

My Future,
My Culture,
My Way.

NSW Department of Education



Case Study – Hunter

Who I am

I'm Hunter, a proud Wiradjuri woman from Byron Bay. I graduated from Byron Bay High School in 2021.

I've always wanted to be a dancer

I've been dancing since I was five years old. When I was in Year 7, an opportunity to participate in Bangarra Dance Theatre's youth program for two weeks in Sydney made me realise that I wanted to dance professionally. As part of the program, we went to classes, rehearsals, and worked towards a performance. Meeting choreographers, being immersed in contemporary dance, and learning about the cultural aspects to performance helped me discover my dream.

In Year 10, I was given an offer to join the National Aboriginal Islander Skills Development Association Dance (NAISDA) College. Accepting my place at that point would have meant leaving school in Year 11 to study dance full time, and moving from Byron Bay to Gosford by myself. To navigate what was potentially a huge change, I talked to a few dancers I looked up to. They all reminded me that it was possible to both get the HSC and to have a career in dance – it was not an "either or", but rather an "and". Knowing that gave me the confidence and motivation to stay on to complete my high school journey. Looking back, I'm really glad I did.

Dance is how I connect to culture

I'd never really connected with culture deeply until I danced with Bangarra. It's was so different being surrounded by other Aboriginal people while dancing. Working on pieces where we were telling stories about our ancestors made me feel more connected and in tune with myself and my culture. I'm really grateful I get to do that on a daily basis now – it makes all the hard work, and opportunities to share that with others in performance, much more fulfilling.

During my time at school, my year advisor who was Aboriginal also helped connect students like me to culture. The best parts were getting to know some of the Elders in the Byron Community. If you want to strengthen your connection to culture, ask your teachers, find cultural groups in your school or local area, or events like dance companies touring – you'll find yourself surrounded by likeminded people.

But I knew the HSC was important, too

After I made the decision to stay at school for the HSC, I knew I needed to focus on school and get things done. Even though I still wanted to be a professional dancer, I knew it was important to have the HSC and my ATAR as a fallback in case dancing didn't work out.



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Aboriginal artwork created by Felicity Adams who is a proud descendant of the Kamilaroi people, currently living and learning on Dharug Country.

To stay engaged, I chose subjects that I really cared about, like legal studies and dance. Learning about the legal system and how it impacts Aboriginal people – like the incarceration rate – helped me become aware of how things aren't right. I was also lucky to have an Aboriginal teacher for dance, and I choreographed a piece about the Stolen Generations for that subject. Being able to connect to culture as part of the HSC was what pushed me harder to get it right.

I've also learnt a lot of life skills staying at school. In the dance context for example, learning how to speak to markers during the HSC has since been very helpful for navigating auditions as a full time-dancer. Ultimately, whatever you do after school, you have to get things done and handed in on schedule. This means being respectful of everyone's time, including your own! I'm still working on it, but my best tips are to start assignments and homework straight away instead of procrastinating, and to be present and focused in whatever it is I am doing.

Deciding what to do after school can be tricky

While I did have dance dreams that meant I was always pretty sure I didn't want to go to university, so many people in Year 12 talking about that path did create a bit of pressure to go down it. Having a really close relationship with my mum who supported my dance dreams helped me become confident with my goals. She helped me realise that once I knew myself, it didn't really matter what other people thought, or that my dreams were different.

I found out early in Year 12 that I'd been accepted to study a Diploma of Professional Dance (Elite Performance) and a Certificate IV in Dance Teaching and Management at Transit Dance in Melbourne. Straight away, I knew the course was right for me because it not only involves getting professional dance and teaching qualifications, but lets me learn how to manage my own business in case I ever want to open my own dance school later in life. I can even transfer course credits to university to become a teacher or physiotherapist if I change my mind – so I feel I've got every base covered. While my dream right now is to be a part of Bangarra one day, I know that whatever happens with my dance career, I will still be able to work in the dance world.

Early acceptance really lifted the pressure off the HSC for me. While that felt good, it did find it harder to work out how much effort to put into studying when I already knew where I was going after school.

If you know what you want to do after school, there are so many pathways to get there. Getting started

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with research and applications early so you're not stressing at the last minute is really helpful. I did my application with a friend who moved to Melbourne with me, and the staff and dancers at Transit were also really useful to talk to. They helped me figure out which course was right for me, and with pulling together my portfolio.

But the HSC, in any case, offers a good 'safety blanket'

Now that I've finished my HSC and gotten an ATAR, I don't have to wonder 'what if...?'. I'm also glad I stayed at school, because I had two more years to get ready for the big move away from home. I learned a lot about myself, life and grew as a person during the HSC, so in the end it was the right decision.

Stepping back, I think the HSC is a great thing to have on your resume, even if it's just the certificate, and not an ATAR – companies and employers will always look for it as an indication you can persist through something difficult. Even if the ATAR hasn't really mattered after high school for me, just having achieved one makes me proud.

My advice for finding your path

When it comes to finding your path, I'd say put effort into discovering what you like doing, and have a go at pursuing that as a career. Always keep trying, even if you're scared. If you don't try, you'll get stuck doing something you don't want to do. Look for programs, ask your teachers, and participate in as much as you can to help you find your passion. You might not like a particular aspect of a field, but you could also end up loving something else in that realm a lot – and if that's the case, you would have tried and made connections you can use in future.

Put energy into the things that matter and that you care about, and don't waste your stress on stupid things. Try and push outside your comfort zone, even though that's the hardest thing to do.

Want to know more?

Visit My Future, My Culture, My Way, follow the Department of Education on social media, talk to your school, or contact your local Aboriginal Education Consultative Group (AECG).



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