

ACER YEARS 9-12 REVIEW – SUBMISSION

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Background

I am writing this submission as a Tasmanian educator who has had an atypical career, and as a consequence, quite a unique set of perspectives from which to make a contribution to the review. The views expressed in this submission are my personal views and do not represent those of my employer or current workplace.

It is easy to form opinions based on one's own experience, anecdotal knowledge and current context. Such opinions are by definition subjective and of a different research value to conclusions drawn from analysis of objective data.

Before deciding to write a submission, being loathe to offer a subjective opinion and lacking the time to properly research an academic contribution, I read most of the existing public submissions and have at least a working familiarity with the relevant papers and reports informing the review. I decided that I do have something to contribute that comes from an informed perspective.

I was educated in the Catholic system in Tasmania, gained a Bachelor of Science (Physics major) and Diploma of Education at the University of Tasmania. In 2013/2014 a Master of Arts at Teachers College, Columbia University, in Instructional Technology and Media, through a 12 month Hardie Fellowship.

I have worked as a DoE employee for my entire 30+ year career

- Secondary teacher of Maths/Science/Computing in four schools in Hobart area from 1978-1986, and a K-10 district school from 1987-1991.
- Five years at Claremont College from 1992-1996 as a teacher and learning area leader.
- Seven years (1997 to 2003) on leave during which I worked on national eLearning innovation projects for government authorities or government-funded projects.
- Four years (2003-2007) in DoE Curriculum Services during the Essential Learnings curriculum development, working on eLearning and curriculum development.
- Four years at Distance Education / eSchool as a teacher, Acting Principal, then Curriculum and Infrastructure leader as it transitioned from print-based to blended learning, and established a northern presence in addition to the south.
- 2012 - myself and my team transferred to Curriculum Services to continue our online learning work systemically.
- 2013/14 – Hardie Fellowship studies already mentioned

- 2015-present – member of the leadership team at Claremont College, with a variety of roles including leading a re-engagement program.

I have been in and out of bureaucracy and worked in several high schools and twice at Claremont College separated by an 18 year gap. Over the course of my career so far, I have participated in and contributed to many national forums, projects, policy and curriculum development either as a DoE employee or as a Professional Association representative. My areas of expertise include curriculum development, eLearning, pedagogy and teacher standards.

I have a reasonably unusual set of perspectives from being in and out of school-based positions, being involved with significant reforms and their consequences, and my work nationally has given me working familiarity with the education jurisdictions in other states and territories and detailed understanding of distance education/eLearning nationally in both school and VET sectors.

I would like to comment on four specific areas:

1. The college system as such, compared to Year 7-12 high schools
2. Years 11/12 course development
3. The role and implementation of distance education for some students and eLearning generally.
4. Consideration of some variables that have recently been introduced in Tasmanian education, and not yet had time to show their impact.

1. 11/12 colleges and 7-12 high schools

Tasmania and ACT share the uniqueness in Australian States and Territories of having an 11/12 College system and Years 7-10 High Schools. The submission by Professors Ramsay and Rowan provides data to support the view that the ACT produces better results at a lower cost from their 11/12 Colleges. This report also suggests some differences between arrangements particularly in terms of teacher mobility between 7-10 and 11/12.

In Tasmania, I was, as a parent, involved in the process of the formation of Guilford Young College (GYC) in Hobart, in 1995. GYC was established as an economic rationalization strategy. It is relevant to note that, at the time, the Catholic system found that it could not adequately provide the specialist facilities needed for quality education at the 11/12 level, at each of their secondary schools. Specifically, they believed they could not compete academically with the government 11/12 colleges in Hobart.

The GYC history, and relative success of ACT colleges, arguably provide pragmatic support the continuation of colleges in Tasmania albeit with significant reform because the attainment and retention facts are undeniable in the data.

The argument put forward by many in the Tasmanian colleges, about the lack of capacity of teachers in high schools to teach the 11/12 subjects, if it has any merit, may be a consequence of the lack of mobility between secondary and senior secondary teachers, as argued in the submission by Professors Ramsay and Rowan.

2. 11/12 course development

Ever since I began networking nationally in the early nineties, and became familiar with the extent of supporting resources for subjects developed in the bigger states, it seemed a no-brainer that Tasmania could benefit from adopting curriculum from interstate rather than always developing our own. The resources that go into curriculum development could be redirected to professional development about good pedagogy and moderation processes.

This is particularly relevant for the smaller subjects where the pool of available expertise for curriculum development is very small. From a professional learning perspective, it is also arguable that by teaming up with another state through formal arrangements, teachers of the subject would be connected to a wider support network. Some teachers will do this anyway through their own professional learning networks but that is entirely optional.

As mentioned in other submissions, just as the Northern Territory uses South Australia's curriculum, why wouldn't Tasmania use, say, Victoria's (as the closest and therefore most economical to work with when face to face is required). They are after all, based on the Australian Curriculum.

3. Provision of Distance Education

The completely separate provision of Distance Education for K-10 and 11/12 is unique to Tasmania and an anomaly that has arisen through historic organisational restructure. Distance Education was at one stage provided from the one organisation but since splitting, each arm of distance provision has developed separately and almost entirely in isolation from each other

- K-10 – evolved from print-based materials into a blended model of synchronous lessons using web conferencing, supported by an asynchronous virtual classroom, supplemented by print-based resources and face to face workshops from time to time.
- 11/12 – print-based materials until 2016 when online courses became available for an increasing number of subjects, gradually phasing out print-based courses. Implementation of this transition has been largely based on translating the print-based materials online, which has long been established in eLearning circles as far from ideal.

K-10 Distance Education in Tasmania, has been informed in materials and course development, by its membership and participation in the Australasian Association of Distance Education Schools (AADAS). With the advent of online learning, this has provided a supportive mutual learning and sharing of experience about addressing the challenges of distance provision in the digital age.

Development of online courses is a time consuming and expensive process that lends itself to economies of scale, which we simply do not have in Tasmania.

It is interesting to note that:

1. The ACT, the other Australian government jurisdiction with an 11/12 College system, uses the NSW curriculum for its distance education provision, supporting students through two Distance Learning Centres, one for Primary and one for Secondary (7-12).
2. In the ACT, distance education has to be approved under certain criteria (as is the case in Tasmania), and enrolment is provisional for a term. Continuation is dependent on participation.
3. In Queensland, each of its eight Distance Education Schools used to develop their own materials and courses. About six or seven years ago, a decision was made to centralize course development at one location, the Brisbane School of Distance Education.
4. Many mainland jurisdictions allow single subject enrolment in Distance Education courses, particularly in Years 11/12.
5. In Tasmania, Distance Education is regarded as a last resort rather than a valid educational option to address equity issues.

Increasingly, in most jurisdictions, there has been collaboration or merging of innovative eLearning initiatives with the work of Distance Education, as systems come to grips with convergence of technologies and recognition that eLearning should be an integral aspect of mainstream schooling. Hence the increasing use of the term blended learning to apply to both campus-based provision of education and non campus-based models.

All states and territories have had to consider the rationalization of resources supporting the innovative eLearning initiatives that occurred in the early years of the World Wide Web (late nineties onwards) and the convergence of Distance Education moving to online delivery.

4. Elephants in the room?

The data on our dire situation are clear. The Terms of Reference for the Review identify some of the variables at play.

Saul Eslake, in his submission discussed economic drivers and variable related to socio-economic status.

Mike Middleton’s submission provides an historic perspective on the location of educational provision and some thoughts about the potential of distance learning.

I offer some thoughts on two sets of variables that do not appear to have been considered.

Legacy effects of failed or abandoned reform

Another set of variables is the impact of multiple major reforms on the teaching workforce.

I do not have the exact dates at hand and they are not available on the DoE website, so the following table is approximate only. It attempts to map the major reforms and reversals that have occurred in the past 15 years in terms of curriculum development K-10, organisational structure K-12 and Distance Education provision K-12. No major educational reform operates in political isolation and Secretaries of Education, while not without influence, at the end of the day are obliged to implement government policy of the time. Hence the naming of secretaries is to situate reforms in the context of the times rather than any personal reflection.

| Time period (Secretary of Education) | Major reforms | Years 11/12 governance | Distance Education provision (for those who qualify) |
|---|---|---|--|
| Dr Martyn Forrest | K-10: Essential Learnings Curriculum and associated professional learning | Under the one overall systemic umbrella Some transfer and continuity of corporate knowledge K-12 | Originally K-12 and at some stage scaled back to K-10, with Colleges looking after 11/12 |

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| John Smyth | <p>K-10: Dropping of Essential Learnings /Intro of Tasmanian Curriculum</p> <p>Massive loss of corporate knowledge as fallout from re-structure</p> <p>11/12 Tas Tomorrow - Academy/Polytechnic/ Skills Tas</p> | Systemically separate to 7-10 | <p>A. K-10 Distance Education/eSchool (transition from print-based to blended learning using synchronous and asynchronous technologies)</p> <p>B. K-10 Opt in eLearning Programs to cater for extension and some VET provision for 11/12</p> <p>(brief merging of A and B in 2010/11)</p> <p>C. 11/12 Flexible Learning Network (print-based/ brokered around colleges)</p> |
| Colin Pettit | <p>Reversal of Tas Tomorrow. 11/12 Colleges structure reinstated, TasTAFE reinstated</p> <p>K-10 Australian Curriculum implementation</p> | 11/12 Colleges brought back under umbrella of Learning Services | <p>A and B as above</p> <p>C. 11/12 Flexible Learning begins transition to online (but primarily as translation of print-based courses to online, which is not good practice)</p> |
| Jenny Gale | 9-12 Review | | <p>A and B as above</p> <p>C. 11/12 Flexible Provision continuing transition to online)</p> |

While the K-10 sector undertook the aspirational and intense work of developing the Essential Learnings Curriculum, and importantly, the associated high quality professional learning around pedagogy and the role of assessment, the 11/12 sector operated largely in isolation from this work.

Although the Essential Learnings Curriculum was abandoned, the legacy left behind from the professional learning was significant and had ongoing benefit to all those who participated. It translated naturally into the emerging Australian Curriculum and the language and spirit of the shape papers for each of the Australian Curriculum Learning areas strongly echoes that of the Essential Learnings. The centralized assessment and reporting system (SARIS) was implemented and in such a way that it could adapt to new curriculum frameworks, and continues today.

Continuity of Data Provision to Schools K-12

As part of the work begun with the Essential Learnings, centralized assessment and reporting was introduced and continues through the ongoing curriculum frameworks. The Colleges will begin to use this system in 2017. As soon as these data sets became centralized K-10, schools were provided with data about their performance in comparison to state averages and anomalies in assessment practices were identified and discussed. This was, and continues to be, part of an overall sustained effort to improve leadership knowledge and understanding of working with data and using it to inform school improvement plans.

Other data sets became available K-10 through the three systems – *edi*, attendance reporting through EduPoint and tracking of student support information through the Student Support System (SSS).

Now that colleges are no longer operating separate to the systems that govern K-10, these three systems are available to them and provide vital historic and current information about each student.

The systems are not perfect and there is still work to be done to make them more integrated as a one-stop shop but when used in combination they are incredibly powerful in understanding an individual student's story.

Centrally provided data about Year 11/12 students in terms of being on track for TCE attainment, are increasingly replacing the need for each college to develop their own internal systems. Manual checking against current reporting is still required but the task of monitoring individual student progress towards TCE attainment to inform intervention strategies, is being increasingly supported by the timely provision of data.

The point of this discussion about data provision, is that the combination of the 11/12 colleges being under the Learning Services rather than a separate network (ie the reversal of Tas Tomorrow reforms) plus the access to continuous data K-12, is relatively new and the potential for those two factors to address some of the

performance issues shown by the attainment and retention data, has not yet had time to play out.

The ACER 9-12 Review should not discount the impact on the collective workforce psyche of the multiple major reform attempts in the last 15 years.

Summary

If we accept the original premise for separate 11/12 colleges based on the same economic rationalization that led to the establishment of Guilford Young College, then we should be prepared to learn from the more successful ACT in its implementation of Colleges.

Movement of teachers appears to be a major implementation difference between ACT and Tasmania. The data shows that movement out of Colleges is rare. However, we must be careful not to throw the baby out with the bathwater, and it will take time to address this issue.

Perhaps the dire data sets are illustrating the cumulative effects of past reform attempts that have in fact been underwhelming, if not damaging in some cases, and from which we have only started to recover.

Perhaps we need both – 11/12 colleges and 11/12 extensions to some high schools, to retain students who might leave after Year 10. There is an argument however, that getting students out of their local environment, to a wider perspective, is a good thing especially in the more disadvantaged areas.

Smart use of technology to share expertise, especially for small subjects is clearly part of the solution. Learning design should be informed by good practice from elsewhere – we can get from novice to specialist, learning from the journeys already undertaken elsewhere without needing to reinvent the wheel.

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