

Principal Participant Information Statement

Research study: Implications of the HSC serving dual purposes, secondary exit and tertiary entrance.

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1. What is this study about?

We are conducting a research study about how Year 12 students view the Higher School Certificate (HSC) and its dual purposes as both a qualification for finishing school and a pathway to university. We aim to find out if students have misconceptions about these purposes, whether these misconceptions contribute to stress, and what changes to the system students would prefer. This research is important because it highlights student perspectives and explores ways to reduce stress, improve the HSC experience, and ensure the system better supports students' needs and goals. Taking part in this study is voluntary.

Please read this sheet carefully and ask questions about anything you don't understand or want to know more about.

2. Who is running this study?

The study is being carried out by the following researchers:

Jim Tognolini- Professor and Director of the Centre for Educational Measurement and Assessment (CEMA) at the University of Sydney

Bianca Aiello- Conducting this study as a basis for Honours in Education at the University of Sydney.

3. Who can take part in the study?

We are seeking both ATAR and non-ATAR Year 12 students and students who graduated Year 12 in 2024. This is because these students are uniquely positioned to provide firsthand insights into the challenges and stressors of completing the HSC. Moreover, graduate students' perspectives may alter upon completion of the HSC.

4. What will the study involve for me?

If you decide to take part in this study, your interested Year 12 students will be asked to complete an online survey during Term 1. The estimated time commitment for the survey is 10 minutes. The survey questions can be seen in the following document:

survey questions_yr12 2025 students_HE001494

From this survey, students can opt to participate in a 30-minute interview on your school premises in Term 1. These interviews could potentially be conducted outside of school hours on school days to maximise convenience for your students. However, appropriate times for these interviews will be finalised with the researcher, your school and any interested students in later discussions to ensure maximal convenience for all parties involved.

In the interview, your students will be asked these main questions:

1. Are you eligible for an ATAR?
 - What influenced your decision to choose this?
2. Do you currently think the HSC serves more than one purpose? Why/why not?
 - If yes, what are the purposes?
 - If no, what is the one purpose?
3. On a scale from 1 to 5, with 5 being highly stressed and 1 being not at all, how stressed do you feel in the HSC?
 - Why do you feel this stressed and why did you choose this number?
4. Are the factors contributing to your stress predominantly external or internal factors? Why/why not?
5. What is your attitude towards the current HSC system?
6. What do you believe the best HSC system would be and why?

Your students will not have to answer all of them, and can go into as much or as little depth as they are comfortable with. Students may also be asked follow up questions based on their responses given the interview structure will not be rigid and can flow naturally.

There will be audio recording on a phone involved if the student consents to this. This will help the researcher transcribe their responses for analysis purposes later in the research project. There will also be an opportunity for students to review this transcript prior to analysis so they can verify the transcript accurately reflects their contributions. The researcher will contact them when they need to engage in this process. They will be provided with approximate dates of when it will occur after their interview.

To make the process of distributing project documentation to students easier, it is recommended that you nominate a contact staff member. However, it is up to you whether

you choose to do so. Such project documentation is provided below if you would like to view them:

recruitment advertisement_yr12 students 2025_HE001494

PIS_carers_interview_HE001494

consent form_carers_interview_HE001494

PIS_young people_interview_HE001494

consent form_young people_interview_HE001494

5. Can I withdraw once I have started?

Being in this study is completely voluntary and you do not have to take part.

Your decision will not affect your current or future relationship with the researchers or anyone else at The University of Sydney.

If you decide to take part in the study and then change your mind, you can withdraw by telling the interviewer (who is the researcher) at any time.

If you choose to withdraw, we will stop collecting information from you. If you don't want the information already collected to be in the study results, please tell us at the time you withdraw. Please be aware that this will not be possible if the data has already been de-identified or published.

6. Are there any risks or costs?

Given we aim to ask about your students' experiences of stress, this may raise sensitive issues such as mental health. Students will not have to answer questions if they feel uncomfortable. Options to withdraw will also be provided at the start of the interview and, if necessary, in the interview.

To further manage this risk, we recommend telling your students about the following mental health resources if necessary. This information will also be provided to students in their Participant Information Statement.

- Beyond Blue Support Service
 - <https://www.beyondblue.org.au/get-support>
 - 1300 22 4636
- Headspace (12–25 years)
 - <https://headspace.org.au/>
 - <https://headspace.org.au/online-and-phone-support/>

- 1800 650 890
- Kids Helpline (5–25 years)
 - <https://kidshelpline.com.au/>
 - 1800 55 1800
- Lifeline
 - <https://www.lifeline.org.au/>
 - <https://www.lifeline.org.au/crisis-chat/>
 - <https://www.lifeline.org.au/crisis-text/>
 - 13 11 14
- School Counsellor services

Aside from this and giving up your time, we do not expect that there will be any other risks or costs associated with taking part in this study.

7. Are there any benefits?

You will not receive any direct benefits from being in the study.

However, the study aims to benefit the wider community by providing insights into how the HSC system affects students' well-being and academic experiences. By identifying stressors and potential misconceptions, the research may inform improvements to the HSC, promoting a more supportive educational environment. These findings could potentially guide policymakers and educators in creating a system that better aligns with student needs, ultimately fostering healthier and more equitable outcomes for future Year 12 students.

8. What will happen to information that is collected?

By providing your consent, you are agreeing to us collecting information from you for the purposes of this study. The information collected will include interview data based on your students' responses. Specifically, the interview data will be audio recorded on a phone if you your students consent to this so the researcher can transcribe and analyse your responses. There will also be an opportunity for them to review this transcript prior to analysis so they can verify the transcript accurately reflects their contributions. We will use Microsoft Stream to transcribe interviews. This will involve sharing their information with Microsoft. We will not share this information with anyone else without their consent unless we are required to do so by law. Microsoft Stream is owned by Microsoft and located in Redmond, Washington, US.

Any other identifiable information you or your students provide us will be stored securely and will only be disclosed with yours and your students' permission unless we are required by law to release information. Therefore, no third parties will have access to this information during or after the study unless it is enforced.

Whilst we plan to publish the findings, you, your school and your students will not be individually identifiable in these publications.

We will store all this information securely following the University's Recordkeeping Policy. Only Bianca Aiello (Honours student) and Jim Tognolini (Responsible researcher) will have access to the data during or after the study. The data collected will be retained for a minimum of five years after the completion of analysis and publication. After this period the data can be disposed of securely. For more details about how your information will be handled please see the University's [privacy webpage](#).

9. Will I be told the results of the study?

You have the right to receive feedback about the overall results of this study. You can indicate you are interested in receiving feedback by providing contact details on the consent form. This feedback will be in the form of a brief plain language summary, which will also be provided to students who opt for this, and a report.

10. What if I would like more information?

When you have read this information, the following researchers will be available to discuss it with you further and answer any questions you may have:

- Jim Tognolini (Responsible Researcher). Email: jim.tognolini@sydney.edu.au
- Bianca Aiello (Honours student). Email: baie7618@uni.sydney.edu.au

11. What if I have a complaint or any concerns?

The ethical aspects of this study have been approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) of The University of Sydney [2024/HE001494] according to the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research.

If you are concerned about the way this study is being conducted or you wish to make a complaint to someone independent from the study, please contact the University:

Human Ethics Manager
human.ethics@sydney.edu.au
+61 2 8627 8176

Any complaint you make will be treated in confidence and investigated, and you will be informed of the outcome.

This information sheet is for you to keep