

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

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Please note that the views expressed in this review are the authors' alone, and do not represent the position of the University of Tasmania or any other organization or group with which the authors are associated.

## I. Preamble

**Something is deeply wrong with schooling in Tasmania and it has been this way for many years.\*** This is shown starkly in the table below, which for each jurisdiction across Australia shows the proportion of the population (calculated as an age standardized rate - ASR) that left school at year 10 or below or did not go to school. We need to root any discussion of the future of schooling in Tasmania in this reality, and consider carefully what we can learn from this census data.

People who left school at year 10 or below (all schools), or did not go to school (ASR/100, 2011)	
AUSTRALIA	34.3
<i>Greater Capital City Statistical Areas</i>	30.1
<i>Rest of States/ NT</i>	41.8
NEW SOUTH WALES	37.6
<i>Greater Sydney</i>	32.1
<i>Rest of NSW</i>	46.3
VICTORIA	29.4
<i>Greater Melbourne</i>	26.8
<i>Rest of Vic.</i>	36.3
QUEENSLAND	36.8
<i>Greater Brisbane</i>	33.3
<i>Rest of Qld</i>	39.8
SOUTH AUSTRALIA	29.8
<i>Greater Adelaide</i>	27.8
<i>Rest of SA</i>	36.3
WESTERN AUSTRALIA	32.8
<i>Greater Perth</i>	30.6
<i>Rest of WA</i>	40.2
<b>TASMANIA</b>	<b>45.7</b>
<b><i>Greater Hobart</i></b>	<b>39.4</b>
<b><i>Rest of Tas.</i></b>	<b>50.3</b>
NORTHERN TERRITORY	39.8
<i>Greater Darwin</i>	<sup>i</sup> 31.3
<i>Rest of NT</i>	52.4
AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY	23.8

Extracted from the Social Health Atlases of Australia <http://phidu.torrens.edu.au/social-health-atlases/data-social-health-atlases-of-australia-local-government-areas> - education data from the 2011 Australian Census)

\* This submission is focused on the Tasmanian public education system, where we find the biggest gap compared to the rest of the country in terms of Yr12 attainment. The data and other evidence presented relates to the Tasmanian public system alone, unless otherwise specified or the context makes clear that all schools are included, as in this table.

The big fact that this table reveals is that in 2011 a person living in **greater Hobart** was **more likely to have left school at year 10** (if they had got that far, and regardless of the kind of school they attended) than a person living in **any other metropolitan area** in Australia and indeed more likely than a person living in **country South Australia** or **country Victoria**, and about as likely to have no schooling beyond year 10 as people living **outside the capital cities in the whole of the rest of Australia** – 39.4 for greater Hobart, and 41.8 for Australia beyond the capitals. As for the rest of Tasmania (50.3), it is scarcely above the Northern Territory outside Darwin (52.4) – where the 2011 census found that 55.6% of the population is Indigenous.

There is more here we need to face up to. Hobart is a university city. It has a large highly educated workforce. The Social Health Atlas records this in the low ASR of people who have no schooling beyond Yr10 in the Hobart local government area (LGA) itself – just 22.8, less than the ACT. That looks good. Taking the bus south to the home of the Australian Antarctic Division, Kingborough (34.1), starts to change the picture, but not yet dramatically. However, if we take a bus ride of less than half an hour east of the centre of Hobart to Clarence (40.4), the ASR of people with no schooling beyond Yr10 is almost double that of Hobart, while if we take the short bus ride north to Glenorchy (49.2) the situation changes completely, with the latter approaching the figure for the NT **outside** of Darwin in company with commuter suburbs further afield like Sorell (49.1), while the Derwent Valley (54.7) and Brighton (56.8) exceed the NT figure.

Indeed, **all the LGAs in greater Hobart but Clarence and the City of Hobart itself** have a higher rate of schooling ending at Yr10 than **every LGA in Victoria and South Australia**, with the exception of the Anangu Pitjantjatjara Lands. The rate of schooling no higher than Yr10 of the communities living in **half** of the remaining Tasmanian LGAs, **including the cities of Devonport** (53.5) and **Burnie** (53.1), is higher than the NT outside Darwin. There is no parallel for this anywhere else in modern Australia. Not in Alice Springs (33.7) or Broome (36.8) or Cairns (34.6) or Dubbo (46.9).

**In fact something is deeply wrong with schooling in Tasmania** – more precisely, senior secondary schooling in the state system as further data presented below shows – and it has been this way for many years.

In what follows we will present further data to show that the common explanations of this situation - various forms of blaming the victim – do not stand up to evidence informed interrogation. Rather, as analysis in this submission seeks to show, the cause of this problem is that the public senior secondary education system which is funded for all in fact works well for just a few – a few students, and a few teachers – who have opposed previous attempts at reform and continue to vociferously defend their privileges. While those left out and left behind have lacked the publicly available data to understand that their individual circumstances are not their fault but part of a wider pattern in senior secondary schooling which systematically disadvantages the many and advantages the few.

The Review is a welcome opportunity, at long last, for a moment of truthful and fearless scrutiny of education in Tasmania. A review which can lay bare the injustice of the current system of state funded senior secondary schooling, and so embolden and strengthen the determination of the many educators and others in the wider community committed to ensuring **all** young Tasmanian's enjoy the benefits of a full secondary

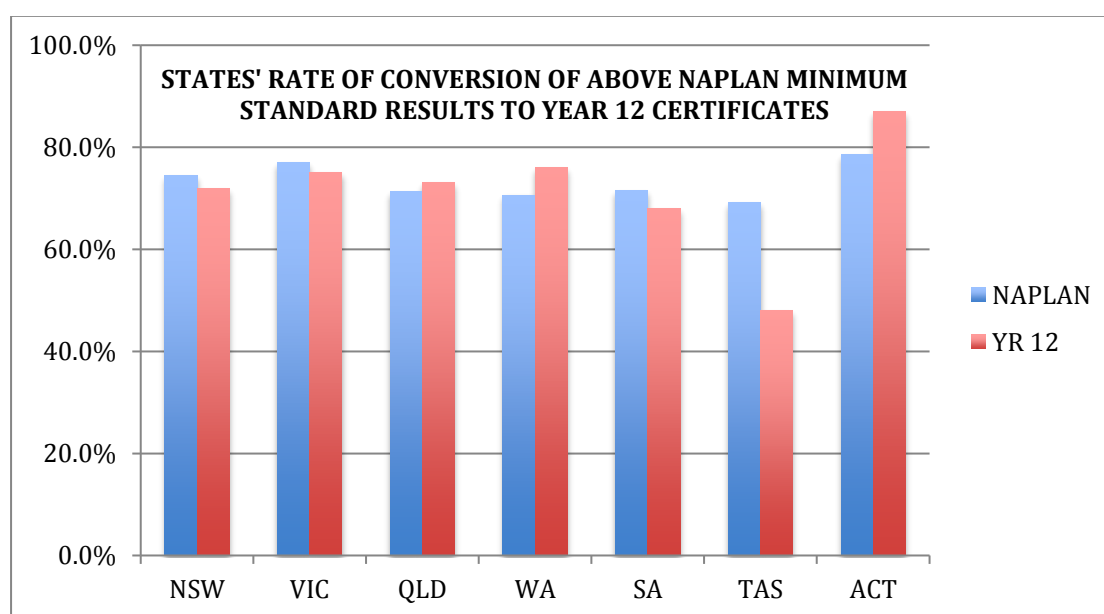
education, regardless of where they live or the educational backgrounds of their families and communities.

## II. The Nature of the Problem

The number one priority in Tasmania is increasing the rate at which our young people successfully complete year 12. This has been acknowledged by the State and many local governments, and emphasized by business and industry. It has been clearly stated by the youth, health and community sectors, and most importantly, by spokespeople for our least affluent communities.

Pursuing this goal is an obligation placed on Tasmania by the Committee of Australian Governments (COAG) in adopting the Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians (and the related National Partnerships Agreement for Youth Attainment and Transitions), and indeed by the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (the fourth of which is that *all* students complete a full and free secondary education by 2030). In Australia and the OECD, the successful completion of twelve years of schooling by the attainment of the Yr12 certificate (or an equivalent) is now universally considered the minimum pre-requisite for young people to lead healthy, productive and happy lives in the twenty first century.

While no state of Australia has yet reached the COAG goals for Yr12 (or equivalent) attainment, most are ensuring that just about all students whose pre-compulsory education has been successful continue to complete year 12, as evidenced by the close relationship between Yr9 NAPLAN results and Yr12 attainment. But Tasmania is right out of step with this positive national trend, as shown graphically below.



**NOTE** data is for all schooling sectors, except for NSW which is only for the public system.  
**NAPLAN data** is the percentage of year 9 students in 2010 who achieved above the national minimum standard for NAPLAN, averaged across the 5 tests.  
**Year 12 certificate data** is for students who attained their senior secondary certificate in 2013 as a percentage of all 2010 year 9 students.  
**For further details** and an analysis of the data used in this graph, see *Tasmania's Year 12 Results: we can do much better*, January 23, 2015, at <http://educationambassadors.org.au>

### III. Is this really a problem for Tasmania?

As the graph above shows, students in year 9 in Tasmania achieve **very similar NAPLAN results** compared with students in other states. With the exception of Victoria and the ACT, the difference is less than 5%. Yet in the **attainment of the Yr12 certificate**, the gap between Tasmania and the other states (and the ACT) is 20% and more. And while in the other jurisdictions the difference between the percentage of year 9s above the national minimum standard for NAPLAN and the rate at which these students continue to gain their Yr12 certificates ranges between minus 3% and plus 7%, **Tasmania is off the scale** with a gap of 21% between the two measures – and that is for students attending all schools.

One response to this disparity between Tasmania's senior secondary educational outcomes and those of the rest of the nation is that this is not really a problem at all. Tasmania, it is said, should not be compared with other states because we are unlike them in not having a large capital city where most of the population lives – and this skews the results of the other states. If you compared Tasmania to regions of the other states, this line of argument continues – if you thought of us as 'Extremely South Gippsland' – the difference in attainment rates which is supposed to be a problem would disappear.

Attempting to explain away the problem in this way should be rejected for four reasons.

First, the difference between the educational outcomes of capital city and regional and rural communities in other states is not a natural order of things which other states accept cannot be changed. People living outside capital cities have the same rights to a healthy, happy and productive life, for which education is the best foundation. It would condemn Tasmania to a future as an educational backwater and our people to less healthy and fulfilling lives if we were to take the failure of other states to achieve equity of educational outcomes across their communities as a reason to accept inequity between the achievement of our students and students in other states.

Second, as rural industries themselves become more knowledge intensive, the educational needs of regional and rural communities are growing. Primary industries are no longer low-skill, low value-add concerns that sell products of varying quality into protected markets. They are high tech, high quality, high value, internationally competitive industries. Like our wine, whisky, cider, cheese, aquaculture, dairy, agriculture, tourism and cultural industries, which are all world class and need to keep improving to remain in that position. To do so they require an educational system and levels of educational attainment which not only match those across the country but are themselves world standard.

Third, as we will explore in some detail below, this version of Tasmanian exceptionalism is not supported by the evidence of comparative Yr12 attainment rates for students living in otherwise demographically similar communities in Tasmania and elsewhere. When we do compare Tasmanian public schools' Yr12 attainment rates with those of schools in like communities in other states – regional with regional, rural with rural – we find that the gap in Yr12 attainment **widens** rather than disappears. As we will see below, even if we wanted to be Extremely South Gippsland rather than the State of Tasmania, we would still need to greatly lift our secondary students' educational attainment.

Fourth, the argument fundamentally misunderstands the role and importance of education in a society. It falls into the trap of thinking that the nature of society inevitably determines

the nature of educational achievements. **But it can and should be the other way around.** The reason communities set ambitious goals for schooling – from the Melbourne Declaration to the UN’s Sustainable Development Goals – is that improving education is the most equitable and effective way of improving society, of increasing the quality of life of the population overall and reducing inequalities between members of any community.

So, if Tasmania is different, we have to ask what has been the role of the education system in creating and sustaining this difference? And we must insist that our education system changes as required to provide the means by which Tasmania can achieve the future health, wealth and happiness of its citizens that is at least equivalent to those of other Australians.

#### **IV. Testing common explanations**

In seeking to explain Tasmania’s low rate of senior secondary attainment, there has been a distinct disinclination to look at the State’s education system itself, to interrogate its current operations to find out whether, how, and to what extent it is contributing to this underperformance at the senior secondary level. Instead common suggestions to ‘explain’ the situation typically focus outwards, blaming the students, their parents, their communities, the Tasmanian labour market, or the requirements of our Yr12 certificate (the Tasmanian Certificate of Education, the TCE).

This submission presents evidence to test and dismiss each in turn.

##### **1. Blaming the students - for lacking capacity and aspiration**

###### Students’ capacity

It is clear from Tasmanian students’ Yr9 NAPLAN achievements that lack of capacity is not an issue. The study which produced the graph above found that the percentage of Tasmanian students achieving above the national minimum standard in Yr9 NAPLAN (averaged across the five test areas) was within a few percentage points of the other states. In stark contrast to the large gap in Yr12 attainment between Tasmanian and the other states and the ACT.

However, as already noted, some in the Tasmanian education community reject any such findings on the basis that in comparing Tasmania with other states we are not comparing ‘apples with apples’ - (ignoring the fact that the ‘rural and regional effect’ is seen as much in NAPLAN as Yr12 attainment and therefore would not be expected to be found in any differences between the two). They suggest that rather than making state-to-state comparisons it would be more meaningful to compare Tasmanian Yr12 attainment rates with other regional areas on the mainland.

To definitively test this hypothesis we went further, undertaking a school by school benchmarking study which compared key educational outcomes from a broadly representative sample of Tasmanian secondary schools with those from sets of similar schools in four other states. The similar schools were identified from the *My School* site using the Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage (ICSEA) - so we compared like schools with like schools rather than making comparisons between jurisdictions or even sub-regions within jurisdictions. Almost 300 schools in total are included in this analysis.

The findings are even more revealing, and concerning, than our earlier state-by-state comparisons - with the Tasmanian schools in the benchmarking study coming top or in the top half of their set of similar interstate schools for Yr9 NAPLAN, but bottom or near to it for Yr12 attainment. When comparing key educational outcomes from Tasmanian schools with schools in four other states with the same levels of socio-educational advantage or disadvantage, our NAPLAN results are better and generally much better than the other schools' average, but our Yr12 attainment is always worse.

See **Attachment 1** for this benchmarking study, and a briefer summary of its findings at <http://educationambassadors.org.au> *Benchmarking Tasmanian NAPLAN and Year 12 Attainment Rates*, July 26, 2016. For the full data set from which the analysis derives, see *Benchmarks For Year 12 Research Paper* at the Did You Know sidebar of the same site.

#### Students' educational aspirations post Yr10

As for pointing the finger at our students' lack of aspirations beyond the junior secondary years as the cause of Tasmania's low senior secondary attainment, this is simply not supported by research. As reported in an article in *The Mercury* late last year, the ARC funded UTAS-Department of Education (DoE) **Beyond Yr10** research project (2012-14) surveyed more than 3,500 students from rural, outer regional, and disadvantaged communities across the State. Findings include that some 90% indicated that education is important to them, with almost three quarters of the students in primary and high schools agreeing that continuing post Yr10 is important, almost half of the student respondents intending to go on to university and about a third into an apprenticeship. (Suzie Right and Jane Watson, "Open the Window of Opportunity" in *The Mercury*, Oct 23 2015, p.22)

#### Schools' expectations of students

Even if we had found that Tasmanian students lack aspiration for educational achievement beyond Yr10, we would need to ask where these aspirations have come from and what has been done – or not done – to counter low aspiration should it in fact be an important factor in explaining lack of achievement at Yr12.

Here we need to attend to counterproductive messages which the education system itself may deliver, whether wittingly or unwittingly, about the importance of and students' capacity to benefit from a full twelve years of school education. For example, one high school principal in preparing for his school to offer Yrs 11 and 12, told us of his astonishment at the multiple ways the school's communications to parents had been sending the message that school finishes at Yr10, with anything beyond an option to be considered rather than an entitlement and expectation. And the UTAS-DoE **Beyond Yr10** research project already mentioned found "Some teachers are surprised that the Australian Curriculum states that students are entitled to all of the content (and) Many teachers don't see this as realistic for their students". This research further found that "Many teachers/principals believe that getting students enrolled in Year 11 is an end in itself (and) Some teachers/principals think in terms of completing Year 11 rather than Year 12." And finally that "Community attitudes characterised as unhelpful are evident amongst some teachers and principals." (Beswick, K. "Whose Aspirations Matter?" presentation to UTAS symposium, June 26, 2015)

We need to consider this issue – aspirations and expectations – in more detail, because lack of aspirations on the part of students is becoming a dominant explanation of the state of Tasmania's senior secondary schooling, with well intentioned attempts to increase attainment unintentionally reinforcing what can easily default to a victim-blaming approach.

Aspirations do matter: they determine what we **intentionally** achieve. What we aspire to do, and the level at which we aspire to do it, is fundamental to our identity and the extent to which we flourish in our lives.

But aspirations are not just a matter of our identity conceived of as a fact about our psychology. **Our aspirations are not formed in isolation, but in interpersonal and social contexts.** How others see us and how we are positioned in relation to institutions, which of our tentative aspirations are reinforced and which belittled, is a powerful voice that whispers in our ear from our earliest years as we form and rework our dreams and plans. To enjoy a bit of a word play, let us say that while our aspirations matter, **others' expectations mutter.** Indeed, they sometimes shout.

So when a young Tasmanian is forming aspirations for their education and career, who is muttering in their ear, conveying the expectations of others and thus influencing their aspirations? Obviously parents, extended family, friends – the all important peer group – are important. But so too are teachers, the media, and all other social institutions with which the young person comes into contact.

That poses an important – indeed, fundamental - question: do teachers, principals, and the Department of Education, **expect all young people** to successfully complete their schooling – that is, gain their TCE (or equivalent), and do they communicate this message of entitlement and high expectations loudly and clearly to all students, their parents and their communities?

Of course we must accept that not absolutely **all** young people **will** complete the TCE. Rather we are asking whether we **begin** with the **expectation that all will**, and reluctantly accept that this will not be the case by exception. Or whether we have the opposite view – that year 12 is not for all, and perhaps even that we can identify who is not suited to year 12 from early in their schooling?

The DoE Booklet *School Life: information for parents and caregivers about Tasmanian government schools*, 2011, did not mention the TCE at all, and made only three passing references to anything beyond year 10. Here they are:

- The Department of Education is responsible for education from Kindergarten to Year 12...
- Term dates for colleges and the Tasmanian Polytechnic are different from K-10 school term dates and may vary between campuses. Please contact your child's campus directly for more information.
- Young people are required to complete the school year during which they turn 16, and continue participating in education or training until they turn 17. Participation options include: undertaking study at a college or district high school (Years 11 and 12).

The reader might think that 2011 is ancient history. Not so. The 2013 version of this booklet – the last year of junior high school for students who should have been doing Yr12 last year - still made no mention of the TCE, and to encourage all parents of students starting school to think of it as a twelve year journey the then Secretary of the Department said this in his introduction:

*School Life* is designed for parents and carers of students entering Tasmanian government schools for the first time or transitioning from primary to high school. Students entering colleges should refer to the Years 11 and 12 guide available on our website.

In 2014 when we went to the Department of Education web site we found an invitation



to click on a link to the School Information brochures for parents, which had replaced the *School Life* booklet. There we found a list of 42 PDFs. *Understanding years 11 and 12* was number 26, right after Child Family Centres; Launching into Learning; Starting Kindergarten; General; Allergies Asthma; Bullying; Cyber Safety; Drugs; Headlice; Healthy Eating Canteens; Immunisation; Infectious Diseases; Medication; Fees Levies; Get Involved; Grandparents; Grievances; Mobile Phones; Outside School Hours Care; Reading; Ready for School; Starting High School; Term Dates; Travelling to School; and Uniform.

While the situation is now much improved, if the DoE was muttering to current students throughout most of their years in high school that they should aspire to Yr12, it was muttering *sotto voce*, giving the strong impression that Yr12 is only for those who have the capacity to find their way there. And for those without family support, this is very much by exception as the figures show.

One last point about expectations. Although a new Education Bill will soon be before the Parliament, the current legislative provisions and school/college processes for leaving early, and before attaining the TCE, have for many years been clearly communicating the message that gaining employment or an apprenticeship or entering some other form of training are equally valid alternatives to continuing on to complete the Yr12 qualification. Our concern here is that this conveys a wholly instrumental view of schooling – as if its only value was as a preparation for employment, which attaches no value to the final years of schooling as a preparation for a life of active citizenship and lifelong learning.

Moreover, we know from an [NCVER](#) report that only about 60% of the young people who enter an apprenticeship complete their training, so those leaving school without their Yr12 qualification have quite a high risk of ending up with no qualification at all. We also have some evidence that employers are increasingly preferring that their incoming apprentices have first attained their Yr12, concerned to ensure they possess the literacy, numeracy and ICT skills necessary to complete the training successfully and proceed into a skilled trade. For example, the [Australian Social Trends](#) report 2011 shows that 66% of young people gaining employment after completing an apprenticeship or traineeship had their Yr12 certificate. Similarly, ABS data shows that 41.4% of people who have no schooling beyond Yr11 are not participating in the labour force, which falls to 26% for those that have completed Yr12 ( Productivity Commission [Report on Government Services 2016](#) Volume B Table BA.5).

Both because of the changing nature of work, and the value of a full secondary education for citizenship, health, personal fulfillment, as well as enhanced security of employment, the message we should send to all young people is that we expect you to complete your Yr12 certificate – and for this to be enjoyable, challenging, and rewarding for you – and that there are many benefits from you doing so *before* you seek employment or undertake job specific training.

## 2. Blaming the communities – for not valuing education and welfare dependency

### Community attitudes to education

In commenting on the then Liberal Opposition's proposal to extend high schools to year 12, the Australian Education Union's (AEU) most senior representative of college teachers wrote:

...the whole paper is based on the same flawed assumption as was Tasmania Tomorrow – the faith that a bit of tinkering with the existing educational structure is

all that is required to bring about a profound change of attitude on the part of segments of society who see little or no value in anything more than a basic education for themselves and their children. (AEU *eReporter*, 13 June 2013)

This offensive passage deserves careful consideration.

First, and obviously, extending all high schools to year 12 is far from “a bit of tinkering” with the structure: it is a profound shift in educational provision, which says to all students and their families that school goes to year 12, communicating clear entitlement and expectations with respect to the full twelve years of education for every young Tasmanian. Whereas the structure we have now says to them that school goes only to year 10. Beyond that is something else. Indeed, the Deputy Secretary of the DoE responsible for senior secondary schooling until recently had the title of the Deputy Secretary for Further Education and Training – a title recently and perhaps still listed on the Department’s ‘way finding board’ at head office.

With Tasmanian high schools progressively being extended to Yrs 11 and 12, a fundamentally different message is being sent to the community – that Yrs 11 and 12 are just school, not further education – and the impact of this in terms of the formation of young people’s, their parent’s, and their community’s aspirations for their education can be confidently expected to be very significant indeed.

Second, we have seen from the UTAS-DoE research cited above that the claim about the community not valuing education is unfounded. Which is not to say that every single Tasmanian parent will encourage their child to complete Yr12 – no more than elsewhere in Australia. Rather, it is to say that there is no evidence that parents’ lack of support for their children’s education beyond Yr10 is so much more prevalent in Tasmania that this explains our low level of Yr12 attainment.

Further, if some in the community do lack confidence in the positive impact of a full education for their children, we need to ask where such mistrust comes from and whose responsibility it is to counteract this. We suggest that the dignity-protecting tendency for people to reject what they believe they have already been denied is relevant here. As one community leader on the west coast informed us, local students think that school ends at Yr 10 because *their* school finishes at Yr 10. And that, he said ‘is a social justice issue’.

“A bit of tinkering with the structure” would change that a lot, if accompanied by clear and confident messages communicating the unshakeable belief that **all** young Tasmanians are capable of and entitled to the full twelve years of a high quality secondary education, regardless of where they live or the educational backgrounds of their families. For as the OECD has found by its extensive comparative and longitudinal examination of the quality and equity of educational outcomes across nations, a belief in the potential of **all** their students has been identified as one of only three key characteristics shared by the education systems which are successful reformers and strong performers in education – more important than levels of funding, more important than class sizes, more important than subject choice, more important than specialist teachers, more important than staff to student ratios and other school resources, more important than geo-location, educational levels of parents and other demographic characteristics such as whether schools are located in rural or urban locations. (*PISA in Focus number 34* “Who are the strong performers and successful reformers in education?”, OECD 2013  
[https://www.oecd.org/pisa/pisaproducts/pisainfocus/pisa-in-focus-n34-\(eng\)-FINAL.pdf](https://www.oecd.org/pisa/pisaproducts/pisainfocus/pisa-in-focus-n34-(eng)-FINAL.pdf) )

Nonetheless we continue to hear the opinion frequently and confidently asserted that our communities do not value education - not from parents themselves or by people talking about their own community, but by people in the 'educated community' talking about 'the others'.

In our widespread and considerable engagement with community leaders all around Tasmania over the last few years, we have simply found no evidence to support such a view and plenty which soundly contradicts it. It has been our direct and repeated experience that Tasmanian communities across the State are well aware of the benefits to be gained from enhanced secondary school completion by their young people, for them as individuals and for their communities as a whole.

Here are some examples of what we have found:

- Over the last couple of years, over one hundred community leaders (including 28 mayors) have become Education Ambassadors, collectively spanning a wide range of fields and all regions of Tasmania. (Their names are listed here: <http://educationambassadors.org.au/meet-the-ambassadors/>) In becoming Education Ambassadors, these community leaders share two fundamental commitments: a deep respect for the value of education for all our young people, our communities and the State as a whole, and most especially the successful completion of the full twelve years of school education; and an insistence on evidence informed, open, respectful, non-partisan understanding of current educational outcomes and discussion of the best ways to significantly improve our unacceptably low attainment levels. (Apart from that, there would be a wide divergence of views among the Ambassadors on any educational issue, and in mentioning *Education Ambassadors* we do not claim to speak here on behalf of any others beyond ourselves, and most certainly not on behalf of them all.)
- Tasmania's 35 neighborhood houses are located in and work closely with our most disadvantaged and socially isolated communities – collectively comprising the largest community development infrastructure in the State. See <http://www.nht.org.au> When Neighbourhood Houses Tasmania (NHT) recently consulted all the State's neighborhood houses on "the number one issue of concern and the number one opportunity to change outcomes in their community, the resounding, even overwhelming response was education". Noting that less than half the young people who did well in their Yr9 NAPLAN went on to complete their Yr 12, this year's NHT budget submission concluded that "the current system is not working!", commended the Government for enabling more communities to provide education through to Yr12, and called for significantly more to be enabled to do so. The submission throws down the gauntlet to those accusing our communities of not valuing education by declaring "no 'tyranny of low expectations' for our communities." Further, the submission recommends that a "community focused culture" be developed in schools and amongst principals and senior staff, "with expectations to develop outreach programs, build community partnerships and develop solutions that work in their local areas." (2016-17 Neighborhood Houses Tasmania Budget Submission to the Tasmanian Government, pp.16-17) If aspirations matter, there is no shortage of educational aspirations for our young people, or confidence in their capacities to benefit from successfully completing their secondary education amongst our statewide network of neighborhood houses and their communities.

- The Museum of Old and New Art (MONA) last year surprised many by including a focus on education amongst all the fun and festivities of the annual Dark MoFo Festival, constructing a magnificent, architecturally designed, bamboo structure on the Salamanca lawns in which the Education Hothouse discussions occurred – clear evidence that the significance of improving educational outcomes across the State is well understood and a widely shared priority. The outpouring of views expressed through the several days of discussions, various social media tools, and the concluding public forum provide abundant evidence that multiple voices in our community recognize the importance of, and are actively seeking effective ways to contribute to the achievement of educational change for the better.
- The establishment of the Peter Underwood for Educational Attainment, a joint initiative of the Government and the University, aimed at “sustained increases in educational attainment...[which] benefits the whole community” through research, workforce development and community outreach and engagement activities, is further evidence that raising educational attainment levels is a shared priority for the State as a whole. See <http://www.utas.edu.au/underwood-centre>
- Tasmania’s three newspapers regularly feature articles, editorials, news items and opinion pieces on educational issues, the Hobart *Mercury* adopting the banner “Education Matters”. Those contributing their opinions, analysis and research come from many diverse parts of our civil society and while their views differ, sometimes energetically on specific educational issues, their voices are as one on the importance of improving educational attainment levels.
- Regional Development Australia (Tasmania) is focused on creating an inclusive, strong and sustainable economy, with enhanced educational outcomes one of only four statewide priorities recently adopted in pursuit of this objective.

Despite this powerful and consistent evidence to the contrary, some in the educational community persist in blaming community attitudes for our low attainment rates. In response we must ask whether such views tell us more about attitudes *towards* the community amongst some educators rather than fairly and accurately representing what the community *itself* thinks or values. In that light we should attend carefully to Neighbourhood Houses Tasmania’s call for the educational community to take responsibility for the current low attainment levels and lead change for the better, rather than respond with “defensiveness, blame shifting between the schools and the colleges, and claims that the kids or the community are the problem.” (NHT, op.cit.)

**We suggest that viewing the current state of senior secondary education through the lens of social justice would afford a clearer view than has usually been presented hitherto.**

#### Community levels of welfare dependency

While few express as sweeping and as denigrating a claim about the community being the problem with senior secondary education as the former AEU spokesperson quoted above, it is common to hear that Tasmania does have a particular problem with inter-generational welfare dependence which makes it hard to engage young people in school, even in the compulsory years, let alone support them to successfully complete Yr12.

We note first that this proposition takes the **consequence** of the lack of success of the schooling system in the past as an excusable **cause** of its continued failure. Put simply, school does not exist to reproduce parents’ and communities’ disadvantage in the lives of their children. In fact, that is the opposite of what schooling in a liberal democracy is

supposed to do. Which is why the OCED seeks to identify the characteristics of educational systems which are more successful at reducing the equity gap in outcomes, categorizing such systems as “strong performers and successful reformers in education”. (OECD, op.cit.) Reproduction of disadvantage is rightly seen as a failure of any education system. Rather than accept its inevitability, we need to continually seek ways to ensure that schooling functions to liberate children from the circumstances of their birth and circumstances, not deepen their levels of existing disadvantage.

Of course no schooling system in Australia has yet won this battle. But all – including Tasmania – recognize that this is the battle to be won.

That said, however, we need to state immediately that the claim concerning Tasmania’s atypically high levels of welfare dependency is unfounded.

As **Attachment 2** shows graphically, Tasmania’s level of welfare dependency (see the green bars) does not differ in any marked way from the other states (the ACT put to one side). Even WA at the height of the mining boom (the data is from the 2011 census) had just 10% fewer children living in welfare dependent families than Tasmania. But whereas in the other states the percentages of children *not* living in welfare dependent families, performing above the national minimum standard in Yr9 NAPLAN, and gaining their Yr12 certificates cluster closely together – with gaps mostly around 5% and no more than 11% even in cashed up WA - in Tasmania the picture is markedly different. Tasmania’s rate of Yr12 attainment is 21% lower than our NAPLAN results, and 24% below the percentage of children **not** living in welfare dependent families.

The Yr12 attainment gaps between Tasmania and the other states (for 2013) are: 39% for the ACT; 28% for WA; 27% for Victoria (VCE only); 25% for Queensland; 24% for NSW (state schools only); and 20% for South Australia. As this graph shows, it is not Tasmania’s level of welfare dependency which differentiates us from the other states, nor our NAPLAN achievements. Our rate of Yr12 attainment alone is where we are so markedly out of step.

The graph shows that in seeking to find the reasons for this marked difference in educational attainment between Tasmania and the rest of Australia, we need to look not at our families, not at our children, not at our communities, not even at primary and junior secondary schooling as is made apparent by our comparatively strong Yr9 NAPLAN achievements. **Our problem is in senior secondary schooling.**

### 3. Blaming the test – the TCE is more difficult to obtain

Another quite popular response to this kind of analysis is that in comparing rates of Yr12 attainment we are not comparing like with like – Yr12 certificates are not all apples, and further, the Tasmanian apple is the most difficult to swallow.

We have thoroughly tested this assertion by means of a comprehensive comparison of the requirements of the various Yr12 certificates across all jurisdictions. (See *The Great TCE Completion Conundrum*, September 2, 2015, at <http://educationambassadors.org.au>) On the basis of this detailed comparison we conclude that there is no validity in the claim that the TCE is more difficult to obtain. It should also be noted that, apart from the VCAL at Intermediate level, the Tasmanian certificate is the only Yr12 which students can attain entirely with vocational subjects, attaining only a grade of Preliminary Achievement in



their subjects, and without any study or results at Level 3 (and noting that the VCAL at Foundation level is not a Yr12 qualification).

**Attachment 3** further addresses the claim that low Yr12 attainment is due to requirements peculiar to the TCE itself, such as the literacy, numeracy and ICT standards. The facts are that these requirements account for but a small number of students not attaining their TCE, as follows:

- In 2015 a total of 50.4% of the age cohort gained the TCE (from schools in all sectors). Those that did not achieve this milestone mostly did not complete the equivalent of two years full time study post Yr10. Of those that did, some 64, 80, and 137 students failed to meet the literacy, numeracy and ICT standards, respectively, each of these accounting for just 1.0%, 1.2% and 2% of the entire cohort not attaining their TCE – (some of whom would certainly have been the same students, and thus the percentages given above should not be summed). Also, 28 students failed to attain their TCE due to not meeting the requirement for 80 of their 120 points being at Level 2 (some of which may, again, have been the same students who did not meet one of the other requirements). See [http://www.tqa.tas.gov.au/4DCGI/WWW/doc/836955/RND01/Rates\\_of\\_Attainment\\_2015.pdf](http://www.tqa.tas.gov.au/4DCGI/WWW/doc/836955/RND01/Rates_of_Attainment_2015.pdf)
- Had the only requirement for the TCE been (at least) **Preliminary Achievement** in subjects comprising a **two full years** of study at **Level 1** or above, **or** gaining an ATAR, just another 4% or so would have gained their TCE. (In 2013, 58 students gained an ATAR but did not complete two years of full time study post Yr10. See [http://www.tqa.tas.gov.au/4DCGI/WWW/doc/257443/RND01/5.2\\_Attachment\\_B\\_CEO\\_to\\_UTAS - ATAR eligibility requirements 2....pdf](http://www.tqa.tas.gov.au/4DCGI/WWW/doc/257443/RND01/5.2_Attachment_B_CEO_to_UTAS_-_ATAR_eligibility_requirements_2....pdf))

So at best, including students achieving at a level that would not meet the requirements for the Yr12 certificate of any other state, just 55% or so of the age cohort would have achieved the TCE.

The supposed difficulty of our Yr12 certificate, the TCE, does not explain why so few students attain this qualification. Thus tinkering with the current requirements of the TCE will do almost nothing to improve Yr12 attainment rates in the State. Indeed, far from being a barrier, these are already unusually flexible, and politely described to us as “forgiving” by a principal with recent experience in another state, and “lacking challenge” by another with the same background.

## **V. The college system – some data and observations**

What is different about Tasmania, therefore, is not our families, nor our students, especially not their mastery of core learning skills as measured by NAPLAN, nor our Yr12 certificate. What is different is the way we organize senior secondary education. If we seek the explanation of our markedly different Yr12 outcomes, we need to look at where our education system is itself markedly different. We need to look at the structure of our secondary education system which divides Yrs 7-10 in the high schools, from Yrs11 and 12 in the eight senior secondary colleges, all of which are located in one of the four urban centres.

We know (from DoE data) that almost all students (86% in 2013) progress from Yr10 to Yr11, almost all enrolling in the colleges. Which is not surprising as students exiting Yr10 are mostly under legal compulsion to continue their schooling if they do not find alternative training pathways or full time employment. However in total across the eight

senior colleges, **barely 50%** of these newly enrolled Yr11 students gain their TCE - even allowing for extended TCE completion by part-time senior secondary students (see **Attachment 4**). Not surprisingly, this high rate of retention and low rate of success is very expensive – using data from the *My School* site, in 2012 each TCE graduate cost \$58,525 on average across the eight colleges. (See **Attachment 5**)

This needs further explanation. Many in the education community are convinced that the creation of the colleges is one of Tasmania's finest achievements. We are told that 'the ACT copied us and they have the best outcomes in Australia'. Letters to the editor of our papers and some political leaders regularly refer to our 'world class college system'.

But the hard reality is that for many Tasmanian communities the colleges have achieved educational outcomes no better than the NT outback. We are not the NT outback. But neither are we the ACT. In fact it should be obvious to all that the ACT is the Australian community least like Tasmania other than the NT outback – it has the most centralized population of any Australian jurisdiction while Tasmania has the most regionalized, it is a fortieth of Tasmania's size, and the ACT has a high ICSEA community whereas Tasmania has a low ICSEA community (Taroom High, Tasmania's highest ICSEA public school, has about the same ICSEA as the average of the ACT colleges). Indeed, it should be obvious that if the college system works well in the ACT, then we need to ask why we should think that it would work well here.

Historically the colleges were not intended to provide senior secondary education to all young Tasmanians, being designed and staffed as matriculation colleges for the small section of the age cohort destined for higher education. Much has changed in the intervening decades and the colleges are now resourced to provide the final years of secondary education to all young Tasmanians, or at least that majority not completing their education in the non-government school systems.

That being so, there are a number of features of the college system which make it wholly unsuitable to the task of providing a senior secondary education to all of Tasmania's young people, culminating for most in the attainment of the TCE.

#### 1. Difficulty of access for some students

Tasmania has a regionally dispersed population, while the colleges are all centrally located in the four cities. For students living in the many communities outside these cities, the straightforward, practical issue of accessibility arises with most reliant on public transport, or parents or other adults to provide transport by car, unless their family can afford (and are prepared to accept) their children moving to the city to finish their schooling. Thus, while we have made it legally compulsory for students to continue from Yr10 to Yr11 we have not yet provided them all with the means to do so without the need to move home or travel undue distances. And it is easy to establish what "undue distances" might mean. The DoE Teacher Transfer policy prevents teachers being transferred more than 65km from their home. If 65km is too far for an adult to travel – by car – to teach, it is certainly too far for a student to travel – by bus – to learn.

Likewise, if it is unreasonable to expect a teacher to shift their place of residence to continue their employment, it is unreasonable to expect a student to shift their place of residence to continue their education. Provided, of course, that it is possible for the state to provide a good quality education at 7-12 high schools located in reasonable proximity to

students' homes. And it is, as shown clearly and evidently by senior secondary provision in all the other states. Indeed, in our benchmarking study (**Attachment 1**) we show that very remote, low ICSEA and generally small high schools in other states, typically offer more successful senior secondary programs and achieve higher rates of Yr12 attainment than the Tasmanian colleges. Schools such as:

- Coober Pedy (SA outback opal mining town)
- Leigh Creek (SA outback coal mining town)
- Wilcannia Central School (NSW, River Darling station country)
- Norseman District School (WA outback mining town)
- Ceduna Area School (SA, far west fishing and farming community)
- Centralian Senior College (Alice Springs)
- Lightning Ridge Central School (NSW outback opal mining town)
- Balranald High School (NSW station country)
- Bourke High School (NSW, iconic 'outback')
- Condobolin High (NSW listed as provincial, but in geographic centre)
- Longreach State High School (QLD, station country)

Specifically, and as detailed in the same study:

- A greater % of the students enrolling in Year 12 gained their senior secondary certificates in seven out of these eleven remote schools than at the three colleges with the highest attainment rates (Rosny, Hobart and Launceston colleges), and only two, Coober Pedy and Leigh Creek, have Yr12 attainment rates below Don, Hellyer and Elizabeth colleges, with the remaining two colleges (Newstead and Claremont) trailing them all.
- To give further detail for just two of these remote schools, from their 2015 annual school reports (which are available on line, as for all schools in all states except Tasmania):
  - Condobolin had 21 students gain their HSC, 100% of their Year 12 class, 50% of whom have gone on to university. The school's total enrolment was 205 students, 48% of whom were Aboriginal;
  - Bourke High School had 12 students gain their HSC, 100% of the Year 12 class, with 7 receiving an ATAR, and 28% of the class going on to university. 72% of Bourke High's 147 students are Aboriginal. The school's language other than English (LOTE) is Paakantji, the local Aboriginal language.

Note that a criticism of using the percentage of the Y12 class gaining their senior secondary certificate as an indicator of the success of the school in supporting all of its students to get their Yr12 qualification – that this figure can be inflated by a low rate of retention to year 12 – certainly applies to the smaller of these schools, where the size of the year 12 class shows that only a minority of student who commence high school continue to year 12. But taken together – treating them as one school - their Yr 12 class is 12% of the total enrolment whereas an 'equal share' would be 11%.

## 2. Perceived 'cultural distance' for students from low ICSEA high schools

We have not undertaken research on this issue, but it has been put to us by many people in responsible positions – mayors of less affluent or rural communities, academics who have been undertaking research in colleges, and public figures reflecting on their own experience of college – that the original purpose of the colleges as 'matriculation colleges'



remains a defining ethos to the extent that students not intending to proceed to university after college believe that ‘college is not for them’, and experience college as such.

As academics we are naturally cautious about giving too much weight to such evidence, but the Review Team will quite likely have encountered views which implicitly accept this conception.

For example, the Review may have heard that one of the good things about the college system is that ‘young people are bored at high school and need to get out of their communities to spread their wings’. Here the educational/cultural distance between high school to Yr10 and college is **explicitly recognized**, but offered as a reason why college is good for students from ‘those kinds of backgrounds’. But of course the reality is that only a minority of such students – about one third - from low ICSEA or rural high schools succeed at college. Rather than college providing a ‘ladder’ to ‘escape’ a small community, they more likely function as a ‘snake’ with the low Yr12 attainment rate evidence that such young people slide down and out of their education without gaining the knowledge and skills to move confidently and successfully into employment, training or further education in the wider world – if this is their choice – or indeed to live in their home community well equipped to play their part in its further development.

There is also, of course, the mere fact of the split between junior and senior secondary education in the high schools and colleges, and that the former are numerous, dispersed and localized and the latter are few in number and confined to just four urban locations. This says that there is something special and different about Yrs11 and 12, whereas in a full high school (7-12) these years are just school. Making Yr10 a point of transition or decision clearly **sends the wrong message to children and families** who do not have a tradition of senior secondary study, or confidence that the costs and efforts involved will be worth the expenditure. Especially if our intention is (as everywhere else across the nation and in comparable ones) that **all** students should have an entitlement to, and be confidently expected to continue to Yr12 and gain their TCE.

### 3. The extensive and atypical array of subject choices

The colleges offer a surprisingly large number and wide spread of subjects. One college lists 160 in the subject index of its 2017 Enrolment Guide, many times more subjects than large metropolitan high schools in the other states which are typically in the order of 20-30. This plethora of subject offerings, with multiple variations of some core subjects (such as English) are justified as being essential in attracting, retaining and ensuring success, despite the evidence that these desirable outcomes are in fact not the result for far too many Tasmanian students. Again, we have been repeatedly told that students who are not sure of their future study or employment path find this vast array of subject offerings bewildering, especially those who cannot turn to friends and family who have ‘done it all before’.

Again while these reports are not hard evidence, the Review could easily establish whether this claim is correct by **gathering data on students’ amendments to enrolments**. Anecdotally (but on good authority) we are told the colleges process upwards of a hundred enrolment changes each year. However accurate that estimation may be, any large number – say, in excess of 10% of students amending their enrolment – would indicate that the range of subjects on offer is more a hindrance than a help to students needing to embark on a coherent and purposeful study program leading to a meaningful qualification.

Further there is good evidence in the educational literature that large numbers of subject choices can have a negative impact on student attachment, engagement, retention and success. The ‘everything you might ever want to study’ spread of subjects is characterized as the ‘shopping mall’ approach to senior secondary education, in which many students, especially those most at risk, get lost in the junk food aisles. For example, Darling-Hammond et al’s useful summary of research findings on the effects of subject choice and school size in the US concluded as follows:

Although the original rationale for curriculum differentiation was to keep students interested in and attending school, greater school retention generally has not been associated with curriculum spread. Furthermore, the typically broad, diffuse, and stratified curriculum can reduce average achievement and increase inequity in achievement. (Linda Darling-Hammond; Peter Ross; Michael Milliken. (2007), “High School Size, Organization, and Content: What Matters for Student Success?” in *Brookings Papers on Education Policy*, No. 9, 2006/2007, pp. 163-203)

The untested belief in Tasmania that very wide subject choice in the senior secondary years is highly desirable, if not essential, functions as a rationale for the maintenance of the college system, since such a huge number of subjects can only be delivered in very large schools. But on the issue of school size the same article continues:

There is strong evidence that low-SES students ... are generally poorly served by very large high schools... [and that] less advantaged students who have fewer academic supports at home may benefit more from the personalization, strong supports, and close attachments possible in somewhat smaller schools.

#### 4. Mismatch between ‘adult learning environment’ and ‘school funding model’

Colleges are applauded for being ‘adult learning environments’ in which students take responsibility for their attendance and progress in their studies – much as in a university. Indeed, this aspect of the colleges, along with there being no uniform and calling teachers by their first names have often, in fact predominantly, been offered as reasons the colleges are a good educational environment for young adults.

But many times we have been told by former students that they simply stopped attending, either because they were uncertain whether they *had* to be there and/or lost confidence that what they were doing was taking them anywhere, and that was that. The lack of reporting of student attendance data – not only on *My School*, but the astounding fact that 2014 was the first year in which the colleges’ student attendance data was reported and recorded centrally by the DoE ‘head office’ – suggests this story might be typical. With the highly regarded mayor of one regional community reporting that at the beginning of the year, three buses full of students trundle off out of town to the colleges in the city, reducing after Easter to only one, and that half full by winter – year after year.

Are these stories a fair and accurate picture? Perhaps not. We know that - at least in the two colleges we have visited - students’ ‘adult choices’ about attendance are being scrupulously followed up by the administration. The stories we have been told, therefore, may well reflect an earlier time, or variation in leadership practices and rates of performance improvement between individual colleges.

**But there may nonetheless be a problem here that the Review Team should consider.**

Universities, as paradigm adult learning environments, are funded in a way that provides a considerable incentive for every university to do all that it can to make sure the students choose to keep attending, and succeed. Subjects (or units) are typically one semester in length, and students enroll separately for subjects in each semester, paying a fee (HECS) for each enrolment that they maintain beyond the census date in each semester. Universities' teaching income is determined by these semester enrolments. If 10% of the students from semester I are not enrolled at the census date for semester II, whether that has been caused by students failing their semester I course or simply dropping out, the universities' income is reduced by that 10%.

As we understand it, no such funding incentive exists for the colleges with funding based on the first census regardless of the extent of attendance or attrition during the rest of the year. Are they being funded for students who do not attend and are therefore not being taught?

#### 5. The colleges are a very expensive model of senior secondary education

While we do not have access to the colleges' budgets and statements of expenditure, the publicly available data give good reason to conclude that the college model of senior secondary education is a very expensive one for Tasmania (but not for the ACT).

*My School* gives the recurrent budget for each school, the teaching EFT, and the number of students who completed their Yr12 certificate for every school offering senior secondary education. Assuming that half the teaching effort is applied to each of the two years of senior secondary study, this allows us to calculate both the cost per graduate and the ratio of graduates to each teacher. **Attachment 5** provides this for each of the Tasmanian colleges using what was, at the time of this particular analysis, the latest data (2012).

The table below updates this data for Hobart College alone, which was closest to the average in 2102, and provides equivalent data for Canberra College, which is as good an ACT comparison as possible (size; income per student; and student destinations post Yr12 – about a third to each of university, VET, and employment). Note that more than 25% of Canberra College students completed a VET certificate, no doubt many as part of their Yr12 certificate. Data for Hobart College on VET certificate completions is not currently available.

COLLEGE COST COMPARISON: ACT AND TAS

	Enrolment	\$/student	Recurrent budget 2014	EFT teachers 2014	EFT Yr12 teachers 2014	Yr12 graduates	\$/Yr12 graduates	Graduates/Yr12 teacher
Hobart College	1003	\$14,518	\$13,040,116	68.5	34.25	255	\$51,138	7.4
Canberra College	1036	\$13,554	\$14,218,302	73.5	36.75	380	\$37,417	10.3

Taking these two colleges as typical of their jurisdictions, this data tells us immediately that, compared to the ACT, college students in Tasmania:

- Do not enroll in subjects which might lead to them attaining the TCE, or
- Enroll in such subjects but cease attending before the end of the year while the college retains the funding for their enrolment, or
- Enroll in such subjects and continue to the end of the year but fail in large numbers.

Unless one of these three circumstances obtains, it would not be possible for the Tasmanian colleges to cost so much for each graduate, nor to have so few graduates per teacher.

**It is highly desirable that the Review clarify this situation by seeking subject viability data.**

It could do so by choosing one or more colleges, and asking for each subject offered in (say) 2013:

- How many students initially enrolled in the subject?
- How many students (and what % of the initial enrolment) changed their enrolment to drop this subject?
- How many students (and what % of the initial enrolment) changed their enrolment to pick up this subject after the initial enrolment period?
- How many students (and what % of the initial enrolment) were enrolled at the first census date?
- For full year subjects, how many students (and what % of the initial enrolment) were enrolled at the second census date?
- How many students (and what % of the initial enrolment, and the second census enrolment) recorded a grade of at least Preliminary Achievement in the subject?
- How many students (and what % of the initial enrolment, and the second census enrolment) included this subject in their successful completion of the TCE or a VET certificate (but not both), by 2015?
- In how many subjects did more than 75% of the students initially enrolled, between 50% and 75%, and less than 50%, count that subject towards their successful completion of the TCE or a VET certificate (but not both), by 2015?

#### 6. Lack of staff mobility and the creation of silos

We are told that securing a teaching position in a college is ‘as good as winning the lottery’ and that once a teacher secures such a position they do not (and will not) move. We have sought evidence on this – asking the former Secretary of the DoE for data on applications for transfer, and actual transfers, between colleges and high schools – but have not been able to get it. The information that was provided, however, showed that staff separations from the colleges – presumably retirements – occur at twice the rate as from the high schools. This suggests that staff once securing a place in a college remain there until retirement and that the age profile of the colleges’ teaching staff is much older than in the high schools.

If so, this would explain a number of features of Tasmania’s secondary schooling system which have puzzled us, perhaps including part of the explanation why the college system works so much more effectively in the ACT than in Tasmania. As follows:

- First, it was very surprising that even highly regarded high school principals were not able to explain the requirements of the TCE;
- Second, it is astonishing that (until this year) high school principals were not given information about their exiting Yr10 students’ success or otherwise in attaining the TCE;
- Third, it was shocking to discover – including for the former high school principal concerned – that the reason given by the nearby college for less than 50% of students from their highly regarded city high school not attaining the TCE was that they had not completed the maths required to study subjects leading to the TCE –

- but that this had never been communicated by the maths staff or principal of the college to their colleagues in the high school, a kilometer or so up the road;
- Fourth, it is puzzling to hear teachers in the colleges describe themselves as ‘college teachers’, rather than Maths or English or P.E teachers;
- Fifth, that there is an often expressed view amongst teachers in the colleges (and their students?) that their colleagues in the high schools are incapable of teaching at Yrs11 and 12 - overlooking the obvious fact that all college teachers must have commenced senior secondary teaching at some stage in their careers;
- Finally, a senior state politician was amazed to hear that teachers qualified to teach a subject in a high school would **not** need to be **retrained** in order to be qualified to offer Yr 11 and 12 subjects in that field.

What this collection of experiences suggests, which staffing data would confirm (or otherwise), is that the colleges have become a silo separate from the high schools, with little staff movement between them, and even little communication. And that this has occurred at great cost to the students, and therefore expense to the DoE budget.

Contrast the ACT, where the teacher mobility policy ensures that teachers do not remain in one position for more than 5-8 years, and there is deliberate mixing of teachers between the levels of schooling to ensure continuity of the curriculum and spread of teaching expertise.

If Tasmania is to persist with a college system for senior secondary education, some such teacher mobility policy is clearly required. The objectives of this should be to eliminate the damaging silos of culture, pedagogy, curriculum, and staff expertise and experience. And the aim should be, as in the ACT, that the entire teaching force of each secondary school and college is renewed within 10 years, with the teachers longest in position being the first to transfer to a new post.

## VI. A picture of a system in need of reform

Over the last several years we have undertaken a series of analyses of senior secondary outcomes from Tasmanian public schools, at the statewide system level.

The most detailed of these is included at **Attachment 1**. At the request of the principal of one of the schools included in that study, we undertook a small further project looking at two variables – the average of Yr9 NAPLAN scores for reading and numeracy, and the percentage of students undertaking Yr12 that attain their certificate - for additional schools in the Devonport region, adding these to the schools in the original study. As explained in **Attachment 1**, in each case the data compares a Tasmanian secondary school with a set of schools in other states identified on the *MySchool* web site as similar (ie same ICSEA) schools. Generally each set of comparison schools numbers 20 or so, with the smallest comparison set including eight interstate schools. In total the data set comprises the eight colleges, fourteen government high schools and five non-government schools in Tasmania, and approximately 200 interstate government schools and 70 non-government schools.

**Graph 1** at **Attachment 6** shows the initial set of ten government schools, plus Ulverstone High School, compared to the average of their interstate similar schools students’ achieving above the national minimum standard in Yr9 NAPLAN (Reading and Numeracy averaged). Schools are shown in order of increasing ICSEA, with the colour coded linear trend lines of NAPLAN against ICSEA for both the Tasmanian (red bars and trend line) and their similar interstate schools (blue bars and trend line).

The picture is clear.

For **all** of the eleven Tasmanian high schools the average of their Yr9 students' NAPLAN is **above** the average of students in similar schools interstate, but this superior achievement is **greatest in lower ICSEA schools**. While the percentage of students above the national minimum standard increases with ICSEA, it does so **more slowly** in Tasmanian schools because of the high scores of our lower ICSEA schools. Thus we see that Tasmanian schools have been **more successful** than similar schools elsewhere in breaking the nexus between levels of socio-educational advantage/disadvantage and educational achievements, in terms of the nationally comparable measure of Yr9 NAPLAN.

**Graph 2 at Attachment 6** shows the percentage of Yr12s from each of the schools who gain their senior secondary certificates, comparing the fourteen Tasmanian government schools and five non-government schools to their interstate similar schools, and including the eight Tasmanian colleges, also in ICSEA order.

Again, the picture is clear.

**In every case** the rate of Yr12 attainment of the Tasmanian school is **below** the average of its interstate similar schools (although the difference is very small for the higher ICSEA non-government schools), with the gap much greater for the lower ICSEA Tasmanian public schools. Thus Tasmanian Yr12 attainment rates show a steep gradient with increasing ICSEA (see the red bars and trend line), whereas Yr12 students in similar schools interstate gain their certificates at almost the same rate in lower and higher ICSEA schools (see the blue bars and trend line). In other words - and in stark contrast to Yr9 NAPLAN achievements – as measured by Yr12 attainment rates and tracked by ICSEA, the Tasmanian public senior secondary education system exacerbates the negative educational impact of socio-educational disadvantage (ICSEA) compared to the systems in other jurisdictions where that relationship is considerably weakened.

The data at **Attachment 6** show that the current arrangements for delivering education across the senior secondary system do not serve students well from lower ICSEA families, and thus they do not serve well the majority of Tasmanian students.

Having eliminated other common 'explanations' by means of the investigations and analyses summarized above, we conclude that it is these arrangements themselves (including the size and locations of the colleges, and the cultural assumptions and messages which these structural and staffing arrangements convey), which are the cause of Tasmania's unacceptably low Yr12 attainment rates – to the extent that it is not unreasonable to claim that these arrangements discriminate against our students from lower ICSEA families and lower ICSEA high schools.

Tasmanian students are entitled to and (as we have shown above) are capable of benefitting from a full secondary education which is equal in all respects to that available to their peers across the nation – in terms of its quality, standards, amount of study, and the relative esteem of their Yr 12 qualification. That is not what they are receiving now from a senior secondary system which is not fit for purpose, the Tasmanian context, the times we are living in, or the future to which our young people aspire, and thus does not well serve our communities and the State as whole.

But change need not be difficult. We suggest what might be done in the following recommendations.

## **VII. Recommendations**

1. Affirm all Tasmanian students' entitlement to a full twelve years of secondary education in their own community - without the necessity to leave home or travel undue distances (except for children whose families are living in communities with no school), or continue their school education in an environment where they do not feel accepted.
2. Affirm that the education provided by Tasmanian schools must be equal in all respects to that available to young people in similar communities in other states – in terms of its quality, standards, amount of study, and rates of attainment; and in terms of the relative standing of their Yr12 qualification.
3. For each high school, identify at least one similar high school, located in a like community in another state, which offers a successful senior secondary program, and benchmark the curriculum offered and the student outcomes (including post-school destinations) of the Tasmanian school against that high school (or schools) to ensure that recommendation (2) is fully implemented.
4. Ensure that each Tasmanian high school (and the colleges) produces and publishes on the school's web site an annual report to the community, detailing (among other things) the students' outstanding achievements for the year, the school's improvement plan, annual progress towards the implementation of the plan, the year's achievement against key performance indicators (including tracking TCE attainment rates and trends), results of the National School Opinion Survey, and (for high schools) the results for that year of the benchmarking recommended above (3).
5. Affirm that every Tasmanian high school should offer its students a program of study leading to the Tasmanian Certificate of Education consistent with recommendations (1), (2) and (3).
6. Adopt a statewide target to close the gap between Yr9 NAPLAN (the percentage of students achieving above the national minimum standard averaged across the tests) and Yr12 attainment rates (the percentage of Yr9 students attaining their TCE or equivalent two or three years later) at the whole of State level and across all schooling sectors; including disaggregated targets and timelines for every school, with monitoring and public reporting against these targets; and for the public system, with school level targets to be set as part of the benchmarking proposed in recommendation (2) and developed in consultation with their communities.
7. Each college to be required and supported to develop a plan for making a valuable contribution to senior secondary schooling in Tasmania, for example, by establishing or strengthening collaborative arrangements with high schools that have been considered feeder schools to support the students of those schools to successfully complete their senior secondary schooling; or the development of specialist studies (in, say, STEM; performing arts; or agriculture and aquaculture) which might attract students for full time study or intensive courses from all over Tasmania, other states and internationally; or other ways to value add to the overall system of secondary (and potentially, post-secondary) education in Tasmania, including for adults wishing to re-engage with education.
8. Review the requirements of the TCE in the light of the recent revision of the senior secondary certificates in other states, including, but not limited to the following issues: the wide spread of subjects offered and the level of enrolment and results achieved in those subjects; the requirements for satisfactory achievement in studies of, or

otherwise demonstrated competency in, English and Mathematics; the size of (credit points) and requirements for sequential study of related subjects; and external examination or moderation. In line with the move towards a national curriculum, consideration might be given to Tasmania offering a senior secondary certificate based on that of another jurisdiction (as the NT bases its certificate on the SACE, outsourcing many of the related processes).

9. Investigate the ACT's teacher mobility policy prior to designing and adopting a similar mobility process suitable for Tasmania's geography, aimed at eliminating the current divisions between colleges and high schools (cultural, staff experience and teaching expertise) and achieving curriculum continuity between the high schools and the colleges.
  10. Expand, or if necessary introduce, a workforce renewal strategy to ensure that the Tasmanian public secondary schooling system has positions available every year to recruit a substantial number of the best qualified teacher education graduates from UTAS, and interstate and overseas universities.
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