

**STATE OF TASMANIA
YEARS 9 – 12 EDUCATION REVIEW**

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ATTACHMENT 3

WILL HARVESTING THE LOW HANGING FRUIT END THE TCE FAMINE? Michael Rowan and Eleanor Ramsay August 2016

When we begin a discussion about Tasmania's low rate of TCE attainment, compared to other states, we frequently encounter three objections to the whole project of interstate comparisons. We are told is not fair to compare our rate of senior secondary certificate attainment with the other states because

1. the other states are so much larger and wealthier;
2. the TCE requires students to do extra things which students do not have to do to get their senior secondary certificates in other states;
3. which has led to Tasmanian students who might have got their TCE have not bothering to do if they were headed for university as only an ATAR was required to get into UTAS.

We have dealt with each of these attempted explanations of the problem elsewhere, by

- comparing individual Tasmanian schools with similar schools in other states and showing that there remains a 20-30% gap between our students' rate of Year 12 certificate attainment and similar students in similar schools in other states (the [TASki gap](#));
- looking in detail at the requirements of the various states' senior secondary certificates to show that the claim that Tasmania makes it harder to get your Year 12 is [without foundation](#);
- noting that almost [twice as many students](#) get the TCE as get an ATAR (much less than that in government schools).

Recently, however, these old objections to interstate comparison have come back in a more hopeful form: if we overcome these problems, we will lift our TCE attainment rate and hence – by implication if not explicitly stated – solve the problem of our low attainment rate without having to do more, in particular without having to reform senior secondary schooling.

Of course problem (1) – the relatively low income of our community – will not be easily solved. Indeed, Saul Eslake argues that we will not lift our income until we improve our productivity and that requires increasing our educational attainment.

But what about (2) and (3)? By comparison to increasing the wealth of our community or even reforming our senior secondary education system, these are low hanging fruit. Could we close the TASki gap by harvesting these low hanging fruit?

Let's use TQA/TASC data to construct a table of how many more students might have got their TCE but for problems (2) and (3).

We need to start with an agreed basis for counting. The accepted way is to estimate the population who might have been able to gain their Year 12 certificate in any year – the potential year 12/13 cohort. Then we need to count

how many of these gained their TCE, and of those that did not, the reason for their failing to do so. Here is the TQA/TASC data compiled on this basis.

2015 Year 12/13 cohort	6719	
Achieved the TCE in 2015	3385	50.4%
Achieved an ATAR in 2015	2202	32.8%
Got 120 points by 2015 but not the TCE	222	3.3%
Did not have 80 points at level 2 or above	28	0.4%
Did not meet literacy standard	64	1.0%
Did not meet numeracy standard	80	1.2%
Did not meet ICT standard	137	2.0%
Got ATAR but not the TCE in 2013		
Did not have 120 points	58	
Did not meet literacy standard	3	
Did not meet numeracy standard	60	
Did not meet ICT standard	13	
Additional TCEs if the TCE awarded to all students with 120 points (222) or an ATAR but not 120 points (58)*	280	4.2%
TOTAL TCEs with all low hanging fruit picked	3665	54.5%

NOTES.

1. This is all state-wide data – all students from all schools.

2. Data for 2015 from

http://www.tqa.tas.gov.au/4DCGI/WWW_doc/836955/RND01/Rates_of_Attainment_2015.pdf

3. Data for 2013 from TQA

http://www.tqa.tas.gov.au/4DCGI/WWW_doc/257443/RND01/5.2_Attachment_B_CEO_to_UTAS_-_ATAR_eligibility_requirements_2....pdf

* Data for 'got an ATAR but not the TCE' is not available for 2015. However, the percentage of the age cohort receiving an ATAR in 2015 (32.8%) was virtually the same as 2013 (32.9%) while the age cohort was just 112 persons larger. Accordingly, it is reasonable to use the 2013 figure for 'ATAR but no TCE' as if it were for 2015, and add to the number of TCEs awarded in 2015 the additional number (222) if all students with 120 points gained the TCE, and the (2013) number for all students who did not gain 120 points but did get an ATAR (58), making 280 in total.

What do we learn from this? We should indeed harvest the low hanging fruit. It will make a difference to the lives of a few hundred students. Dollars are by no means the measure of it, but they are an easy measure. The Gonski report put the value of a Year 12 certificate at an additional \$300,000 in lifetime earnings. That is paying off the mortgage for many Tasmanian families.

But if we are looking to close the TAski gap – to get our schools' rates of Year 12 attainment up to the rate of similar schools in other states, we will need to aim a little higher than picking these low hanging fruit.