

I am a senior secondary teacher in Tasmania, delivering Level 2 and Level 3 courses and also Certificate 2 in Electrotechnology to students from southern colleges.

I am gravely concerned about the future direction of year 11 and 12 education in this state and the way in which data is interpreted to justify political agendas.

I believe that in Tasmania having year 11 and 12 separate from secondary education enables students to access a greater range of courses with experienced teaching staff.

As Tasmania is a small state the current senior secondary system works extremely well. Having a college that is fed from a number of high schools allows the college to have the numbers to employ teachers with expertise in the fields required to move students to the next stage of their education or employment.

Having year 11 and 12 in high schools only retains a small body of students at each school and does not allow the school the ability to employ teaching staff that have the expertise to take the students further. We already see this happening in high schools where teachers are teaching outside of their specialised areas in years 7-10.

Keeping the colleges separate to high schools also allows for the continuation of the successful delivery of VET courses. There is the argument that the students can go to TAFE to undertake VET training if they wish to do so. I believe this is highly detrimental to the student and fragments their learning and also can set them up to disengage from learning before they reach their potential or explore all their future possibilities. I have seen this in the past with students that have done dual enrolment's with TAFE and the colleges.

When a student goes to college they have access to both level 2 and level 3 courses, VET courses and more importantly pastoral care and pathway planning. The benefits to students and what they can access are why we have so much success. This success however is not recognised by the government. For example this year I had approximately 34 applicants for Certificate 2 in Electrotechnology(Career start) of which 16 students were accepted into the course. These students came from all the southern colleges including the private sector. The benefit for these students is that while carrying out the course they can also undertake two other courses as well as receiving pastoral support and assistance in planning their future. Most of the students are encouraged and choose to do Level 3 course's. This ensures the student has a solid back up plan and will potentially be able to access university studies if they are unsuccessful in the electrical industry. The whole focus of the support and care given by teaching staff is to ensure that students create every opportunity to succeed in their lives. Students have voiced that they do not receive the same level of individual pastoral support and planning in their previous high schools, that they do when they come to college.

At the moment the government measures success in both retention and attainment. This is where in the governments data says my course has failed. Currently in October my class retention is 44% and only 30% will receive the full Certificate, the other 70% will receive a statement of attainment for the units they have completed.

What the data fails to recognise is the huge success of the course, as every one of the 56% of leaving students have gained apprenticeships directly from this course's close ties with industry and industry employers. These students have moved to the next stage of their lives, undertaking employment and further training in the industry that they so strongly desired to be involved with. For each student this move is done with close consultation with their families and the employer.

The other downside of the success of the course is that each of those leaving students also left their other courses at their colleges. This also has a negative outcome for the overall retention and attainment of the colleges overall data. When you have several successful VET courses in a college, the data can soon start to look very bad, even when the college is one of the most successful in helping young Tasmanians reach their goals.

It is my belief that disbanding colleges or removing VET courses and sending students to TAFE would take away the very essence of what education, learning and pastoral care is all about. TAFE's focus should be on training at Cert 3 and above or helping mature age students retrain and gain further qualifications.

Young Tasmanian's under 18 years should be able to access Vocational Training, Level 2 and Level 3 courses while staying within a system that supports them to have every opportunity and not limit them to one focus or limited opportunities.

On closing I would also like to note that it is the diversity of young people, from varying communities and backgrounds that opens a college students eyes to the potential around them and assists them to become all they can be. This may be greatly limited if students are kept in a 7-12 system located in their local high school community.



Kaleb Smith | Teacher
Claremont College | Department of Education