

YNOT Submission to the Review of Years 9-12 in Tasmania



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Suite 4a, Mayfair Plaza, 236 Sandy Bay Road, Sandy Bay Tasmania 7005
p 03 6223 5511 f 03 6223 2255 m 0458 235 511
admin@ynot.org.au www.ynot.org.au abn 37 078 758 651

ynot is the peak body representing the voice of Tasmanian youth

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Introduction

The Youth Network of Tasmania (YNOT) appreciates the opportunity to provide a submission to the Australian Council of Education Research (ACER) in regards to the *Review of Years 9-12 in Tasmania*.

YNOT is the peak body for the broader youth sector in Tasmania. YNOT represents the interests of its members as well as the interests of young people aged 12 to 25 years of age. Integral to the work of YNOT is the youth participation structure, the Tasmanian Youth Forum (TYF). TYF is Tasmania's peak youth consultative and participatory body. TYF consults with young people and have produced reports communicating the thoughts and ideas of young people. Our most recent reports have included *Learning and Education*, *Youth Employment* and *Mental Health Matters*. These have been attached as appendices.

A key role of YNOT is to advocate for young Tasmanians to be included in all aspects of society, which gives them the opportunities and ability to participate in their communities. As found in YNOT's TYF Learning and Education Statewide youth consultation process, young people value their learning and have high aspirations for their education, however, experience barriers, which may prevent them from achieving these goals. These barriers include transport, lack of pathway and transition support, low levels of literacy and limited access to flexible or alternative education models and support services. YNOT believes these are factors that need to be considered when reviewing the curriculum and other aspects of the education system to ensure that young people are able to meet their learning goals.

YNOT's submission will focus on the importance of addressing these barriers to highlight ways young people can be supported to engage in and complete education through to Year 12 or equivalent and skills that are important for young people to develop during their education.

1: Access and Equity

To ensure young people can have equity in their education, it is important they have agency and therefore aware of the options, support and pathways available to them.

Young people need to be able to make informed choices about their education and learning pathways in order to ensure they understand ways they can access their education in a way that meets their needs. They also need to understand what barriers or challenges they may face and how they can overcome them by being prepared with strategies and information.

YNOT believes cross campus enrolment for students should be encouraged. Young people should be supported to access education across different campuses, particularly for Year 11 and 12. For some young people, enrolling in subjects or courses at different schools or training institutions is beneficial for their learning as they are able to access subjects or courses not available at their main campus. An example could be a student attending Year 11 at college, who is also enrolled in a course at a TasTAFE campus. YNOT has received anecdotal evidence that suggests some students are discouraged from having a cross campus enrolment, despite this being an option for their education. It is not clear why this may occur, however the process of arranging these enrolments and funding arrangements could influence this. The impact of this is potentially negative on the students as they may not feel supported to pursue their learning goals and this may also be linked to disengagement. YNOT argues processes need to be in place to support young people to complete their education cross campus and for this to be seen as a legitimate option for education by schools and teachers.

YNOT believes the priority to extend high schools to Year 11 and 12 needs to be in rural and regional areas to support students most in need, who would otherwise have no other option. YNOT is aware that not all subjects or courses can be provided at each of these schools and argues that cross campus attendance should be supported for these students to access more courses, such as attending a college one day a week or participating in a course online. Currently, there are some schools in rural areas of Tasmania that schools continue to experience greater need in terms of access due to students needing to travel significant distances to access education and only limited online study options available to them if they want to stay within their community.

YNOT has concerns about meeting the needs of Tasmanian students most in need and the viability of high schools within close proximity to existing colleges extending

to Years 11 and 12. As outlined, the priority should be to extend rural and regional high schools to Year 11 as these are the students who need it most and there are limited resources that can be allocated for schools to provide Year 11 and 12. When there is a college in close proximity to a high school, YNOT argues it is a more efficient use of resources to have students attend the college. Colleges are able to offer more subjects on campus and have dedicated teaching staff to teaching the Year 11 and 12 curriculum, which has a different structure to meet the Tasmanian Certificate of Education (TCE) requirements. Young people in rural and regional areas do not have the option to attend a college in close proximity, therefore YNOT argues resources allocated to extending high schools to Year 11 and 12 are best used in these areas. YNOT believes that rural and regional high schools should be the priority in this instance.

Support staff

YNOT believes the support staff within schools have a valuable role in supporting young people's education and wellbeing. Many young people rely on accessing social workers, youth workers and other support workers through school as they may be unable to access these types of support people or services outside of school due to their location, opening hours or concerns about their privacy. Young people have consistently reported they want these support workers within schools to support their mental health and other personal challenges they may face, which can impact on their learning (TYF 2015). Despite this, most of these support workers are only available at schools on certain days as several schools may share one social worker, for example. YNOT argues support workers need to be more accessible for young people within schools. Young people have also identified that they want seeking help to become normalised (TYF 2015) and having a youth worker or social worker who can be within schools on a regular basis to increase their presence there would also support this. Youth workers and social workers are able to help young people identify and work through a number of issues that can impact on their learning.

In addition, young people may need specific support staff who can help with their learning to supplement what they are being taught in class. Young people recognise that there are different ways of learning and some of their peers needed more support with their learning, such as having more time to have content or instructions

explained to them in a way they understand (TYF 2016). It can be difficult for young people to participate at school if they cannot understand and engage with what they are learning. YNOT argues young people who need this extra support would benefit from having more support staff who could go through work at a pace more suitable to their needs.

Alternative and flexible models

YNOT argues there needs to be more alternative models for education available for young people to access. An example of a successful model in Tasmania is the Big Picture Program, which combines a highly personalised approach to education by combining academic work with real world learning, either as a class within a school or as a school with a stand-alone campus. Core elements of the Program include interest-based learning with individual learning plans for students, exhibitions for the student to showcase their learning and work to families, teachers, and mentors, participation in meaningful work experience or internships, and parental involvement in learning plans and exhibitions. The Program has achieved high attendance rates, low dropout rates and better learning outcomes for students who may have struggled in mainstream, traditional schooling (Big Picture Education Australia 2016). The program is designed for Years 9-12, although it is commonly 9 and 10 in Tasmania. This means there is scope for this program and fits directly within the scope of this review.

An alternative education models that sits outside of a school structure but still within the Department of Education is EdZone. EdZone is a program to provide young people between ages 13-16 who have not been enrolled in mainstream school for at least one term. It provides young people to learn outside of a school environment in a way that is flexible to their needs (Hobart City 2016). Young people recognise the importance of having environments that cater to students learning needs and want to be able to access this, however, they also see alternative education programs or models are stigmatised (TYF, 2016). YNOT believes alternative education models to mainstream education should be normalised as legitimate education pathways.

Many young people rely on public transport to access education and this can be a considerable factor when young people are making decisions about their education.

The frequency of services, routes of services, waiting times between services and the information available about services all contribute to the access young people can have to public transport, and therefore education. Young people with a disability may have additional barriers such as being able to access bus stops or needing taxis, as well as young people who live in rural and regional areas who may have less services and increased reliance on private transport. Some young people are also concerned about the behaviour of other passengers and their safety, which can prevent them from using public transport if they can access it.

In addition, young people YNOT has consulted with have said they have fears and are not confident in using public transport, particularly when they need to use different routes or services when they move schools. An integrative approach early on could improve a young person's confidence and reduce their anxiety in regards to using public transport. For example, public transport familiarisation could be done within the schools in preparing young people for Year 11 and 12.

2: Pathways and Transitions between schools and beyond

Navigating pathways between Year levels and beyond Year 12 can be a difficult and daunting task for young people and their families. YNOT argues there needs to be more support provided to young people to support planning their learning pathways and transitions.

Currently, young people can access information about different pathways from the MyEducation platform, which is an online space for young people to explore their interests and information relating to different learning pathways. While young people identify they want access to this information online, more importantly, they also want access to face-to-face support (TYF 2016). Teachers are currently providing this support alongside the MyEducation platform, however, it may be difficult for them to provide one-on-one support to each student on this. Young people want a specialised, specific support person, who has knowledge about different pathways, industries and opportunities that can provide tailored support and specific information to the circumstances and interests of young people (TYF 2016). A challenge for an online only platform is that young people may often be able to identify a pathway or

job they would like to pursue, but do not know how to go about it, which is why the face-to-face support is important to them for exploring different options and getting advice. YNOT argues having a support person within schools who is trained to work with young people in identifying pathway options for them and has knowledge and connections to different industries

YNOT argues that this personalised support also needs to start earlier in high school as many young people start considering these decisions from an early age (TYF 2016). Young people feel there is a lot of pressure placed on them to make decisions about their education after Year 10, whether this is what school they are going to, the subjects they choose or choosing a different pathway (TYF 2016). They recognise this means exploring different pathways needs to start earlier in high school to help ensure young people are making informed choices about their learning and education.

An additional barrier to navigating pathways and transitions between schools and beyond Year 12 can be low levels of literacy, both among young people and their families. Not only can this affect a young person's ability to engage in their learning and education, it can make it difficult for them to comprehend the information provided to them about future pathways. In Tasmania, 48.8% of the adult population has low levels of literacy skills (ABS 2013). While this is the lowest rates in Australia, it is combined with generations who have lower levels of education and may be unfamiliar with the college or further study or training institutions. This means it can be difficult for some families to provide support to young people when they are not able to understand different pathway options or what this means for their children. Family and friends may also have a negative influence and discourage young people from continuing with their education, which is an issue young people have identified themselves (TYF 2016). YNOT believes families who have opportunities to have a stronger involvement with their child's education can develop their understanding about the different pathways available to their child and what they mean. The Big Picture Program is a good example of how this can occur.

YNOT acknowledges more students in Tasmania should be achieving their Tasmanian Certificate of Education (TCE). In 2015, only 50.4% students in Year 12 and 13 achieved their TCE (TQA 2016). There are a variety of reasons as to why a

young person may not achieve their TCE and some of these barriers and issues that can impact this have been outlined in this submission.

It is important to note that students not attaining their TCE are not necessarily not attending Year 11 and 12. For example, some young people may attend Year 11 and 12 and complete the amount of required study hours but not meet the requirements of the TCE, such as literacy, numeracy or ICT skill requirements (TQA 2013). There may also be some young people who are not at a skill level to complete subjects required to achieve their TCE. It is important to not assume this means young people do not value their education. Young people value their education and have high aspirations for their education, however, there are multiple challenges and barriers that can develop which may prevent young people from engaging in their education. Young people YNOT has consulted with who have said they do not attend school list some of the reasons as they live too far away, they are sick and cannot attend, or do not enjoy school. Young people have said if they can access extra support to address these issues, it could make it easier for them to attend school (TYF 2016). YNOT argues that having support for young people to identify pathways available to them and plan for challenges they may face could have a positive impact and increase the number of young people completing their TCE.

In addition to this, YNOT understands it may be difficult to track the enrolment and supports for a student who may change schools and this means there can be a lapse in support that has been in place. Ensuring there is an enrolment system which can follow the pathway of a young person is important to ensure any support or strategies can be passed on.

3: Core skills/Generic capabilities

YNOT believes it is important our education system is able to prepare young people for a rapidly changing work environment and globalised society. Young people are more likely to have multiple jobs in different industries across their lifetime in addition to experiencing less certain and stable employment, due to more jobs being part-time, temporary or casual. YNOT argues that core and generic skills that can be transferred across and between jobs is increasingly important to prepare young

people for this. Currently, 70% of young people in Australia are entering jobs that will be affected by automation that will either be lost or dramatically different within the next decade. In addition to this, 60% of students are being trained for jobs that will be affected by automation and nearly half of Australia's workforce will be required to build, use or configure digital systems as part of their job within the next two years (Foundation for Young Australians 2015). This will likely require the education system to move away from preparing young people for specific jobs and develop core and generic skills that can be used across multiple jobs.

There is increasing demand for employees to have enterprising skills, which includes communication, financial literacy, project management and critical analysis skills, that can be transferred between jobs and enable people to engage with complex problems and navigate challenges (FYA 2016). YNOT argues the curriculum needs to be adaptive and flexible to ensure young people are learning and developing these skills. In addition, teachers need to be aware of these demands. YNOT understands that the professional development opportunities teachers get can vary between schools but it is important that this is consistent to assist in supporting students meet the demands of a changing workforce.

In addition to this, young people want more practical learning experiences through work placements and work experiences through school. While there are many other benefits and purposes of gaining an education, young people are concerned about the ability of their education to help them gain employment and primarily see education as their pathway to employment (TYF 2016). They want to participate in work experience to learn about different workplaces and prepare them for life beyond school. YNOT argues work experience is a good way that young people can learn 'soft skills', such as communication skills, and develop a greater understanding of workplaces before they begin to look for work. It can also support young people to develop their confidence and independence, which benefit their learning. The opportunities for work experience vary greatly depending on what school a young person attends. YNOT argues there should be more opportunities for young people to participate in work experience or placements.

In addition to employment and work skills, young people want to learn life skills through their education. This includes skills such as budgeting, cleaning, driving,

cooking, first aid and looking after their mental health (TYF 2016). Young people want to be prepared for their future and recognise school is an opportunity to learn these skills.

Young people value their education but want it to remain relevant to their needs now and in the future. Young people say their learning is supported when they understand how it links to what they want to do in the future. Young people want to be learning content that will help them for life after school (TYF 2016). Approaching learning in this way can support young people's engagement with education, and the Big Picture Program is an example of how this can work.

Conclusion

In conclusion, it is important for young people to have appropriate and adequate support to navigate pathways and transitions, address personal issues and participate in their learning. One of YNOT's main concerns is about ensuring young people are informed to make choices about their education. This includes understanding what pathway options are available to them, such as subjects, courses cross campus enrolment and alternative or flexible education models. Young people also need support to work out how these pathways can be undertaken in their own context and identify possible barriers and strategies for addressing these.

YNOT believes supporting young people through increasing the amount of alternative education models, access to transport, access to youth workers or social workers in school and involving parents in their child's education can benefit young people and support them to complete Year 12 and attain their TCE.

YNOT would like to thank the Australian Council of Education Research (ACER) for the opportunity to provide input into the *Review of Years 9-12 in Tasmania* and for providing the chance to voice the opinions of a diverse range of Tasmanian young people on an issue, which affects them significantly.

YNOT is keen to contribute to further consultation processes or work in this area and looks forward to seeing the results of the Review.

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