a sturdy career unless moving away and coming back
>
> 16-18, survey

> "
> I tried for multiple years to get a full time job in the Blue Mountains, but I eventually had to go to the city to find full time employment.
>
> 19-24, survey

> "
> It's hard up here. There's hospitality and retail - not much industry unless they go to uni and move on from that. I'm not sure where the kids are getting jobs if they're not going to uni.
>
> Business owner, fitness, survey

Industries for young people in the Blue Mountains

The three major industries of employment for 16-24 year olds in the Blue Mountains are hospitality, retail and construction (ABS 2016f). The dominance of hospitality and tourism as local employment pathways for young people was a commonly cited concern. Working in hospitality and tourism was sometimes described as a good opportunity for part-time or gap year work, but the data more commonly suggested that young people don't view these jobs as offering secure employment or career progression. Outdoor recreation and the trades were identified as more secure industries of employment for young people.

Considering tourism is a major industry in the Blue Mountains, young people's perception of tourism and hospitality is worthy of further research. The data suggested the work conditions often associated with hospitality and tourism, see overpage, contributed to the lack of interest from local young people in pursuing careers within these industries.

> "
> There aren't many employment opportunities in the area other than hospitality which is normally underpaid for young people
>
> Community organiser, interview

> "
> There are limited options for young people (primarily only hospitality positions)
>
> 19-24, survey

> "
> We took a stance - if we're going to make a business work, it's on the backs of good staff. And if you want good staff, you have to treat them well....We provide superior customer service - you need to make sure your staff want to be there.
>
> Business owner, retail, survey

What is it like employing young people?

Experiences of employing young people were varied, although several business owners pointed out that variation in staff was an aspect across age groups.

For many business owners, the experience has been positive; as one employer states ""These young people are our best workers" (business owner, survey). Positive experiences were particularly evident in businesses that engaged apprentices or hired staff after work experience or holiday work. Some business owners mentioned that it can be difficult and challenging, but "very rewarding if you can get the right people" (survey).

Other business owners mentioned having difficulty employing young people, especially with regard to required skills. Several business owners suggested there are gaps between what employers are looking for in staff and how young people are prepared for the workforce. The two main areas were communication skills, including some digital literacy, and workplace behaviour. As one employer stated, "I found that they were not prepared for work. The school hadn't taught them about what was expected, how to behave as an employee in a work environment" (business owner, professional, interview).

What skills do business owners want to see?

'Affective abilities' (Baker and O'Brien 2019), including:

- A willingness to learn;
- Work ethic;
- Good presentation skills;
- An ability to work as a team.

As one employer stated, "good people skills are essential and organisational skills. If you have those skills, everything else can be taught" (employer, retail, survey). Another concurred, "There's no need for prior learning, we're more interested in their personalities" (tourism, interview).

Another recurring theme in the data was a preference for work-ready staff, who demonstrated the affective abilities described above, as opposed to job-ready staff who may have relevant experience or some qualification. Many employers cited work-readiness as a concern in hiring young people, as opposed to experience.

> If a young person comes to me, and says they completed a Certificate III in retail - it means nothing, unless they've earnt that working in a shop or Maccas, whatever. The best way to learn is on the job - those skills are valuable
>
> Employer, retail, interview

What is it like working as a young person in the Blue Mountains?

Several young people described positive experiences in employment. Across all groups, Scenic World and MacDonalds were both described as exemplary employers in areas such as training, employment conditions, and the provision of opportunities. Undoubtedly, there are local businesses who are investing extensively in staff training, retention, pay award wages and focus on providing appropriate workplace conditions.

However, many young people, especially those in the 19-24 age cohort, described negative experiences in the workplace, most commonly in hospitality or tourism. The scarcity of secure employment and the dominance of casual employment was a recurring concern. Poor work conditions, including below award wages, below minimum wages, cash-in-hand, and simply not being paid, were not uncommon. This finding was confirmed by educational experts and community organisers, as well as some business owners who suggested young people needed to be educated about their work rights in order to prevent exploitation. One participant stated "they would never pay us properly, just stop paying us. I'm still owed, I don't know, maybe 300 bucks. Whatever, that's fine" (19-24, interview). Another stated, "My highest pay rate would have been $10 an hour - even at 17" (19-24, interview). It is reasonable to assume these conditions and rates of pay have a negative impact on the view of local post-school pathways, as well on the wellbeing of young people.

Young people and work experience

Gaining work experience can be a challenge for young people and was identified as an important goal by business owners, educators, and community organisers. All groups were invested in providing work experience and mentoring for young people, but stated that barriers- including time, resources, and insurance - were significant. Work experience, in schools in particular, was regarded as an opportunity for young people to gain experience and make more informed post-school pathway decisions.

Work experience

Some businesses were already facilitating regular work experience students, mostly through their own initiative or contact from community organisations. As one business owner stated, "work experience allows you to fix that [lack of experience]. I'm committed, because I've watched them struggle" (beauty, interview). A community organiser identified the need for work experience opportunities as 'critical' but was also aware of the challenges "There is no incentive to the employer, they're basically just doing us a favour. And they have to manage their insurance" (interview).

Recruitment

Recruitment was identified as one of the major challenges, and business owners described employing a range of strategies to recruit. It is notable that very few business owners mentioned engaging recruitment agencies. Several businesses recruited through connections and this has been successful; "The ones we knew from the community, knew the background, they've done really well. That's just occurred to me - that's been the difference" (construction, interview). This recruitment strategy was by also mentioned by young people, who suggested networks are essential to accessing opportunities. This comment is representative of many young people's perspectives: "very limited jobs available advertised, unless you knew somebody. Even hospitality, you have to be within the community" (19-24, survey). As one community organiser commented; "Who you know is overwhelming in the Mountains" (interview) with another stating;; "This is a real issue for young people" (interview). Facilitating more accessible connections in recruitment could be beneficial for both business owners and young people.

"
Something that would really help would be help accessing young people - it's one of the banes of our existence.

Business owner, hospitality, interview

Mentoring

Most businesses in the sample were very favourably disposed to mentoring, and several participants were already doing so through formal and informal processes. Most organisations engaging in mentoring described the process as very rewarding and with good outcomes, but "a huge amount of work" (business owner, arts and recreation, interview). There were consistent requests for more business and "more community mentoring programs and community projects that can incorporate skills building opportunities for youth" (community organiser, survey)

Training

There was significant variance in the data from employers as to their preferred training processes. In some industries, external training is non-negotiable. Mentoring and work experience can play a significant role here. Overall, business owners in these areas did not express strong opinions about the vocational education training provided.

In other industries, especially hospitality and retail, business owners expressed a strong preference to train staff themselves and often expressed a concern that vocational courses - for example, barista courses at TAFE - were not as current as employers desired. However, there was also a contradiction in this data as some hospitality business owners also stated that they experienced difficulty in sourcing local qualified staff, especially cooks and chefs. One business owner stated that they wouldn't have a business without international staff (hospitality, interview).

"
Business is about problem-solving. What's our goal? There's no reliable stream of qualified, competent staff - for front and back of house. So how are we going to solve that? We're spending a fortune on recruitment - so we're just going to have to train them

Business owner, hospitality, interview

5.6 Belonging in the Blue Mountains

A key finding of this research is that post-school pathways, such as education and employment, are intrinsically interconnected with experiences and perceptions of belonging or exclusion. Many young people describe the Blue Mountains as not a place 'for' young people, which is interrelated with both post-school pathways and out-migration, and an under-explored aspect of the post-school experience of young people in the Blue Mountains.

Young people describe a range of feelings about the Blue Mountains

1 Many young people feel deeply attached to the Blue Mountains and describe a quality or style of life that they enjoy. Participants describe liking and "loving" the peacefulness, 'quirkiness' or 'kookiness', the community and the environment/bush in the Blue Mountains. They also describe enjoying the proximity to friends and family.

> I love living in such a beautiful place and I love the people and my friends
>
> 19-24, survey

2 Of the young people that describe deep attachment to the Blue Mountains, some are developing local post-school pathways, such as local employment, apprenticeships or starting families. Others remain attached to the Blue Mountains but leave for non-local opportunities. Of this group, some intend to return to the Blue Mountains in the long-term.

> I do love it here, but I need to leave out of necessity. I will probably return after my course is finished.
>
> 19-24, survey

3 The majority of participants, however, describe the Blue Mountains as a place that is not 'for' young people. Participants describe this as either a result of a lack of opportunity, a feeling of exclusion from the community, or both. The following quotes are indicative of extensive data from young people.

> I feel as though young people are despised by the local community. I want to get out of here as soon as possible
>
> 16-18, survey

> The Mountains is a pretty isolating place for someone young.
>
> 16-18, survey

> The Mountains are for tourists, old retirees. Not families & young adults.
>
> 19-24, survey

> You grow up there and you grow old there
>
> 19-24, interview

Any reform to post-school pathways must be developed alongside initiatives designed to include young people in the community

Challenging the association of 'success' with out-migration

As discussed, a recurring theme throughout the data was that young people in the Blue Mountains are 'stuck' and that staying was 'failure'. These stereotypes, perpetuated across all groups, have significant implications for young people's sense of belonging and experiences of post-school pathways. These discourses do not represent the diversity of experience of participants, many of whom have developed successful post-school pathways while remaining or returning to the Blue Mountains.

Social opportunities as a key intervention

Education, employment, financial resources, transport and housing all intersect with a sense of feeling 'in place' and belonging. Both data in the Blue Mountains literature (BMCC 2016a) and the data collected for this report suggest that a sense of belonging is limited for young people in the Blue Mountains.

The data also suggests that increased social opportunities for young people in the Blue Mountains is a key intervention. Participants frequently described difficulty in meeting other people their age, need for more diverse and accessible nightlife, especially outside of Katoomba, socialising outside of pubs and bars, and the limitations of transport. Indeed, the consistency with which this was requested and suggested by young people was surprising. It was also supported by data from all other groups. Improving social opportunities for young people was described as dependent on five intersecting factors:

- Improving transport;
- Facilitation of youth-oriented spaces;
- Social and recreational activities that were directed exclusively at under-24s;
- Regular and ongoing social and recreational opportunities, rather than one-off programs over 6-10 weeks;
- More inclusive and diverse spaces.

> There needs to be a better social life for those of us who are out of school and staying in the Mountains. Often I will come back and find myself lost as to what to do because the social areas mostly cater to middle aged + people.
>
> 19-24, survey

> I think school leavers would be more likely to study and be okay to travel for work if they were able to come home and have options for having fun and more places to exercise and socialise
>
> 19-24, survey

> I also think that the lack of anything to do in the Mountains at night (activities, social spaces, entertainment, etc) seriously limits young adults in the Blue Mountains
>
> 19-24, survey

An Inclusive Blue Mountains

Finally, there was significant data suggesting that the Blue Mountains is not always experienced as an inclusive place to live, a characteristic sometimes described as a "small-mindedness" (19-24, interview). One participant mentioned, "After the whole same sex marriage debate, I feel unwelcome in the community" (19-24, survey), while another stated post-school pathway challenges "are exacerbated for young people from sexual / cultural / religious minorities" (19-24, survey). Again, a particularly strong trend in the data described the difficulty in accessing post-school pathways and feeling part of the community for young people living with disability.

> None of [the options] are disability friendly
>
> 16-18, survey

5.8 Identified strengths of the Blue Mountains

Participants consistently mentioned the following four strengths of the Blue Mountains and suggested that all initiatives should draw on and build on these strengths.

The environment

The unique environment of the Blue Mountains was the most commonly referenced strength of the Blue Mountains. Several participants suggested building from the environment as a strength, and developing the Blue Mountains as a "world leader" in sustainability. The success of outdoor recreation as an industry is consistent with 'the bush' as a strength.

Creativity and the arts

Participants often felt that the Blue Mountains was a place where many creatives lived, and this was a resource that could be more extensively drawn upon. The arts was often identified as a strong point of the community and a means of engaging young people. With that said, some participants mentioned the arts are not necessarily a secure form of employment

Tourism

Participants also suggested that the tourism industry in the Blue Mountains could be built from, especially in developing full-time or secure employment for young people, as well as attracting young people from elsewhere. As one business owner stated, as the example of the International Hotel Management School shows, "there's no reason why the Mountains can't become a centre in excellence in hospitality" (business owner, hospitality, interview)

Lifestyle

There were many aspects of living in the Blue Mountains that were described by participants as attractive. These included 'peacefulness', "quirkiness", and connection to nature.

While participants suggested some difficulties with the closeness of the Blue Moutnains community, this was also described as a strength.

6.0 Discussion

Possible options to improve post-school pathways for Blue Mountains young people

One research aim was to engage with participants about what changes they'd like to see in the Blue Mountains as an effort to improve the attractiveness as a place to live for young people.

What options would encourage young people to stay?

As can be seen in Figure 15, for 16-18 year olds, the three answers are: 'a university campus', 'more full-time work' and 'more things to do for fun/recreation'. These priorities shift in the older age range, with 'more full-time work' the top answer, followed by 'more things to do for fun/recreation', and 'a university campus'. For both groups, these three options are closely ranked.

What would improve post-school options generally?

Interestingly, the coded data from an open-ended question on improving post-school pathways in the Blue Mountains provided a slightly different picture, see Figure 16. As opposed to asking what would increase the likelihood of the respondent staying, as in Figure 15, the second question asked what would improve post-school pathways generally and did not provide options.

In Figure 15, the preference for university among 16-18 year olds is clear, with 19-24 year olds rating university as a significantly lower priority than work and recreation opportunities. The awareness of transport as a priority (an option not included in the earlier question) also increases dramatically in the 19-24 year age group.

This data suggests that, while there is general agreement about what options would improve post-school pathways in the Blue Mountains, the prioritisation of different options is specific to the age group and the dominant needs of each age group. These nuances are important in developing policy and initiatives.

Another significant finding from this data is the frequent suggestion that 'more information or support' would improve post-school pathways for Blue Mountains young people.

Which of the following options would increase the likelihood of the participant remaining in the Blue Mountains? (Participants could pick more than one option)

16-18
19-24
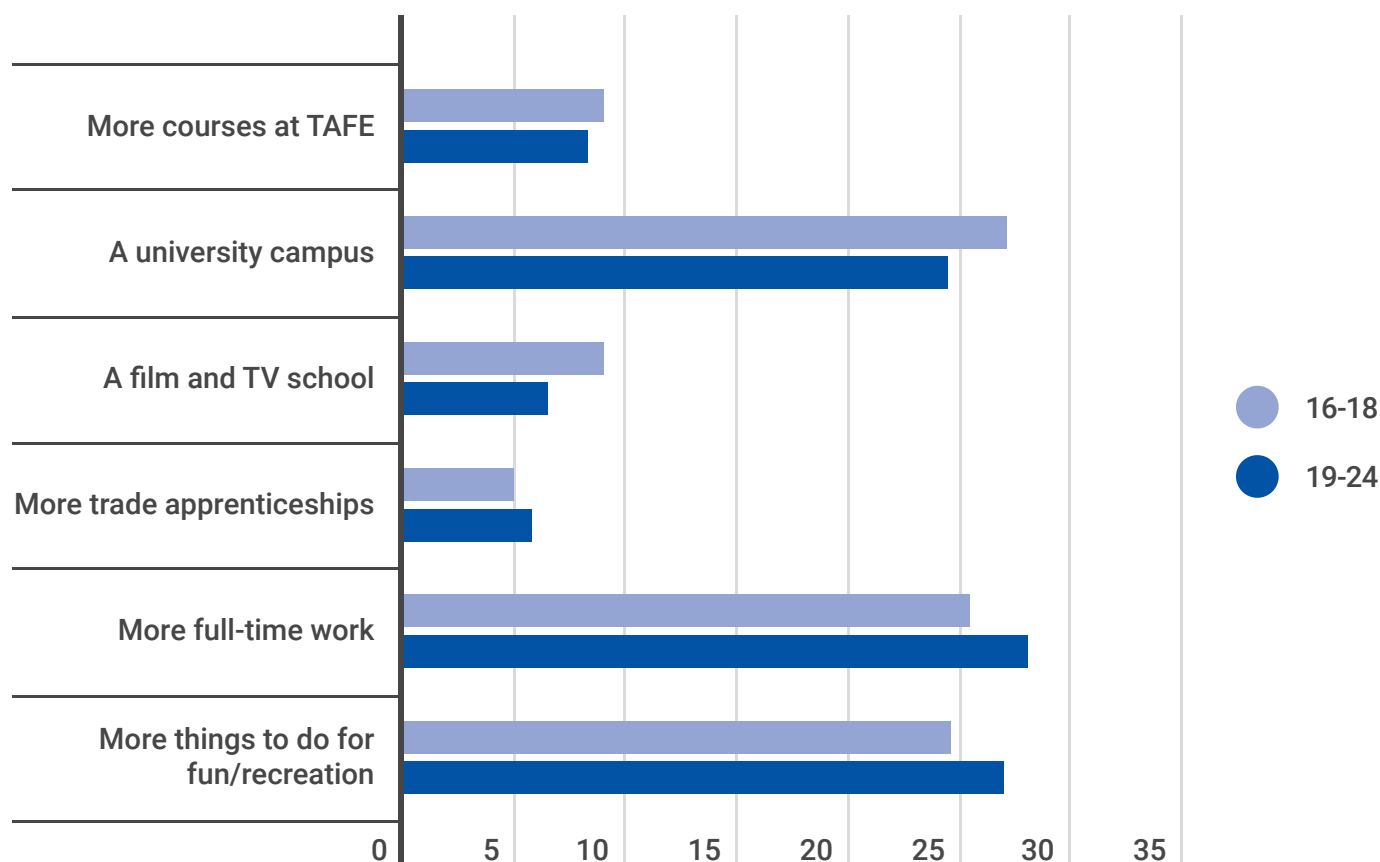
Figure 15 - Options that would encourage sampled young people to stay in the Blue Mountains

What do you think would improve post-school options for Blue Mountains young people?

Category	16-18	19-24
A university campus	25.0	16.8
More options at TAFE	8.8	6.6
More work opportunities	22.1	23.0
More fun/recreation opportunities	14.7	24.5
Improved transport	4.4	15.8
More affordable housing	4.4	1.5
More support and information	4.4	7.7
Other	10.3	2.6
Not sure	4.4	0.5
Nothing	1.5	1.0

16-18
19-24

Figure 16 - Young people's perspective on potential options for reform

Option: A university campus

Attracting a university campus in the Blue Mountains was considered as the first priority by those aged 16-18 in improving post-school pathways in the Blue Mountains. It was less important to the 19-24 year old cohort, who ranked it below employment and social opportunities. In other target groups, educators were - with one exception - positive about a university cam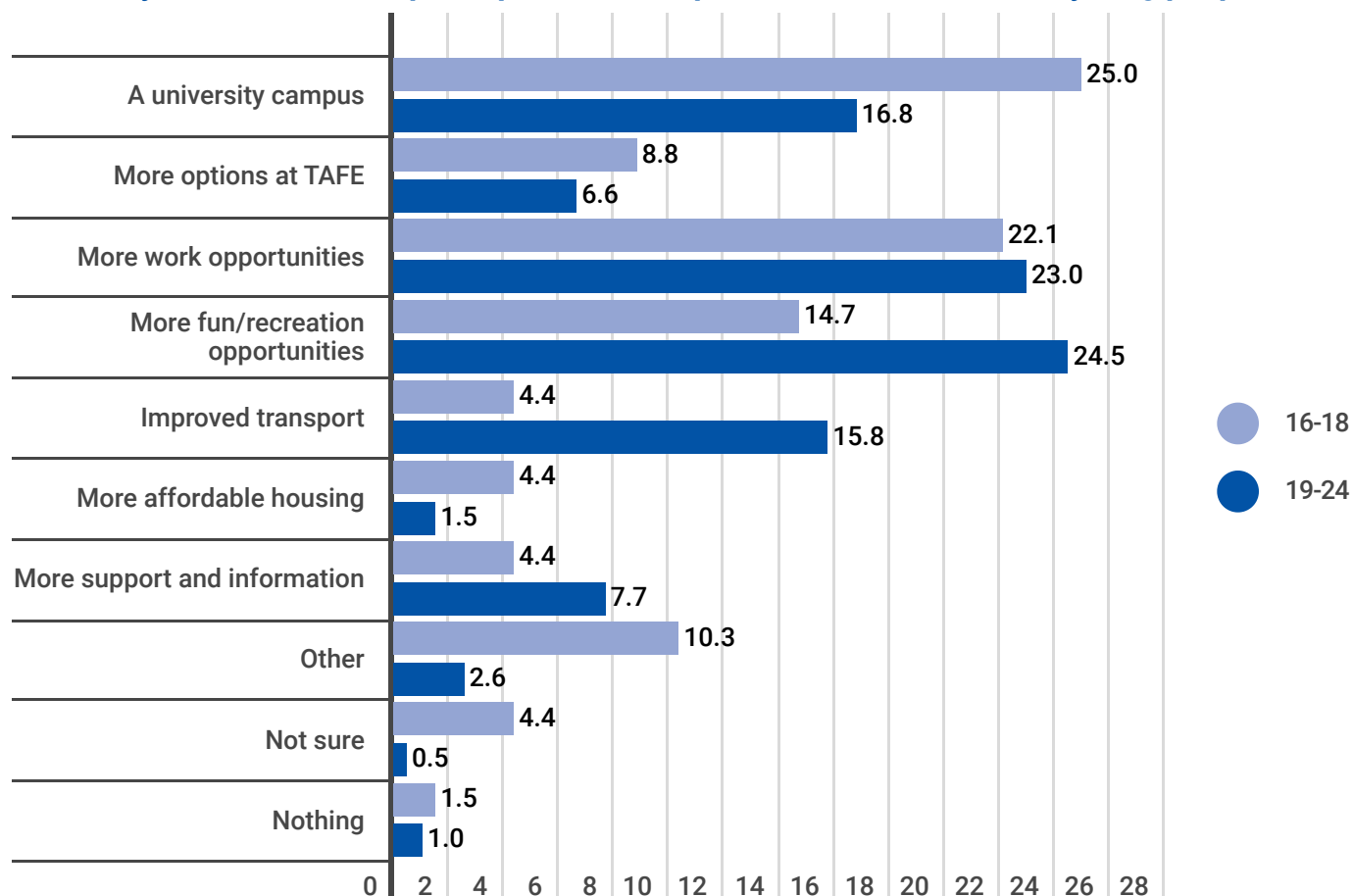pus in the Blue Mountains, describing it as an option that "would totally shift the community" (interview). Business owners and community organisers were more mixed; some viewed it as "the wisest move" (community organiser, interview) but others suggested "other things would be better than a university" (community organiser), a sentiment that was supported by several young people in the 19-24 age range. A university campus was the most frequently suggested method to attract young people from elsewhere.

Is the Blue Mountains a feasible location for a university campus?

The feasibility of a university campus in the Blue Mountains is an area for further research and community consultation. The Mid and Upper Mountains, comprising of Planning Areas 1, 2, 3 and 4 has a larger population than other LGAs that have a university campus in New South Wales such as Lismore, Bathurst, Armidale and Wagga Wagga (.id 2018a; 2018b; 2018c; 2018d; 2018e). For Armidale, Bathurst and Wagga Wagga, the presence of a local university campus may be a significant factor in the net in-migration at age 18-24. However, it is also worthy of note that Wagga Wagga and Armidale lost more young people aged 25-34 than they gained in the 18-24 age range in 2016 and the local Univeristy campus in Lismore did not create net migration growth in either the 18-24 or 25-34 age range (.id 2016a, 2016h, 2016i, 2016j, 2016k). Wollongong and Newcastle were not considered in this comparison due to their significantly larger populations.
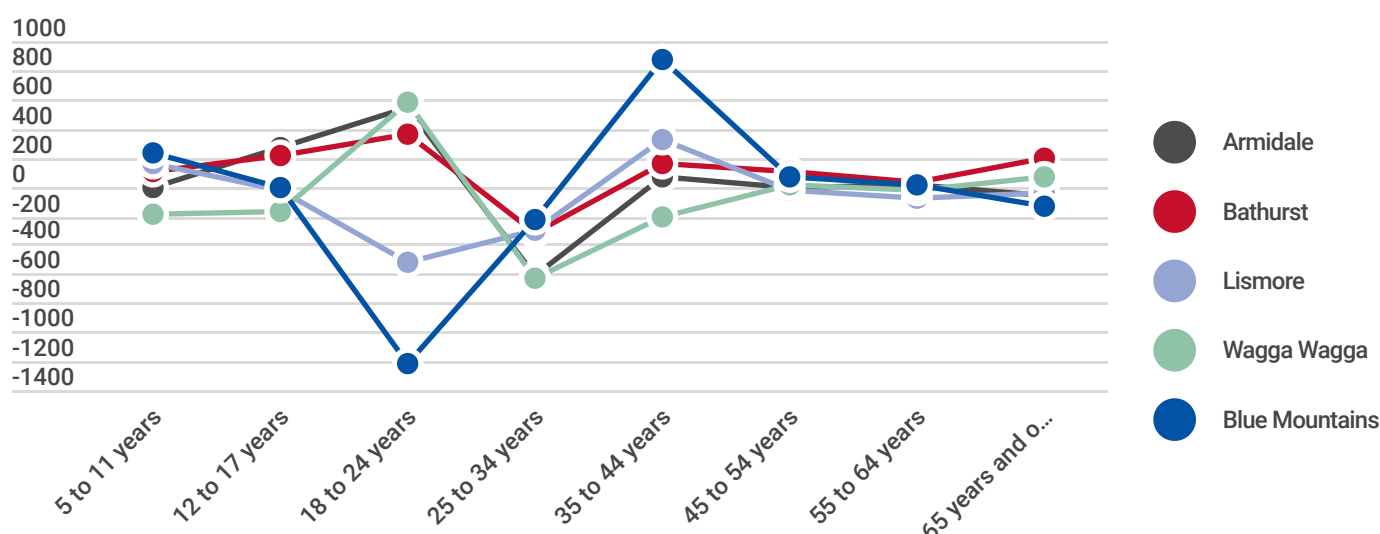

Figure 17 - Migration trends by age for regional LGAs with a university campus (.id 2016a, 2016h, 2016i, 2016j, 2016k)

University and the culture of out-migration

Some participants noted that moving for university was perceived as a rite-of-passage and that a local campus would not alter this. As noted earlier, several educators cited the difficulty in promoting Western Sydney University and Charles Sturt University, despite their relative closeness to the Blue Mountains. Some young people questioned the feasibility of a local campus considering these trends.

University as one aspect of integrated reform

Some participants stated that a university campus would need to be part of integrated reform in employment and social opportunities. As one participant stated, "for young people who are going to a local uni - is that going to help them get a local job? Maybe it's better they leave earlier" (employer, professional, interview). Others suggested "if I was a uni student and there was a campus here, there'd have to be a social element" (employer, recreation, interview). While there is a commonly held assumption that a university would encourage a social environment, some young people disagreed; "when you build the social community, then later you can think about a university' (19-24, interview). Addressing concerns around employment and belonging must be part of reform.

Key suggestion: A campus in keeping with the Blue Mountains

Participants strongly agreed that, if chosen as a priority, a university campus should draw on Blue Mountains' strengths. The most common suggestion was a campus that specialised in an interdisciplinary institute of the environment and the arts, a combination that "draws on that we have up here" (community organiser, interview). One participant suggested tourism could also be offered as part of this institute. Generally, participants felt that a specialised institution was a preferable approach, as "a taste tester is too tokenistic" (education expert, interview). Some also cited the success of the Big Fix's Pluriversity and suggested non-formal education as an alternative consistent with the strengths of the Blue Mountains, like permaculture courses.

Key suggestion: Further community consultation

Further community consultation is necessary, as evidenced by the broad range of responses to a university campus as an option.

Option for further investigation: Torrens University and Blue Mountains International Hotel Management School

It is worthy of note that the Blue Mountains does have a university campus - the Blue Mountains International Hotel Management School, in Leura (BMIHMS). BMIHMS was founded in 1991, and amalgamated with Torrens University, a private university, in 2016 (Arbon Publishing 2016).The Blue Mountains is the only non-metropolitan centre campus in Australia. Approximately 80% of students at BMIHMS are international students, and as a private university, courses are marketed as 'premier' courses and priced accordingly. The price of courses would not be financially accessible for most Blue Mountains residents and their families, although there are Commonwealth Supported Places (CSP) and scholarships available.

BMIHMS works within several of the areas identified as opportunities in this research:

- Situated within an area identified as a Blue Mountain' strength, tourism;
- Attracts young people to the area;
- Links with local businesses, as BMIHMS students are required to complete two placements throughout their degree.

It's noteworthy that the BMIHMS was not mentioned by either cohort of young people as a possible option post-school, nor educators or community organisers. Only a small number of business owners mentioned BMIHMS, although in one instance BMIHMS was cited as a possible starting point for the Blue Mountains as a centre of excellence for hospitality. The lack of additional data to this suggests that BMIHMS is not seen as a post-school option by local young people. Considering the dominance of hospitality and tourism as industries of employment, the identified strength of the Blue Mountains including tourism, and the need for qualified staff, this disconnect is an interesting one to pursue in future research and community consultation.

Option: Fun and recreational opportunities

For young people, the provision of youth-friendly and youth-specific activities was extremely significant. Indeed, for the 19-24 year old category, it was the second most likely option to encourage them to stay (after improved employment opportunities) and the most commonly cited response as to what would improve Blue Mountains post-school pathways. Other groups were divided; some felt that Katoomba "has lots of stuff' (education expert) and some "brilliant stuff going on" (community organiser, interview), and that Springwood increasingly did also. These responses were in the minority, however, with many other participants in these groups expressing familiar themes; there is "not really much to do" (business owner, interview), and "there's nothing to do at night. They'll walk up and down Katoomba Street, looking for something" (education expert, interview). Both cohorts of young people requested more accessible and diverse nightlife opportunities. Participants from all groups expressed concerns about safety for young people trying to socialise and relying on transport. Safety concerns were expressed particularly strongly by young women in both the 16-18 and 19-24 age range.

> **"**
> I have looked and looked, especially when I lived up here. I really, really, really tried, because I was really struggling to meet other young people.
>
> 19-24, interview

> **"**
> I moved away from the Mountains about 6 months ago as university was too far away and I was struggling to meet other people my age
>
> 19-24, survey

> **"**
> Often I will come back and find myself lost as to what to do because the social areas mostly cater to middle aged + people.
>
> 19-24, survey

Key suggestion: social opportunities for young people

A desire for socialising opportunities that are focused on and tailored to young people was an overwhelming request.. This priority cannot be separated from the need to improve transport and provide spaces for young people.

The requested model for social opportunities included several factors:

- Improving transport
- Facilitation of youth-oriented spaces
- Social and recreational activities that were directed exclusively at under-24s
- Social and recreational opportunities that were regular and ongoing, rather than one-off programs that run for 6-10 weeks.

Types of socialising options

Undoubtedly, this is an area for further research. Some initial suggestions included a bowling alley, escape rooms, a music and/or art venues or studios, exercise classes, gaming events, and youth-run creative hubs. The crucial point was that these activities should be in a safe space, be limited to those under 24, and be ongoing, regular occurrences, rather than a six week or ten week program. Improving the variety and accessibility of nightlife was also a regular request. Young people considered sports as available, but not easy to access with transport challenges.

> **"**
> I want a gay bar, more youth culture/ any more diverse culture and opportunity.
>
> 16-18, survey

Option: more full-time work

Local business owners named 'more full-time work' as the most important priority in improving post-school pathways for Blue Mountains young people. More full-time employment was also regarded as important by community organisers and educators. Young people, especially in the 19-24 year range, emphasised that it was not only the provision of more jobs, but also the provision of better and more secure employment that was desired.

Key suggestion: Organisational Support

Several business owners indicated real interest in employing young people, but had experienced difficulties in doing so. A recurring suggestion was for an organisation or an individual in an organisation that could support businesses, particularly in the following ways:

- **Recruitment:** This was a recurring request; several businesses found recruiting young people challenging and time-consuming, and suggested they'd be more likely to do so if there was an organisation that could facilitate the process. A contact person at every school was also suggested as an initiative.

- **Human resources support:** One employer described their difficulties in negotiating the complexity of converting part-time staff to full-time staff, eventuating in the need to hire a HR consultant. They suggested a successful intervention might be an organisation "offering support and help getting contracts in place" (business owner, hospitality, interview). This employer suggested it would "potentially retain youth if they had full-time work".

- **Educating young people about workers' rights:** This request from some employers was surprising. As part of work readiness, some employers were concerned as young people "are poorly educated on their workplace rights and responsibilities. They are often exploited" (business owner, arts and recreation, interview). Another suggested it would be a good measure so young people could recognise a good employment situation; "something that would help young staff understand their rights - so they know what's good and what's not" (business owner, retail, interview). Several employers suggested an organisation that included an education program on workers' rights would be beneficial.

Shared mentoring and work experience

Several employees and community organisers suggested a shared mentoring and/ or work experience program. This initiative was suggested across the three groups of employer, community organisers and education experts, and included a model of sharing a mentee across organisations and suggestions of co-funding or incentivisation for businesses.

Innovation hub

Some participants also suggested an 'innovation hub' as a way to " inspire young people" (community organiser, interview) and connect professionals and creatives in the Blue Mountains with young people. As this research was conducted, Toolo announced a 'Digital Ecologies Lab' (Blue Mountains Gazette 2019a), which may offer that opportunity.

Option: more courses at TAFE

The option 'more courses at TAFE' provoked more mixed responses than other options. While less than 10% of either group of young people identified TAFE as a priority, the qualitative data suggested that it was a crucial intervention for those interested in non-university pathways, especially for those interested in trades such as construction and carpentry. This was consistently backed up by those in high school education and some community organisers. Data from business owners were mixed; some felt updated courses at TAFE is a priority, while others preferred to train staff themselves.

Key suggestion: Greater engagement with schools

Across all groups, participants suggested that young people would benefit from more promotion and discussion of TAFE as a post-school pathway. There was significant data to suggest several high schools in the Blue Mountains were doing this well, but data from both cohorts of young people suggested that university remained the priority as a post-school pathway and that they would have benefitted from more discussion of TAFE as an option.

> "
>
> I think a huge part is letting TAFE have talks with the students. At my high school, you finished high school and you go to uni - that's how you be successful. I was lucky, because I always knew there were options to bridge the gap. But I had friends who ended up sick from worry about getting into uni
>
> Business owner, beauty, interview

Key suggestion: Construction course at Wentworth Falls TAFE

Young people suggested a range of courses they'd like to be offered at Wentworth Falls TAFE. The most common suggestions were construction, carpentry, electrical, plumbing. Educators, business owners in the construction industry, and community organisers also strongly suggested a construction course would be extremely beneficial, especially in addressing the needs of young people, especially young men, in high school who do not have the resources to coordinate travel, transport and attendance to where courses are currently running in Western Sydney, often requiring one or more train changes. Educators also suggested this would assist in offering Construction as a TVET course. Construction is also consistent as one of the major industries of employment in the Blue Mountains, and the third highest industry of employment for young people.

Demand versus supply

One employer stated that it is important young people know to inform TAFE they're interested; "Half the time, they look up the course, see it's not run locally and give up, but it's good to let them know - you can put in a request. "Hey - I'd be interested in doing that here"' (employer, beauty, interview). This was a suggestion supported by the data - a minimum number for a course was 12 - and offers a possible intervention.

Option: Film and TV school

Business owners, educators and - to a lesser extent - community organisers were very positive about the possibility of a film and TV school, and identified it as building from the strengths of the Blue Mountains, especially the significant population of creative workers. 9.02% of 16-18 year olds and 6.50% of 19-24 year olds suggested that it would increase the likelihood of them remaining in the Blue Mountains, but there was very little qualitative data from these groups outside of these responses.

> Think about what the Blue Mountains has - (supposedly) good NBN, creative people, the recognition on a state and national level - it's a strong prospect - and I'd add building a brand that not only focuses on the social and economic, but also on the wilderness
>
> Business owner, arts and recreation, interview

> Amazing. And comparable with the Blue Mountains as a geographic location. TV, radio, creative industries; a lot of those jobs can be done working from home or freelance, and we do have a lot of those sorts of people up here who figure out how to work
>
> Community organiser, interview

> If it attracts creatives, academia or high end professionals and they can create those studios, I think that would be quite positive.
>
> Education expert, interview

Option: trade apprenticeships

Business owners, educators, and community organisers agreed that more trade apprenticeships would be an improvement for young people in the Blue Mountains. However, there was a recurring concern across groups that there was a lack of industry in the Blue Mountains to support apprenticeships. Less than 5% of young people in either group identified this as a priority.

> The school-to-work and school-to-trade process is vexed.The last couple of years of school and how do get kids get out of school and trained, the engines of apprenticeships have gone. It's up to individual trades - how do you support kids to get the maturity and license to sustain over a period of years at a low income
>
> Education expert, interview

> "I don't think there are enough trade apprenticeships. There's not a lot of incentives for employers. Incentives have changed all the time (for apprentices as well)
>
> Business owner, construction, interview

Option: Information and support in post-school pathways

"More support and information" was not included as an option in questions to any group. However, this emerged from the qualitative data as significant, and formed the basis of several of the key suggestions. Young people in both cohorts identified a gap in how prepared they felt for post-school options; asking for "more insight into job opportunities and potential opportunities outside of the Mountains" (16-18, survey), an "information centre for options after school in the Mountains" (16-18, survey), and several 19-24 year olds requested "more help through school in terms of careers advice" (19-24, survey).

Key suggestion: Picturing yourself in a post-school pathway

Educators mentioned the need for young people to be able to "picture themselves in a space" (interview) in order to feel comfortable accessing that pathway. It's hard to overstate how crucial this suggestion is, especially for those with limited experience of particular pathways. The need to 'see yourself' in a space is also particularly important in light of out-migration as lower population levels of young people means that young people accessing post-school pathways are less visible than in other areas.

Educators suggested the most effective means of encouraging this process is through systems of familiarisation; systematised processes of visiting post-school institutions, instituting work experience, bringing in guest speakers. It is evident from the strategies currently employed by educators, that these processes are already in place to some extent, and these could be supported further. The data suggests this is particularly important for young people living with disabilities. A community organiser stated that inviting service providers to school and "better links between school and the next option" would be a significant improvement, as many of the people the organisation works with "don't know how to move in the system" by the time they come into contact with the service, and experience disadvantage and difficulties as a result (interview).

Another suggestion was to develop an initiative where the older cohort of Blue Mountains young people who had accessed a variety of post-school pathways - locally, through commuting, and through out-migration - could present or discuss post-school pathways with the younger cohort. Such an initiative could model a variety of post-school pathways as a form of information and support for the younger cohort. As one participant stated, "If you have no role models, how are you meant to make it happen?" (19-24,

Suggestion: support and information systems

Knowledge of post-school pathways - for young people and, especially, their families - was identified as a critical gap. The widespread provision of information for young people and their families was suggested as an important intervention. One participant stated, "Maybe a program that taught parents how to deal with adolescents - supporting the adolescents in their lives" (19-24, interview). Others felt an organisation dedicated to providing post-school pathway information and support would be "hugely beneficial" (19-24, interview). The need for more information for families was identified across all groups.

7.0 Case studies

The Blue Mountains Pluriversity

The Blue Mountains Pluriversity works to expand "the range of possibilities for young people aged 16 – 24 to engage with one another and the wider community as they explore future life and career pathways" (Blue Mountains Pluriversity, n.d.). The Pluriversity was established to provide local opportunities for young people, including attracting young people from elsewhere.

A pilot program ran for 20 months, with the first stage involving a permaculture and social enterprise design course for twenty young people. The now-established Pluriversity runs a variety of programs for young people, including workshops, mentoring, work experience, events, and Youth Cafes. The Pluriversity is also associated - through the organisation 'The Big Fix' - with EDGY BM, a collaborative social enterprise for young people.

In August 2019, the Pluriversity launched their official program that also includes the opportunity to earn credentials through verified training in areas as diverse as health, community farming and citizen journalism among others.

How does this program address a 'gap'?

The Blue Mountains Pluriversity is working to address several of the gaps identified in this research:

- It is an established institution linking young people with community mentors;
- It provides accessible skill development;
- It is a youth-oriented social space for young people to connect with one another and other members of the community;
- It offers work experience opportunities;
- It is youth-led and oriented.

The Pluriversity was cited by several participants in this research as a very positive initiative. For young people interested in social enterprise, permaculture and community involvement, it is a positive option. The Blue Mountains Pluriversity has also attracted some young people from elsewhere, an important aim for the Blue Mountains.

Image: Jamie Street on Unsplash

Scenic World Shared

'Scenic World Shared' is the philanthropic initiative of Scenic World, a tourism business in Katoomba. The mission of the initiative is to "empower our community to thrive" (Scenic World Shared, 2019). To achieve this mission, Scenic World invests 3% of their profits in community and local environmental projects through partnerships. The projects that are of most relevance here are educational; the 'Scenic World Scholarship Fund and the partnership with Schools Plus.

Scenic World Scholarship Fund

Partnering with Western Sydney University, Scenic World Shared will provide a scholarship for four Blue Mountains residents from disadvantaged backgrounds over the next four years.The scholarship covers the entirety of the degree.

The scholarship is particularly for those who are interested in studying a bachelor's degree in either environmental science or tourism management, thereby building from and towards identified strengths in the Blue Mountains. The first student awarded this scholarship is currently studying for a career in sustainable tourism and plans to develop a career in this area in the Blue Mountains (Blue Mountains Gazette 2019b).

Community development and mentoring at Katoomba High School

In partnership with charity, 'Schools Plus', this project funds the following at Katoomba High School:

- A Community Liaison Officer to develop connections with local community groups, liaise with families, and support young people's wellbeing;
- A mentoring project, where Scenic World staff are trained and then matched with a student 'mentee';
- "Explore post-schooling projects to help students develop career pathways in our local community" (Scenic World Shared, 2019).

How does this program address a 'gap'?

The education programs coordinated by Scenic World Shared addresses several of the gaps identified in this research.

These include:

- The disproportionate impacts challenging post-school pathways can have on Blue Mountains young people from disadvantaged backgrounds;
- The need for supported connections between schools and the wider community;
- Building from Blue Mountains strengths, such as tourism and environment;
- The positive role and urgent need for mentoring in the Blue Mountains.

The mentoring program, in particular, was mentioned by several participants as a positive initiative.
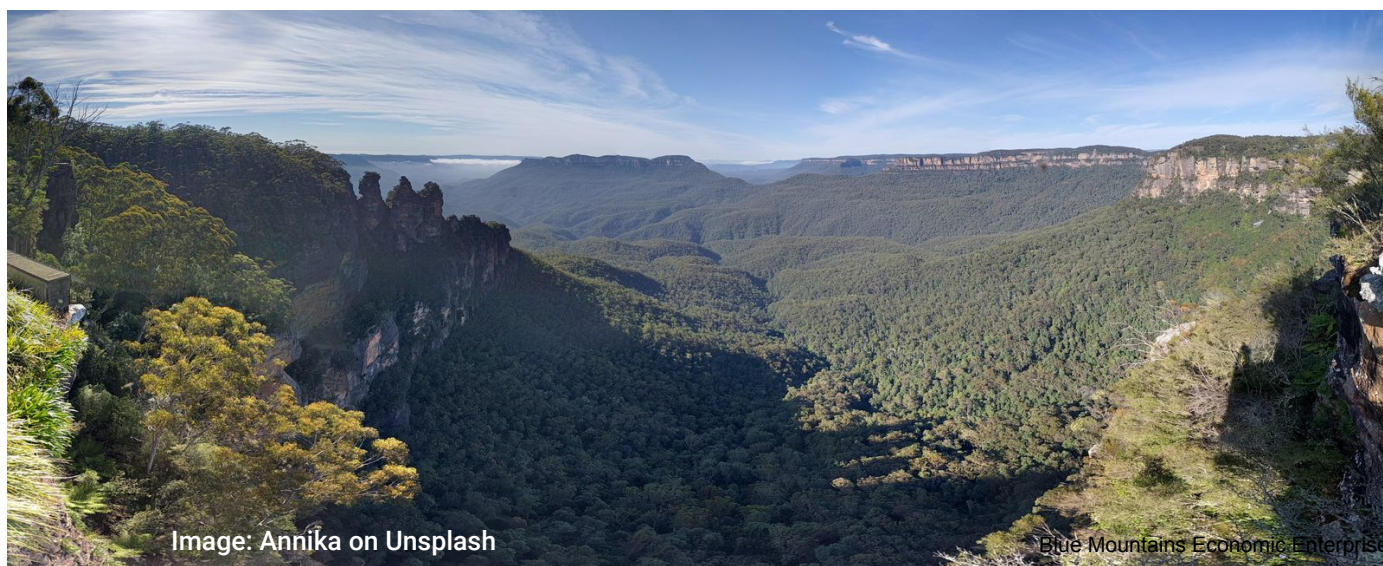

Image: Annika on Unsplash

Blue Mountains Economic Enterprise

Outdoor Explore

Mountains Youth Services Team (MYST) runs the bush adventure therapy course, 'Outdoor Explore', and have been doing so for the past twelve years. This program is described as "a therapeutic, adventure-based program" (Mountains Youth Services Team 2017a) that gives young people of high school age an opportunity to engage in outdoor recreation over a period of ten weeks, while also presenting personal development and wellbeing discussions every week. MYST provide experienced outdoor recreation guides, as well as a youth worker with each group.

MYST identified a gap in service provision for Blue Mountains young people, stating "We know that not all young people are engaged in school, and we also know that not all young people will choose to attend a youth centre" (Mountains Youth Services Team 2017a).

'Outdoor Explore' uses "experiential education techniques" (Mountains Youth Services Team 2017a) to improve attributes such as self-esteem, self-confidence, team work and communication skills.

How does this program address a 'gap'?

'Outdoor Explore' addresses some of the challenges raised in this research:

- Working to support young people at risk of disengagement (a cohort identified as disadvantaged with regard to post-school pathway);
- Developing work-ready skills.

It is also an indication of successful integration between schools, a community organisation, a local business - Blue Mountains Adventure Company has been involved with MYST for many years - and TAFE.

While this program is directed at school-age young people, particularly those at risk of disengagement, it offers insight into possible programs that could be developed for a broader cohort, including those out of school and in the 19-24 age range.
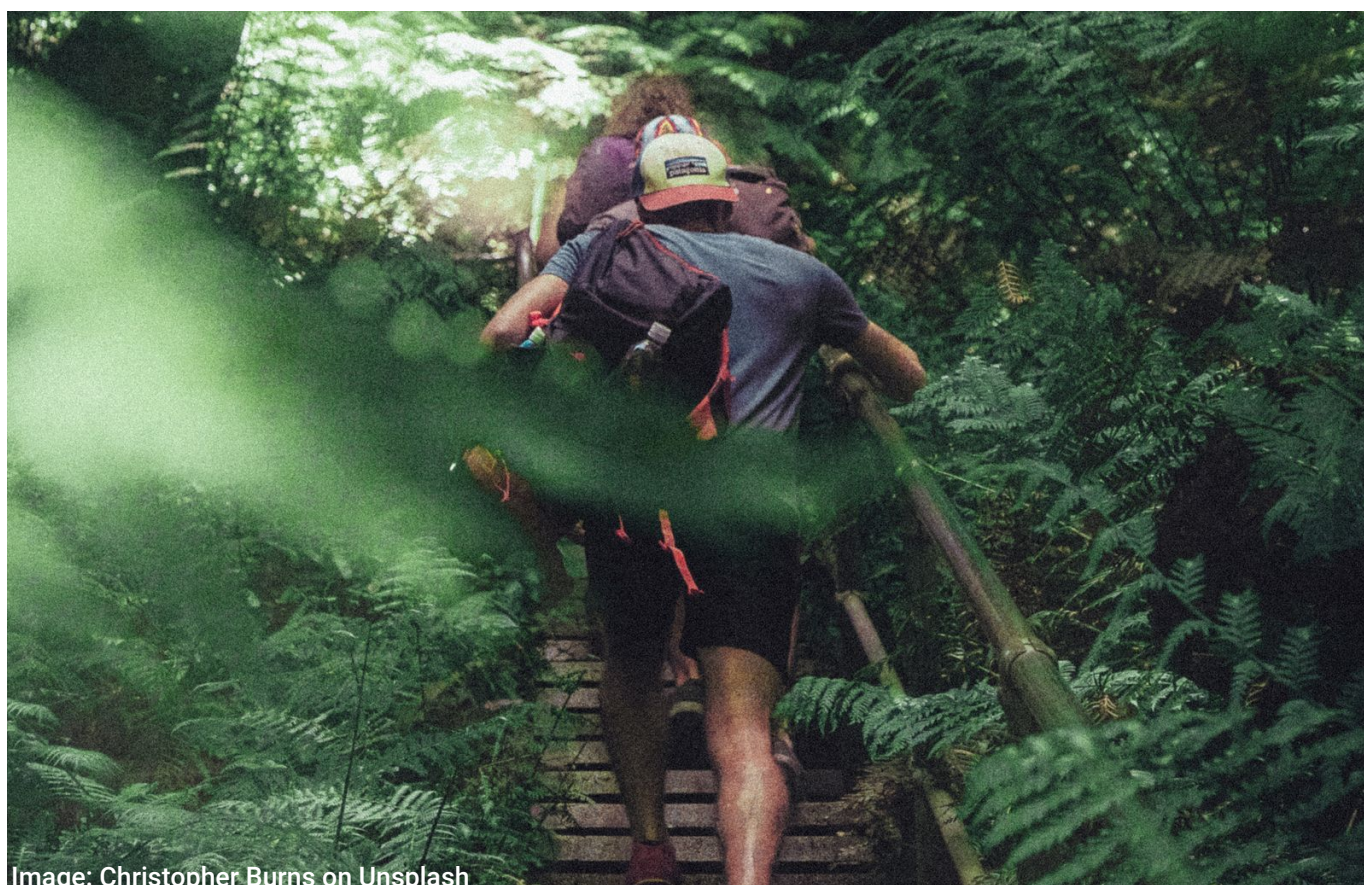

Image: Christopher Burns on Unsplash

8.0 Key findings and future directions

Access to and availability of post-school pathways for Blue Mountains young people is perceived as limited

Post-school pathways for Blue Mountains young people are seen as limited, very limited, or non-existent by 78% of 16-18 year olds and 92% of 19-24 year olds. Business owners, education experts and community organisers, by and large, agreed that post-school pathways in the Blue Mountains are challenging for young people.

The significant increase in negative perceptions of post-school pathways between the 16-18 year cohort and the 19-24 year old cohort suggests that **the experiences of the two cohorts of young people are different, and policy and initiatives should be tailored to and specific for each group**. It also may suggest that the experiences of post-school pathways are harder than anticipated by the younger cohort.

Participants prioritised different areas of reform. A majority of educators and those aged 16-18 suggest that attracting a university campus to the Blue Mountains was the first priority, while the majority of 19-24 year olds, business owners and community organisers suggest that full-time employment and social and recreational opportunities require reform before the addition of a university campus. Participants identified transport as a critical concern.

There is an eagerness for information and support around post-school pathways. All groups are interested and invested in supporting young people in their post-school pathways. In addition to the required support for young people, the families of young people were identified as needing more information and support.

Post-school pathways are closely linked with perceptions and experiences of out-migration after higher school

There was an inclination towards out-migration in the sample. 30% of 16-18 year olds indicate they were planning to 'probably' or 'definitely' stay in the Blue Mountains. However, despite the data suggesting a clear orientation towards out-migration in the 19-24, 74% of those engaged in this research are still living in the Blue Mountains. This is potentially a result of the recruitment strategy; as the research was advertised locally, it may have drawn a larger proportion of young people living locally.

Young people move for a variety of reasons, not solely to access post-school pathways. While accessing post-school pathways was the major motivation for out-migration in both cohorts, young people also intended to move as a form of personal development - often described as 'growing' or seeing new things - or because they could not see a future in the Blue Mountains or felt they did not belong.

There is a normative culture of out-migration in the Blue Mountains, where **leaving is associated with success and remaining or returning is associated with 'failure' or being 'stuck'.** These discourses are evident in data from all groups, and have implications for young people's post-school pathways. Participants identified the need to challenge this discourse. Reform in other areas without addressing these discourses would, in all likelihood, be ineffective.

Rather than focusing on stemming out-migration, effective initiatives and policy could reframe around young people as supported to stay, supported to leave, and supported to return, as well as attracting young people from elsewhere to the area.

Access to necessities and financial resources impacts post-school pathways

There is a relationship between location and access to post-school pathways. The proximity of the Lower Mountains to Sydney ensures young people in these areas have greater access to post-school pathways. This may intersect with greater disadvantage and a lower median household income in the Upper Mountains.

Housing affordability and financial resources were identified as barriers to accessing post-school pathways. Community organisers identified socioeconomic resources as a major factor in a young person's access to post-school opportunities. 16-18 year olds identified financial barriers as the largest barrier to post-school pathways, and 45% of 19-24 year olds stated that they remained in the Blue Mountains for financial reasons.

Transport is a critical challenge. Difficulties with transport disproportionately affect young people in the Upper Mountains and young people living with a disability. Transport was also identified by both cohorts of young people as negatively impacting socialising, the vitality of towns, access to employment and education, and access to TVET, as well as prompting serious safety concerns. Participants suggested improving transport would encourage young people to commute, rather than leave.

University is the preferred pathway, but young people also want other options

University is the preferred post-school pathway for both cohorts, with 70% of those aged 16-18 nominating it as their preferred pathway and 76% of those aged 19-24 either attending university immediately after high school, attending university after a gap year, or applying for university.

Despite this preference, **many young people stated they would have liked to have received more information about alternatives to university while in school.** Educators supported this request, stating that TVET and strong links to industry remain a priority.

The accessibility of locally available vocational education, especially in trades, was identified as a concern. Education experts, business owners and community organisers all stated **a construction course at Wentworth Falls TAFE would address a significant gap.**

Local employment opportunities are seen as limited

While some young people felt there was a reasonable amount of locally available jobs, **employment opportunities in the Blue Mountains are generally seen as limited.** Tourism and hospitality are seen as the dominant industries of employment and neither industry is regarded as offering secure jobs or career progression.

Poor work conditions - such as underpayment, cash-in-hand, and job precarity - in hospitality and tourism were a consistent concern from young people, community organisers, education experts and some business owners.

The vast majority of business owners agreed local opportunities are limited, and some identified the provision of full-time employment as a method to retain or attract young people.

A majority of the business owners engaged in this research are invested in supporting young people. Many also experienced barriers in employing young people, including difficulties with recruitment, the work readiness of young people, and training.

Work experience and mentoring are critical initiatives and suggested by all groups.

Many young people feel they do not belong in the Blue Mountains. Improving the inclusiveness of the Blue Mountains is critical for post-school pathways and out-migration

There is extensive data to suggest many young people do not feel they belong in the Blue Mountains and that it is not a place 'for' young people. Experiencing a lack of belonging is a factor in youth out-migration and may decrease the likelihood of return.

Any reform to post-school pathways must be developed alongside initiatives designed to include young people in the community. Attempting reform to post-school options in the Blue Mountains without addressing the issues around belonging are likely to be ineffective.

Young people identified reform of transport and the support of more social opportunities as the two key interventions in addressing a lack of belonging.

Support for more socialising opportunities is a recurring and critical request from young people. The proposed model included the following aspects: support for transport options (including long-term transport reform); youth-oriented activities limited to those under 24 exclusively; ongoing and regular activities rather than one-offs; and, an inclusive space. Improved access to and diversity of nightlife was also a regular request.

Future directions

Several initiatives were identified as possible directions in future strategic planning:

- The creation of a transport reform advocacy strategy to address ease-of-movement between living, studying, working, and socialising locations;
- The development of a construction course at Wentworth Falls TAFE;
- The establishment of an organisation, or an individual within an organisation, that can support businesses in recruiting young people, provide HR support, and education to young people about their rights as workers;
- The establishment of a shared mentoring and work experience program;
- The establishment of regular activities for young people that are limited to those under 24 exclusively;
- The development of systemic 'familiarisation' initiatives, where young people are exposed to a variety of post-school pathways while in school;
- The facilitation of an initiative where the 19-24 age cohort discuss their own post-school pathway with the younger cohort, including modelling pathways outside of the dominant university and out-migration pathway;
- The development of more extensive information and support for families of young people, as well as young people themselves;
- A community consultation process/cross-functional working group commissioned to investigate the possibility of attracting a university campus, a university centre, or film and TV school to the Blue Mountains.

Most importantly, reform of post-school pathways must be integrated with the increased inclusion of young people in the Blue Mountains community. Effective reform - and the consequent improvement of post-school outcomes for Blue Mountains young people - is dependent on approaching these challenges as interrelated.

9.0 Reference list and bibliography

.id 2016a, *Blue Mountains - migration by age group 2016*, viewed 14 April 2019,<https://profile.id.com.au/blue-mountains/migration-by-age>.

.id 2016b, *Blue Mountains City - service age groups*, viewed 11 April 2019, <https://profile.id.com.au/blue-mountains/service-age-groups?EndYear=2001&DataType=UR>.

.id 2016c, *Blue Mountains City - median household income*, viewed 15 August 2019, <https://atlas.id.com.au/blue-mountains>.

.id 2016d, *Blue Mountains city- disengaged youth (aged 15-24 not employed or in education*, viewed 30 May 2019, <https://atlas.id.com.au/blue-mountains>.

.id 2016e, *Blue Mountains City - education institution attending*, viewed 11 April 2019, <https://profile.id.com.au/blue-mountains/education?EndYear=2001&DataType=UR&BMID=50>.

.id 2016f, *SEIFA index of disadvantage*, viewed 15 April 2019, <https://atlas.id.com.au/blue-mountains>.

.id 2016g, *Blue Mountains City - median weekly rental payments,* viewed 22 July 2019, <https://atlas.id.com.au/blue-mountains>.

.id 2016h, *Armidale Regional Council - migration by age*, viewed 15 August 2019, <https://profile.id.com.au/armidale/migration-by-age>.

.id 2016i, *Bathurst Regional Council - migration by age*, viewed 15 August 2019, <https://profile.id.com.au/bathurst/migration-by-age>.

.id 2016j, *Lismore City - migration by age*, viewed 15 August 2019, <https://profile.id.com.au/lismore/migration-by-age>.

.id 2016k, *Wagga Wagga City - migration by age*, viewed 15 August 2019, <https://profile.id.com.au/wagga-wagga/migration-by-age>.

.id 2018a, *Blue Mountains City - estimated residential population*, viewed 15 August 2019, <https://profile.id.com.au/blue-mountains/population-estimate>.

.id 2018b, *Armidale Regional Council - estimated residential population*, viewed 15 August 2019, <https://profile.id.com.au/armidale/population-estimate>.

.id 2018c, *Bathurst Regional Council area - estimated residential population*, viewed 15 August 2019, <https://profile.id.com.au/bathurst/population-estimate>.

.id 2018d, *Lismore City - estimated residential population*, viewed 15 August 2019, <https://profile.id.com.au/lismore/population-estimate>.

.id 2018e, *Wagga Wagga City - estimated residential population*, viewed 15 August 2019, <https://profile.id.com.au/wagga-wagga/population-estimate>.

Arbon Publishing 2016, *Inspiring passion, creating futures: celebrating 25 years of the Blue Mountains International Hotel Management School*, Arbon Publishing, Crows Nest.

Argent, N & Walmsley, J 2008, 'Rural youth migration trends in Australia: An overview of recent trends and two inland case studies', *Geographical Research*, vol. 46, no. 2, pp. 139-52.

Australian Bureau of Statistics 2016a, 'AGEP Age by LGA (UR)', *Tablebuilder*, Findings based on use of ABS TableBuilder data.

Australian Bureau of Statistics 2016b, 'EETP Engagement in employment, education and training by AGEP age', *Tablebuilder*, Findings based on use of ABS TableBuilder data.

Australian Bureau of Statistics 2016c, 'AGEP Age and LFSP Labour Force Status', *Tablebuilder*, Findings based on use of ABS TableBuilder data.

Australian Bureau of Statistics 2016d, 'INDP - 1 digit level by AGEP age by LGA', *Tablebuilder*, 19 April 2019, Findings based on use of ABS TableBuilder data.

Australian Bureau of Statistics 2016e, 'AGE5P - Age in Five Year Groups and UAI5P Usual Address Five Years Ago Indicator', *Tablebuilder*, Findings based on use of ABS TableBuilder data.

Baker, M & O'Brien, W 2019, 'Rethinking outdoor leadership: an investigation of affective abilities in Australian higher education curriculum', *Journal of Adventure Education and Outdoor Learning*, pp. 1-15, DOI 10.1080/14729679.2019.1634598.

Blackheath Area Neighbourhood Centre n.d., *About BANC*, viewed 25 April 2019, <http://banc.org.au/about-banc/>.

Blue Mountains Aboriginal Culture and Resource Centre 2018, *Services*, viewed 25 April 2019, <https://www.acrc.org.au/services/>.

Blue Mountains City Council 2005, *Infrastructure strategy: building a better future, Blue Mountains City Council*, viewed 10 April 2019, <https://www.bmcc.nsw.gov.au/documents/infrastructure-strategy>.

Blue Mountains CIty Council 2006, *Cultural strategy 2006-2016*, Blue Mountains City Council, viewed 10 April 2019, <https://www.bmcc.nsw.gov.au/documents/cultural-strategy>.

Blue Mountains City Council 2015, *SBM Together consultation report: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community engagment 2015*, viewed 10 April 2019, <https://www.bmcc.nsw.gov.au/publications/looking-forward-integrated-plans#strategic>.

Blue Mountains City Council 2016a, SBM Together consultation report: BMCC youth council consultation viewed 10 April 2019, <https://www.bmcc.nsw.gov.au/publications/looking-forward-integrated-plans#strategic>.

Blue Mountains City Council 2016b, *SBM Together consultation report: LGBTIQ community engagement*, viewed 10 April 2019, <https://www.bmcc.nsw.gov.au/publications/looking-forward-integrated-plans#strategic>.

Blue Mountains City Council 2016c, SBM Together consultation report: interagency planning workshop, viewed 10 April 2019, <https://www.bmcc.nsw.gov.au/publications/looking-forward-integrated-plans#strategic>.

Blue Mountains City Council 2016d, SBM Together consultation report: culturally and linguistically diverse community consultation, viewed 10 April 2019, <https://www.bmcc.nsw.gov.au/publications/looking-forward-integrated-plans#strategic>.

Blue Mountains City Council 2016e, Delivery program 2013-2017: operational plan 2016-2017, viewed 10 April 2019, <https://www.bmcc.nsw.gov.au/publications/looking-forward-integrated-plans#strategic>.

Blue Mountains City Council 2016f, *Blue Mountains civic education kit*, viewed 10 April 2019, <https://www.bmcc.nsw.gov.au/community/children-youth-families/student-information>.

Blue Mountains City Council 2017a, *Blue Mountains community strategic plan 2035*, Blue Mountains City Council, viewed 10 April 2019, <https://www.bmcc.nsw.gov.au/documents/community-strategic-plan-2035>.

Blue Mountains City Council 2017b, *Disability inclusion action plan 2017-2021*, Blue Mountains City Council, viewed 10 April 2019, <https://www.bmcc.nsw.gov.au/community/people-living-with-disability/disability-inclusion-action-plan>.

Blue Mountains City Council 2017c, *Resourcing strategy 2017-2027*, Blue Mountains City Council, viewed 10 April 2019, <https://www.bmcc.nsw.gov.au/documents/resourcing-strategy-2017-2027>.

Blue Mountains City Council 2017d, *Report on the outcomes of the together community forum*, viewed 10 April 2019, <https://www.bmcc.nsw.gov.au/publications/looking-forward-integrated-plans#strategic>.

Blue Mountains City Council 2018a, *LEP roadmap - phase 1 - LEP health check review (enclosure 1)*, Blue Mountains City Council viewed 21 August 2019, <https://www.bmcc.nsw.gov.au/sites/default/files/docs/2018-11-13_Enclosure_Item18.PDF>.

Blue Mountains City Council 2018b, *Open space and recreation strategic plan 2018-2028,* Blue Mountains City Council, viewed 10 April 2019, <https://www.bmcc.nsw.gov.au/documents/open-space-and-recreation-strategic-plan-2018-2028>.

Blue Mountains City Council 2018c, Integrated transport strategic plan 2035, Blue Mountains City Council,, viewed 10 April 2019, <https://www.bmcc.nsw.gov.au/documents/integrated-transport-strategic-plan-2035>.

Blue Mountains City Council 2018d, Delivery program 2017-20121 and operational plan: year two 2018-2019, viewed 10 April 2019, <https://www.bmcc.nsw.gov.au/publications/looking-forward-integrated-plans#strategic>.

Blue Mountains City Council 2019a, *Reducing youth alcohol harm - FAQs*, viewed 10 April 2019, <https://yoursay.bmcc.nsw.gov.au/reduceyouthalcoholharm/faqs>.

Blue Mountains City Council 2019b, *News and priorities*, viewed 25 April 2019, <https://www.bmcc.nsw.gov.au/young-people/news-and-priorities>.

Blue Mountains City Council n.d., Stronger Families Alliance - membership, viewed 25 April 2019, <https://www.strongerfamilies.net.au/about-us/membership/>.

Blue Mountains Economic Enterprise 2014a, Home-based businesses - economic impact statement - Blue Mountains LGA, Blue Mountains Economic Enterprise, viewed 10 April 2019, <https://bmee.org.au/wp-content/uploads/BMEE-EIS-Home-based-business-Oct-2014-2.pdf>.

Blue Mountains Economic Enterprise 2014b, *Blue Mountains health and wellbeing industry profile*, Blue Mountains Economic Enterprise, viewed 10 April 2019, <https://bmee.org.au/wp-content/uploads/BMEE-Health-Wellbeing-Profile-20142.pdf>.

Blue Mountains Economic Enterprise 2014c, *Blue Mountains tourism industry profile*, Blue Mountains Economic Enterprise, viewed 10 April 20109, <https://bmee.org.au/wp-content/uploads/BMEE-Tourism-Industry-Profile-2015.pdf>.

Blue Mountains Economic Enterprise 2018a, *Blue Mountains demographic and economic profile*, Blue Mountains Economic Enterprise, viewed 10 April 2019, <https://bmee.org.au/wp-content/uploads/A4-Demographic-Booklet-BMEE.pdf>.

Blue Mountains Economic Enterprise 2018b, *Blue Mountains creative industries profile*, Blue Mountains Economic Enterprise, viewed 10 April 2019, <https://bmee.org.au/wp-content/uploads/Creative-Industries-Profile-BMEE-Version-for-Website.pdf>.

Blue Mountains Economic Enterprise n.d., *About*, viewed 15 August 2019, <https://bmee.org.au/about/>.

Blue Mountains Gazette 2019a, 'Free rent to set up a digital lab', Blue Mountains Gazette, 11 July 2019, viewed 15 August 2019, <https://www.bluemountainsgazette.com.au/story/6269030/toolos-digital-lab-set-for-old-library/>.

Blue Mountains Gazette 2019b, 'WSU scholarship program helps ambitious locals to shine | Blue Mountains Gazette', *Blue Mountains Gazette*, 9 January 2019, viewed 12 August 2019, <https://www.bluemountainsgazette.com.au/story/5842374/wsu-scholarship-program-helps-ambitious-locals-to-shine/>.

Blue Mountains Pluriversity n.d., *Blue Mountains Pluriversity*, Blue Mountains Pluriversity,, 18 April 2019, <http://bmpluriversity.org>.

Blue Mountains Women's Health and Resource Centre n.d., *Young women*, viewed 25 April 2019, <http://www.bmwhrc.org/young-women/>.

Charles-Edwards, E, Bell, M, Cooper, J & Bernard, A 2018, *Population shift: understanding internal migration in Australia, Australian Bureau of Statistics*, viewed 11 May 2019, <https://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Lookup/by%20Subject/2071.0~2016~Main%20Features~Population%20Shift:%20Understanding%20Internal%20Migration%20in%20Australia~69>.

Coffey, J, Threadgold, S, Farrugia, D, Sherval, M, Hanley, J, Askew, M et al. 2018, ''If you lose your youth, you lose your heart and your future': affective figures of youth in community tensions surrounding a proposed coal seam gas project', *Sociologia Ruralis*, vol. 58, no. 3, pp. 665-83, DOI 10.1111/soru.12204.

College, BY 2015, Lawson campus, viewed 25 April 2019,
<https://www.blacktownyouthcollege.nsw.edu.au/lawson-campus>.

Cook, J & Cuervo, H 2018, 'Staying, leaving and returning: rurality and the development of reflexivity and motility', Current Sociology, pp. 1-17.

Cuervo, H & Wyn, J 2012, *Young people making it work: continuity and change in rural places*, Melbourne Univ. Publishing.

Cuervo, H & Wyn, J 2017, 'A longitudinal analysis of belonging: temporal, performative and relational practices by young people in rural Australia', *YOUNG*, vol. 25, no. 3, pp. 219-34.

Dufty-Jones, R & Argent, N 2018, 'Why young women say no to rural Australia', *The Conversation*, viewed 30 March 2019, <https://theconversation.com/why-young-women-say-no-to-rural-australia-100760>.

Farrugia, D 2016, 'The mobility imperative for rural youth: the structural, symbolic and non-representational dimensions rural youth mobilities', *Journal of Youth Studies*, vol. 19, no. 6, pp. 836-51.

Farrugia, D 2019, 'Class, place and mobility beyond the global city: stigmatisation and the cosmopolitanisation of the local', *Journal of Youth Studies*, pp. 1-15, DOI 10.1080/13676261.2019.1596236.

Foster, K & Main, H 2018, *Finding a place in the world: understanding youth outmigration from shrinking rural communities*, Social Sciencies and Humanities Research Council and Dalhousie University.

Gabriel, M 2002, 'Australia's regional youth exodus', *Journal of Rural Studies*, vol. 18, no. 2, pp. 209-12.

Gateway Family Services n.d., *Baby bootie club - young parents*, viewed 25 April 2019,
<https://www.gatewayfamilyservices.org.au/evolve/baby-bootie-clubyoung-parents/>.

Geldens, PM & Bourke, L 2008, 'Identity, uncertainty and responsibility: privileging place in a risk society', *Children's Geographies*, vol. 6, no. 3, pp. 281-94.

IRIS Research 2014, *Blue Mountains City Council - community survey 2014 - final results*, Blue Mountains City Council, viewed 10 April 2019, <https://www.bmcc.nsw.gov.au/publications/looking-forward-integrated-plans>.

IRIS Research 2016a, *Blue Mountains City Council - community survey 2016 - final results*, Blue Mountains City Council, viewed 10 April 2019, <https://www.bmcc.nsw.gov.au/publications/looking-forward-integrated-plans>.

IRIS Research 2016b, *City of the Blue Mountains: report on the outcomes of area community workshops*, viewed 10 April 2019, <https://www.bmcc.nsw.gov.au/publications/looking-forward-integrated-plans#strategic>.

Kirinari 2016, *Services*, viewed 25 April 2019, <http://www.kirinari.com.au/services>.

Micromex Research 2018, *Community satisfaction research,* Blue Mountains City Council, viewed 10 April 2019, <https://www.bmcc.nsw.gov.au/publications/looking-forward-integrated-plans>.

Mountains Youth Services Team 2017a, Outdoor explore - Blue Mountains, viewed 15 July 2019, <http://myst.com.au/outdoor_explore/>.

Mountain Youth Services Team 2017b, Annual report 2016-2017, viewed 10 April 2019, <http://myst.com.au/resources/documents/MYST-Annual-Report---2017---Web.pdf>.

National Centre for Vocational Education Research 2013, *Youth transitions in Australia: a moving picture*, National Centre for Vocational Education Research, Adelaide.

Nepean Area Disabilities Organisation n.d., *Lawson community day program*, viewed 25 April 2019, <https://nado.org.au/services/day-programs/lawson-community-programs/>.

NOVA Employment 2010, *NOVA locations - Katoomba*, viewed 25 April 2019, <https://www.novaemployment.com.au/locations/Katoomba_4/>.

Pink Mountains n.d., *Pink Mountains youth*, viewed 25 April 2019, <http://pinkmountains.com.au/community-organisations/pink-mountains-youth/>.

Platform Youth Services, n.d., *How we help*, viewed 25 April 2019, <https://www.platformys.org.au/how-we-help/>.

Ranasinghe, R, Chew, E, Knight, G & Siekmann, G 2019, *School-to-work pathways*, National Centre for Vocational Education Research, Adelaide.

Robinson, N 2019, 'University debt and limited job prospects mean learning a trade at TAFE is better for income, report', *Australian Broadcasting Association News*, 12 August 2019, viewed 12 August 2019, <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2019-08-12/university-vs-tafe-what-will-lead-to-a-higher-income/11399662>..

Scenic World Shared 2019, *What we do*, Scenic World Shared, viewed 17 May 2019 `, <http://scenicworldshared.com.au/what-we-do/>.
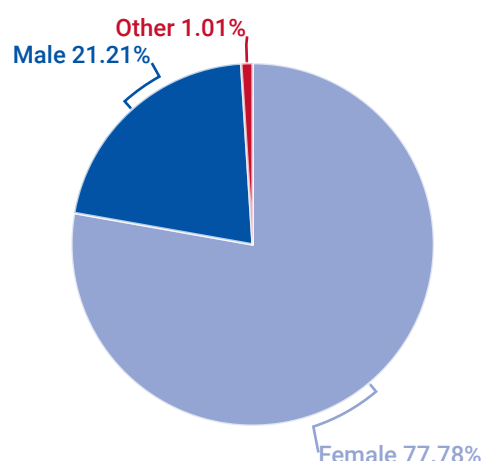
Stronger Families Alliance 2010, *Child and family plan*, viewed 10 April 2019, <https://www.strongerfamilies.net.au/wp-content/uploads/sfa_plan_final.pdf>.

Stronger Families Alliance n.d., *Our ultimate outcomes*, viewed 10 April 2019, <https://www.strongerfamilies.net.au/child-youth-familyplan/ultimate-outcomes-framework/>.

WISE Employment 2019, *Our offices*, viewed 25 April 2019, <https://wiseemployment.com.au/offices/>.
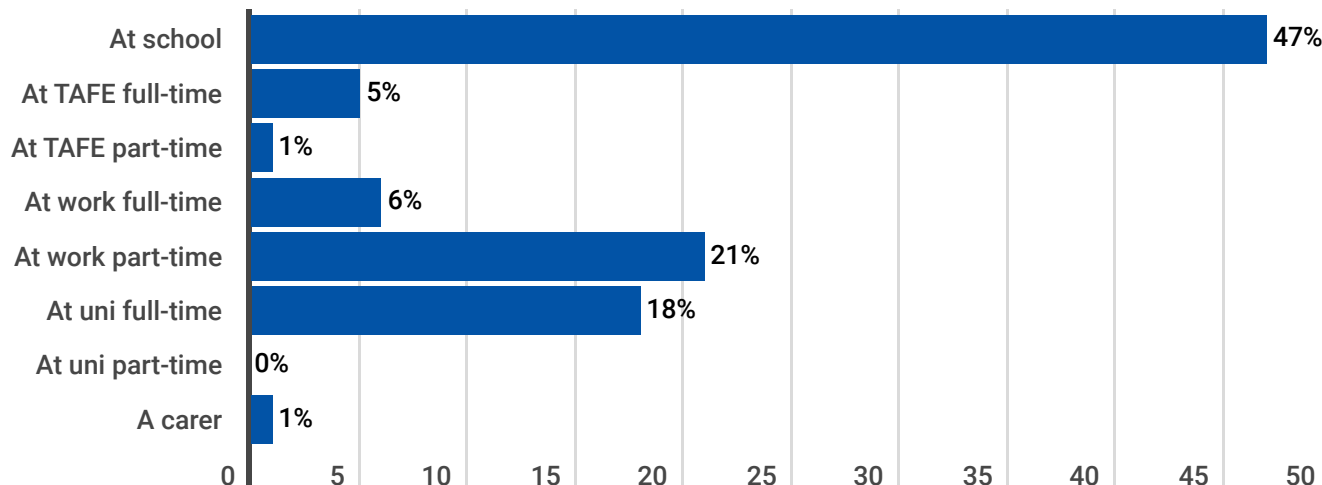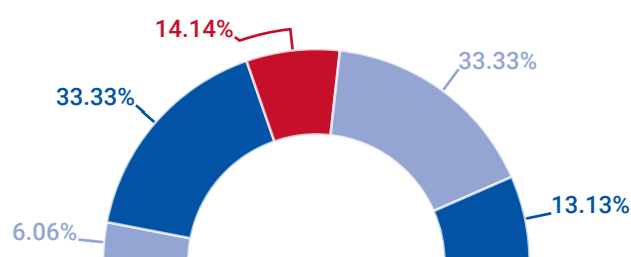
10.0 Appendices -Appendix A: Sample

Group A: 16-18 year olds (n=69)

Other 1.01%
Male 21.21%
Female 77.78%

4% identified as Aboriginal

1% identified as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander

14.14%
33.33%
33.33%
13.13%
6.06%

● Planning area 1 ● Planning area 2 ● Planning area 3
● Planning area 4 ● Planning area 5

6% identified as living with a disability

At school	47%
At TAFE full-time	5%
At TAFE part-time	1%
At work full-time	6%
At work part-time	21%
At uni full-time	18%
At uni part-time	0%
A carer	1%

0 5 10 15 20 25 30 35 40 45 50

97% live with family members, most usually at least one parent, or at least one parent and siblings

77% identified as straight

13% identified as bisexual

4% identified as unsure

3% identified as gay

1% identified as lesbian

1% identified as asexual

53% identified as having an an 'Australian' (understood as an Anglo-Celtic) or Anglo-Celtic background. Of the 48% of the sample that identified other cultural backgrounds, 25% identified European (other than Anglo) background. Other cultural and ethnic backgrounds identified by participants included Chinese-Australian, Malaysian, African American, Sri Lankan, and Maori among others.
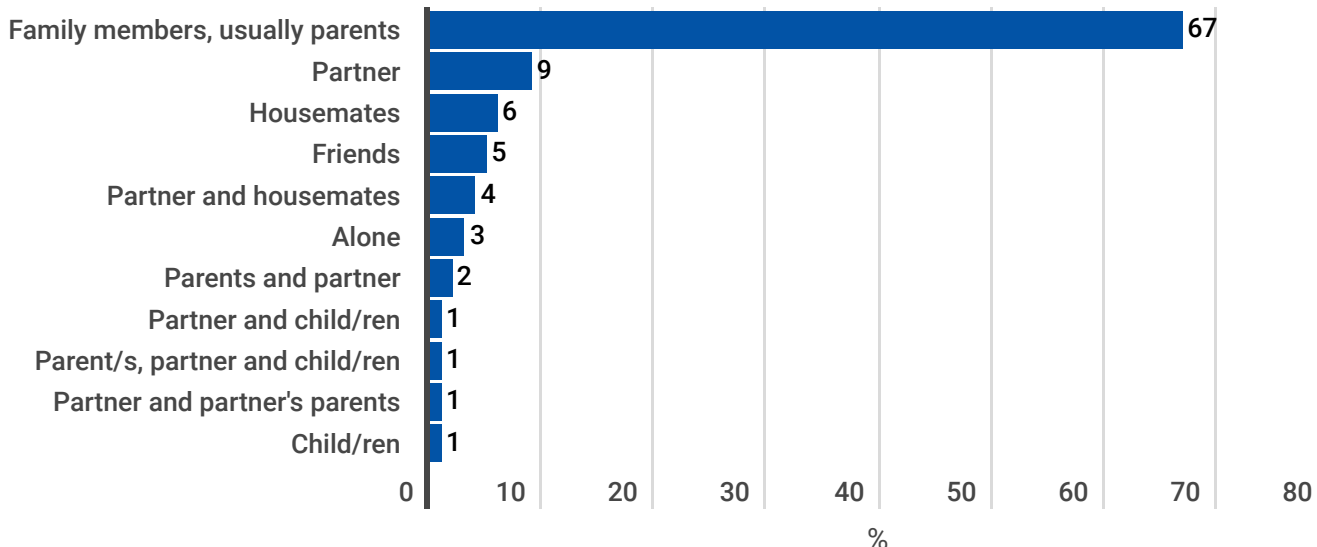
The sample was not intended as representative. It included more females than males. The sample also comprised greater representation of Planning Areas 2 and 4 and less representation of Planning Area 5 than population averages. A surprisingly low number (47%) of the sample at school, considering the age range.
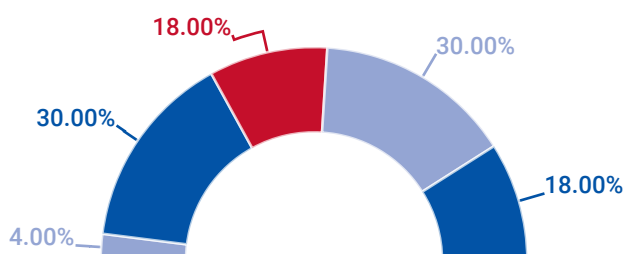
Group B: 19-24 year olds (n=163)

Male 37.35%
Other 0.60%
Female 62.05%

6% identified as Aboriginal

1% identified as Torres Strait Islander

18.00%
30.00%
30.00%
18.00%
4.00%

- Planning area 1
- Planning area 2
- Planning area 3
- Planning area 4
- Planning area 5

5% identified as living with a disability

Who do they live with?

Category	Value
Family members, usually parents	67
Partner	9
Housemates	6
Friends	5
Partner and housemates	4
Alone	3
Parents and partner	2
Partner and child/ren	1
Parent/s, partner and child/ren	1
Partner and partner's parents	1
Child/ren	1

%

80% identified as straight

14% identified as bisexual

4% identified as lesbian

1% identified as gay

1% identified as unsure

1% identified as queer

1% identified as other

67% identified as having an an 'Australian' (understood as an Anglo-Celtic background) or Anglo-Celtic background. 16% identified as having other European heritage, and 16% identified other ethnic or cultural backgrounds, including Chinese-Australia, Sri Lankan, Peruvian, Malaysian, and Indonesian.

The sample was not intended as representative. It included more females than males. The sample also comprised a greater representation of young people from Planning Areas 2 and 4, and less representation of Planning Areas 1, 3, and 5 than population averages..

Other participant groups - Education experts and community organisers

To ensure the de-identification of data and the small size of the sample, it's not possible to provide an in-depth analysis of the sample of educational experts or community organisers.
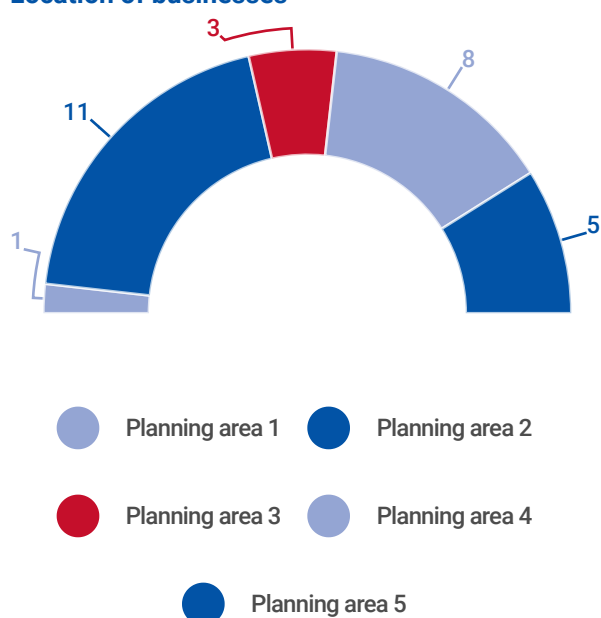
Educational experts were drawn from further education institutions and members of the executive in high schools in the Blue Mountains. 4 surveys were collected, and 10 interviews conducted. 3 interviews followed-up survey responses. Public and private institutions were both represented.

Community organisaters included people working in various sectors throughout the Blue Mountains. The recruitment criteria was that the individual needed to be employed in a position that worked in a community-based activity in the Blue Mountains. 4 surveys were collected and 17 interviews conducted. No interview participants also took the survey. Participants came from a range of sectors. Every planning area was included, although there was no organisation specific to Planning Area 5 interviewed in this research.
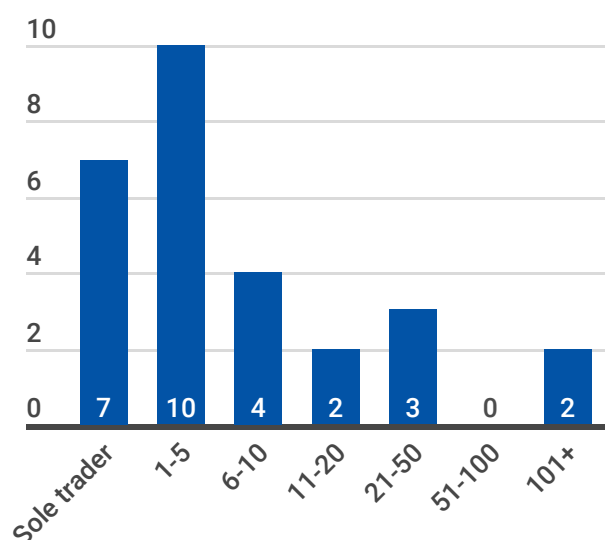
Other participant groups - Employers

As it is a larger sample size, more information may be provided about the 'employer' group of participants. 13 surveys were collected, and 17 interviews conducted. 2 of the interview participants had also taken the survey.
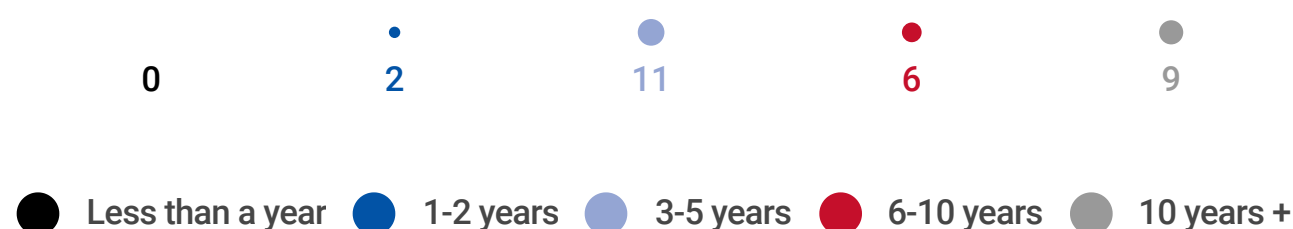
Location of businesses

- Planning area 1
- Planning area 2
- Planning area 3
- Planning area 4
- Planning area 5

Size of businesses

Sole trader	1-5	6-10	11-20	21-50	51-100	101+
7	10	4	2	3	0	2

Length of time in business

0	2	11	6	9

- Less than a year
- 1-2 years
- 3-5 years
- 6-10 years
- 10 years +

The sample was not intended as representative. It included a larger number of businesses from Planning areas 2 and 4.

Appendix B: Reviewed Blue Mountains Literature

Blackheath Area Neighbourhood Centre n.d., *About BANC*.

Blue Mountains Aboriginal Culture and Resource Centre 2018, *Services*.

Blue Mountains City Council 2005, *Infrastructure strategy: building a better future*.

Blue Mountains City Council 2006, *Cultural strategy 2006-2016*.

Blue Mountains City Council 2015, *SBM Together consultation report: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community engagement 2015*.

Blue Mountains City Council 2016, *SBM Together consultation report: LGBTIQ community engagement*.

Blue Mountains City Council 2016, *SBM Together consultation report: Interagency Planning Workshop*.

Blue Mountains City Council 2016, *SBM Together consultation report: Culturally and Linguistically Diverse community consultation*.

Blue Mountains City Council 2016, *Delivery program 2013-2017: operational plan 2016-2017*.

Blue Mountains City Council 2016, *Blue Mountains civic education kit*.

Blue Mountains City Council 2016, *SBM Together consultation report: BMCC Youth Council consultation*.

Blue Mountains City Council 2017, *Blue Mountains community strategic plan 2035*.

Blue Mountains City Council 2017, *Disability inclusion action plan 2017-2021*.

Blue Mountains City Council 2017, *Resourcing strategy 2017-2027*.

Blue Mountains City Council 2017, *Report on the outcomes of the together community forum*.

Blue Mountains City Council 2018, *Integrated transport strategic plan 2035*.

Blue Mountains City Council 2018, *Delivery program 2017-20121 and operational plan: year two 2018-2019*.

Blue Mountains City Council 2018, *LEP roadmap - phase 1 - LEP health check review (enclosure 1)*.

Blue Mountains City Council 2018, *Open space and recreation strategic plan 2018-2028*.

Blue Mountains City Council 2019, *Reducing youth alcohol harm - FAQs*.

Blue Mountains City Council 2019, *News and priorities*.

Blue Mountains City Council n.d., *Stronger Families Alliance - membership*.

Blue Mountains City Council. Prepared by IRIS Research 2014, *Blue Mountains City Council - community survey 2014 - final results*.

Blue Mountains City Council. Prepared by IRIS Research 2016, *Blue Mountains City Council - community survey 2016 - final results*.

Blue Mountains City Council. Prepared by IRIS Research 2016, *City of the Blue Mountains*: r*eport on the outcomes of area community workshops*.

Blue Mountains City Council. Prepared by Micromax Research 2018b, *Community satisfaction research - Blue Mountains City Council*.

Blue Mountains Economic Enterprise 2014, *Home-based businesses - economic impact statement - Blue Mountains LGA*.

Blue Mountains Economic Enterprise 2014, *Blue Mountains health and wellbeing industry profile*.

Blue Mountains Economic Enterprise 2014, *Blue Mountains tourism industry profile*.

Blue Mountains Economic Enterprise 2018, *Blue Mountains demographic and economic profile*.

Blue Mountains Economic Enterprise 2018, *Blue Mountains creative industries profile*.

Blue Mountains Pluriversity 2019, *Blue Mountains Pluriversity*.

Blue Mountains Women's Health and Resource Centre n.d., *Young women*.

Blue Mountains Youth College, 2015, *Lawson campus*.

Gateway Family Services n.d., *Baby bootie club - young parents*.

Kirinari 2016, *Services*

Mountain Youth Services Team 2017, *Annual report 2016-2017*.

Mountains Youth Services Team 2017, Outdoor explore - Blue Mountains.

Nepean Area Disabilities Organisation n.d., Lawson community day program.

NOVA Employment 2010, NOVA locations - Katoomba.

Pink Mountains n.d., Pink Mountains youth.

Scenic World Shared 2019, What we do.

Platform Youth Services n.d., How we help.

Stronger Families Alliance 2010, Child and family plan.

Stronger Families Alliance n.d., Our ultimate outcomes.

WISE Employment 2019, Our offices.

Appendix C: Example survey

As an indication of data collection instruments, the following is the survey that was distributed to 16-18 year olds in the Blue Mountains.

Q1 Do you live in the Blue Mountains? ☐ Yes ☐ No

Q2 Are you between 16 and 18 years of age ☐ Yes ☐ No

Q3 What is your gender identity? ☐ Male ☐ Female ☐ Other _____

Q4 Are you...? ☐ Aboriginal ☐ Torres Strait Islander ☐ Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ☐ Neither Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander

Q5 What is your cultural or ethnic background? (For example, are you Chinese-Australian, Anglo Australian, grandparents are from India?) _____

Q6 What do you like doing? (pick as many as apply)
☐ Going to the movies   ☐ Going to rock/pop gigs
☐ Hanging with friends at home   ☐ Going to the theatre
☐ Going to museums/galleries   ☐ Watching sports
☐ Going to the gym/exercising   ☐ Listening to or playing classical music
☐ Playing video games   ☐ Using social media
☐ Listening to rap/hip-hop   ☐ Socializing in restaurants or cafes

Q7 Who do you live with? _____

Q8 What do the people you live with do for work _____

Q9 Do you identify as a person living with disabilities? ☐ Yes ☐ No

Q10 Which of the following best describes your sexual identity? ☐ Straight ☐ Lesbian ☐ Gay ☐ Bisexual
☐ Trans ☐ Queer ☐ Intersex ☐ Asexual ☐ Unsure ☐ Other _____

Q11 Where in the Blue Mountains are you based?
☐ Planning area 1: Bell, Blackheath, Mount Irvine, Mount Tomah, Mount Victoria, Mount Wilson, Blue Mountains parts of Berambing and Megalong Valley
☐ Planning area 2: Medlow Bath, Katoomba, Leura and Wentworth Falls
☐ Planning area 3: Bullaburra, Lawson, Hazelbrook, Linden and Woodford
☐ Planning area 4: Faulconbridge, Springwood, Winmalee, Yellow Rock, Hawkesbury Heights, Sun Valley, and Valley Heights
☐ Planning area 5: Warrimoo, Blaxland, Mount Riverview, Glenbrook, and Lapstone

Q12 Are you? (you can choose more than one option) ☐ At school ☐ At TAFE full-time ☐ At TAFE part-time
☐ At work full-time ☐ At work part-time ☐ At university full-time ☐ At university part-time ☐ A carer ☐ None of the above

Q13 What are you planning to do in the next five years? _____

Q17 What do you think might be a barrier to achieving your plans? You can choose more than one and please give examples.
☐ Money or financial barriers: _____
☐ Social barriers: _____
☐ Geographic barriers (access to Sydney, for example): _____
☐ Parental or family expectations: _____
☐ Other: _____

Q13 Do you plan to stay in the Blue Mountains for the next five years? ☐ Definitely yes ☐ Probably yes
☐ Might or might not ☐ Probably not ☐ Definitely not

Q14 Why/why not? _____

Q15 Would you be more likely to stay in the Blue Mountains if any of the following options were available?
(You can choose multiple options)

☐ More courses at TAFE   ☐ A university campus
☐ A film and TV school   ☐ More trade apprenticeships
☐ More full-time work   ☐ More things to do for fun/recreation

Q18 When you look at people in the Blue Mountains who are five years older than you, what have they done?
And does this influence how you think about your options after school? _____

Q19 Who do you talk to about your post-school plans? _____

Q20 How do you feel about the options for young people in the Blue Mountains after school?
_____

Q21 What do you think would improve the options for young people in the Blue Mountains after school?
_____

Q23 Is there anything else you would like to add? _____

Q24 If you're interested in attending a follow-up focus group, please enter your contact details here:
_____