

Submission for Year 9-12 Review

School Structure

It is my belief that the current system of 7-10 high schools followed by fewer 11 and 12 Colleges is not structurally beneficial to a number of young people of Tasmania. It is often purported that this is a similar system to the ACT, however, both the demographic and culture are different and not a fair or helpful comparison.

Due to the culturally accepted norms, in some sections of the community of “Leavers” at the completion of Year 10, there are significant flaws with the current system that ensures the culture perpetuates. For young some people who often do not have determined pathways, the transition that comes at Year 10 creates a choice/decision point. For some students, the absence of a goal and pathway will see this choice being one where they can ‘opt out’ of education. With some elements of the parent community and indeed industry sector encouraging this, far too many young people are disengaging from education too early. Having all schools that are a 7-12 pathway without transition will enable greater retention and engagement of students, this is due to the “natural pathway” without transition or change through to Year 12.

The data currently shows that of those who do start at Colleges, proportionately less complete their TCE than in schools that have a 7-12 structure. The belief is that this is a result of students becoming ‘lost’ in the transition and overwhelmed by the step from the Australian Curriculum at Year 10 through to the TASC based courses of Year 11 and 12.

A 7-10 structure is also prohibitive to some students’ success in a number of ways. For effective learning and teaching to occur, a teachers are best served knowing ‘where a student is coming from and where they are heading’ in relation to their learning and the curriculum. This is best known through experience, not just through theory. A 7-10 / 11 - 12 structure presents a number of barriers for some students. These include:

- Teachers of 7-10 do not have a robust knowledge of what is required in a senior curriculum and/or potential pathways.
- Teachers of 11/12 do not have a working knowledge of 7-10 curriculum. This then means that if there are omissions in the learning sequence. These cannot be incorporated into future 7-10 curriculum, due to the lack of immediate communication and thorough understanding that occurs when a teacher is a practitioner across all year levels (7-12).
- Students in 7-12 students are able to easily access TCE based courses at lower year levels, due to the opportunities and expertise that is present on a 7-12 site. Having access to courses means that students have broad opportunities and can commence pre-tertiary and VET based courses more easily in Years 9 and 10. This supports student engagement and retention.
- A Senior College based system is positive for highly motivated, academic and supported students, however, far too many fall through the gaps given that they are

not yet prepared for the more adult based, university style education provision that lacks the proactive checks and balances. For some students the scaffolding is not as structured as they require.

- Students in younger year levels are exposed to the dedication, mature discipline and self-directed learning of senior students. This has an extremely positive effect on students, especially in Years 9 and 10. Having positive role models and being able to realise the importance of the senior years of education greatly motivates and inspires.
- For a young person to learn, most need to first feel that they are known, safe and valued. With transition to larger colleges there is often some concern about the sense of connection and community, due to 50% of the population changing each year. For some young people this presents no issues and indeed can be a source of great engagement, however, it is not the case for others. A 7-12 pathway ensures continuity of relationship, knowledge and connection to both peers and staff. The wellbeing outcomes for young people are greatly affected by positive and secure relationships.

It is my belief that many of the barriers to changing the system are put forward by people who have worked within the structures for long periods of time and obviously have a personally vested interest. There is often misunderstanding, and occasionally fear expressed about having to teach ages, either higher or lower, and having had no experience of feeling competent in teaching beyond their current role requirements. There is also the fear of the unknown for community members who have never experienced another reality to that of the current structure.

Often the government cost of change is also highlighted as a barrier. While this is true in the short term, in the long term the cost of not changing is far greater, given the outcomes that are currently being achieved.

Year 9 and 10 Curriculum

It has been relatively recent for Tasmania to have a robust, rigorous and well documented 7-10 curriculum. This has come as a result of the implementation of the Australian Curriculum. I would strongly encourage that this is not wound back. Moving away from the framework, resources and research that is available from the Australian Curriculum would be a backward step for Tasmanian Schools.

There are some suggestions that the current curriculum is too advanced for some students. As with any curriculum, there are opportunities for differentiation of both teaching and learning, where this presents as a need. It would not be wise to develop and implement non-Australian Curriculum based courses and programs that lower the expectations for students, based on engagement rather than ability.

Years 11 and 12

The TCE requires close planning and monitoring to ensure all criteria are satisfied. It is often described as an 'opt in' program, rather than an automatic achievement through a structured

sequence of mandated requirements. It is our belief that this should be streamlined and that course planning should happen in a manner that automatically enables a student to qualify for their TCE, rather than to have to navigate the points, ticks, etc. currently required. Similar to the Victorian system, to qualify students will need to complete a minimum number of courses over the two year period and this will have a built in safety net for students, should they not pass one or two subjects. A compulsory English pass would be a mandate for successfully gaining the TCE.

Tasmania has a low literacy and numeracy levels for adults. It would be highly advantageous if English and Mathematics had compulsory units in Year 11 or 12. Given that literacy and numeracy are fundamental to success in all subject areas, it is disappointing that a student can finish study in these areas at the end of Year 10.

The concept of the “ticks” in numeracy, literacy and ICT need to be abolished. If a course is offered at Year 11 or 12 and does not have the basic literacy, numeracy and ICT skills that are covered in these tests, it is not a course of sufficient standard to be assessed as a senior college curriculum in the first place. Each course needs to have embedded requirements that ensures the students meet the standards set.

At present the indicative hours for courses is set such that it limits the number of subject offerings that students can participate in. It may be of benefit to reduce the indicative hours which will enable a broader subject choice without limiting the depth and rigour of courses. Having course such as set at indicative times of 150 means that schools are reluctant to reduce the face to face hours for fear of not giving adequate instructional time to courses. With more subject completion over a two year period students would have greater capacity to achieve TCE points and indeed have built in contingency points should a need arise.

Quality over Quantity

A perceived benefit of the Tasmanian Senior Secondary Curriculum is the breadth of offerings. However, the reality is, that the breadth comes at the expense of quality. There are many courses that are similar in nature and course content. The Senior College curriculum would be better placed with fewer more high quality courses that are appropriately resourced, assessed and audited. This would also allow for greater teacher development.

VET

VET in the current format is problematic in schools. Given that many VET based courses require blocked time, they tend to clash with other TASC based courses. Students will often need to attend whole day VET courses and blocked classes which necessitates missing timetable lessons in other subject areas. This means that students have to ensure that they then catch up on work missed. Given the frequency and amount of time missed students, unless they are highly organised and motivated tend to perform more poorly on the subject areas they are missing.

For VET to be to industry standard, current industry knowledge is required. Finding these people and then ensuring that their training and qualifications meet with industry standards

is essential. Often there is criticism of the training received in schools as a result of the experience of the VET trainer.

VET in schools is also often directed by industry. It is interesting that we allow commercial enterprises to direct student learning, who ultimately wish to benefit from the services the workforce then offers. It in itself is not encouraging entrepreneurship. It is creating an “on demand” workforce for private providers. Students’ careers are potentially being shaped by profit driven enterprises, rather than student passion and interest areas. This is especially true in regional areas. There is also concern at private providers profiting from education, with little focus on the service to students and more on the profit margins achieved. ASQA has been of benefit in requiring all RTOs to be more accountable for quality and rigour of programs.

VET is of great value and is an essential and valued pathway for many students, it does however, need to be reevaluated in how it is best implemented in schools.

Administration of Current Senior Curriculum

We have concerns about the changing nature of points for TCE. At times, a guidance scale is provided for points, particularly with VET courses, only to have these change. Obviously if you are pathway planning for students over a two year period, certainty on the points, ICT, Literacy, Numeracy ticks are paramount. Changes in either points or requirements can adversely affect student outcomes in relation to the achievement of TCE. Additionally, we have had some issues in relation to the administration and recording of provided information. I do not believe these are systemic issues, simply oversights or omissions.

We believe that there needs to be a cut-off point, at which time, if a student drops a subject or course, that they are recorded as not achieving the outcomes on their official transcript. At this stage, students can put off, dropping or changing subjects until very late in the year and this in itself has application and endeavour outcomes on students. A more rigid structure in this regard would be beneficial to students and Colleges. Similarly, we believe there needs to be firmer guidelines and timelines on the concept/practice of ‘dropping back’ where students choose to move from a Level 3 course back to a Level 2, if the achievement has not been as required. This process would indicate that the courses are the same, with differing levels of achievement criteria. This of course is not the case, and most, if not all are different courses that would require different delivery throughout the year and therefore ‘dropping back’ is not an option. We push against it in our courses, however, it is difficult when students know it is done in other colleges.

The concept of dropping back also breeds “taking the easy route”. Many students are capable of achieving, however, fail to complete the work required with the knowledge that there are “easier options” to fall back on. Some students will essentially lower their expectations. Challenging and supporting students with a scaffold for achievement is a more productive approach, however, this is hindered by giving options to opt out.

Data for Informed Practice

Data is essential for informing practice, at present the data from our Senior College Curriculum is lacking. Our College would like access to robust and qualified data that enables

interrogation, exploration and understanding of student cohort performance. This data can then lead to school centred improvements, based on the information discerned in the context of intra and inter school performances. This data ideally will be displayed in a number of formats, including, individual school, and State comparative and also sectorial. The data supplied to each sector should be standard and varied, only based on school context.

For the individual school, data it is desired to have trends over a three to five year period and also to have yearly growth data highlighted.

In relation to subject marking moderated data, I would suggest that this it is fundamentally flawed and the criterion based assessment and subjective nature of the ratings applied both within and between schools needs to be reevaluated. My overall belief is that the data that is supplied through our current assessment and reporting mechanism, as a result of our Senior College Curriculum structure and assessment, is far too subjective and therefore inequitable for all students.

Summation

This review is a great opportunity to reevaluate how we approach our Senior Years Curriculum. It is essentially important that we look beyond our current approaches and those of Australia in general, and look for examples from throughout the world where there is quantitative and qualitative data highlighting success and worth of the programs offered in similar communities. I also believe, that we need to recognise the resource limitations of a state our size and utilise the strengths and resources of other states, sectors and governments, from both within Australia and beyond. It is imperative for the young people of Tasmania that we all put aside our personal bias and focus on student learning outcomes as the driver for decisions.