



# Independent Education Review

**Beacon Foundation Submission**

16<sup>th</sup> October 2024



## Opening Statement

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Beacon Foundation (Beacon) welcomes the opportunity to provide our input to the Independent Review of Education in Tasmania.

As a not-for-profit organisation, Beacon has devoted over 35 years to supporting educational outcomes for students from some of the most highly disadvantaged schools (all with an ICSEA below 1000) in the State. Our mission is for *all students to have the aspiration, motivation, and ability to determine their working future*. **We firmly believe all young Tasmanians deserve the opportunity to succeed, regardless of their background or postcode.** This drives our commitment to providing young people with the skills, confidence and understanding they need to successfully transition from education to employment.

We acknowledge that whilst the objectives of the Review are commendable, many young students currently in Tasmanian education system are performing well below the minimal standards for literacy and numeracy and lack the skills and confidence to successfully complete school, to pursue further education, training or employment. Therefore, without intentional, specialised interventions, improving the educational outcomes for this cohort of young people will be fraught. We are concerned that the scope of the Review is too narrow and fails to acknowledge that the current system is in crisis. Without broadening the scope of the Review, the risk is its findings and or recommendations, are highly unlikely to result in any substantial change to the educational outcomes for young people in Tasmania.

### **The evidence below highlights the criticality of the current situation in Tasmania:**

- Low SES background: 45.3% of Tasmanian students complete year 12, compared to 69.7% national average;
- Medium SES background: 57% of Tasmanian students complete year 12, compared to 75.2% national average;
- High SES background: 66.5% of Tasmanian students complete year 12, compared to 82.9% nationally<sup>1</sup>.

**NAPLAN:** Our students NAPLAN performances are below the national average, and far too many school leavers lack basic literacy and numeracy, needed to fully participate in daily life. Tasmania's Australian of the Year, Rosalie Martin has stated,

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<sup>1</sup> Productivity Commission 2024, Report of Government Services 2024, School Education

“Literacy and numeracy are fundamental to any individual’s capacity to engage meaningfully in contemporary society- to find and remain in employment, to access a wide range of essential services, to raise a family, or to participate as a citizen in our democratic process”<sup>2</sup>.

**Year 3 Reading:** Tasmania is the second highest in needing additional support behind the NT. 36.2% of Tasmanian year 3's are either needing additional support or developing, compared to the national average of 31.8%.

**Year 9 Reading:** 40.3% of year 9's are needing additional support or developing. National average is 35.2%. The NT and QLD have worse outcomes.

**Year 3 Writing:** 27.8% of Tasmanian year 3 students need additional support or are developing in writing. This percentage is less than the NT and QLD, however, still lagging the national figure of 21.2%.

**Year 9 Writing:** 43.6% of Tasmanian year 9 students need additional support or are developing in writing. The national average is 37.3%<sup>3</sup>.

#### **ABS Data:**

**Unemployment Rate:** 4.3% of Tasmanians are unemployed. The national unemployment rate is 4.1%<sup>4</sup>. The under-employment rate for Tasmania is 6.8%, compared with 6.4% nationally.

**Participation Rate:** The Participation Rate in Tasmania was 60.8% in August 2024, compared with a national Participation Rate of 67.1%.

**School Attendance:** The latest Tasmanian data showing average attendance at 77% for senior school students, with the lowest attendance annual attendance at 58.9% for JRLF Senior School<sup>5</sup>. The national average for senior school students is 86.4%<sup>[2]</sup>.

**ICSEA:** Only 5 Government high schools in Tasmania are located in areas where the ICSEA is above 1000. (Taroona, Hobart College, Woodbridge, Riverside and Clarence)<sup>6</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> Martin, R, 2018, The Importance of Literacy and Numeracy, Chatter Matters, The Mercury.

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.acara.edu.au/reporting/national-report-on-schooling-in-australia/naplan-national-results>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/labour/employment-and-unemployment/labour-force-australia/aug-2024>

<sup>5</sup> [Student engagement and participation data - Department for Education, Children and Young People \(decyp.tas.gov.au\)](https://www.decyp.tas.gov.au/student-engagement-and-participation-data)

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.aussieschooldata.com/top-schools-secondary-yearly>

**SEIFA:** Based on the latest SEIFA maps, more than half of the geographic area of Tasmania is classified as ‘most disadvantaged against the Index of Relative Socio-economic Advantage and Disadvantage (IRSAD)’<sup>7</sup>. The SEIFA Index for Disadvantage for State Growth was 966 for 2021.

Given this, the **case for change is undeniable and urgent**, anything short of **transformational change** will fail to alter the current. An overhaul of the education system is urgently required—one that redefines values, culture, and operational models, as well as shifting mindset, behaviour, and practices. Only through such significant change can we begin to bridge the gap between the privileged and the disadvantaged and ensure that all young Tasmanians achieve the educational outcomes they deserve.

To achieve this level of change, bold decisions will be essential and innovative new approaches will need to be embraced and supported. **This includes re-examining the future of the college system, adopting non-traditional schooling models that accommodate diverse learning styles, and implementing explicit teaching strategies to enhance outcomes for highly disadvantaged student cohorts.** Whatever the decision is, **young people must remain at the heart of the process.** Ultimately, while economic contribution is a vital aspect of education, fostering students' exploration of their interests, values, and strengths will cultivate a workforce that is not only skilled but also passionate and motivated. This alignment between personal fulfillment and professional life fosters innovation, creativity, and a sense of purpose, ultimately benefiting both the economy and society.

**Without a strong** understanding of the Tasmanian context, the effect of geographic isolation and impact **intergenerational disadvantage**, the Review’s recommendations will again not elicit any fundamental change on educational outcomes. **Tasmania, for example, has one of the most regionally dispersed populations in Australia**, with almost two-thirds of Tasmania's population (309,000) living outside of the capital city area of Greater Hobart in 2021<sup>8</sup>. This geographic isolation leads to challenges accessing education and employment opportunities. **Tasmania also has some of the highest levels of socio-economic disadvantage in Australia**<sup>9</sup> with Tasmania generally ranking low on the **Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas (SEIFA)**, particularly on the **Index of Relative Socio-Economic Disadvantage (IRSD)**. Not surprisingly given this **Tasmania’s ICSEA scores**

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<sup>7</sup> <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/people-and-communities/socio-economic-indexes-areas-seifa-australia/latest-release-index-of-relative-socio-economic-advantage-and-disadvantage-irsad->

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.abs.gov.au/articles/snapshot-tas-2021>

<sup>9</sup> <https://profile.id.com.au/tasmania/seifa-disadvantage>

**are also some of the lowest in Australia.** Of 213 public schools in Tasmania only 20 have an ICSEA of over 1000 and of these only five are secondary schools.

Many students from disadvantaged backgrounds struggle with attendance and engagement, which impacts on their educational outcomes. There are also negative perceptions of education which diminish young peoples' motivation and aspiration and the perceived value of educational attainment. The age at which children from lower socio-economic backgrounds may stop dreaming and aspiring can vary, but research suggests that this often occurs in the later primary school years or early secondary school years, typically around ages 10 to 14<sup>10</sup>. During this period children become more aware of their social environments and the barriers they face, which can lead to a decline in aspirations.

Students who struggle with school may begin to lose hope about their prospects. Increased awareness of family struggles, financial difficulties, or community issues can lead to a more restricted outlook, causing children to temper their dreams. As children enter adolescence, peer influence becomes more significant. If aspirations are not encouraged within their social circles, they may feel pressured to conform to lower expectations.

Overcoming the impact of disadvantage and lower socio-economic status of young people's educational outcome is challenging and intervention strategies must be multi-faceted and enduring. Given Beacon's commitment to supporting better educational outcomes in Tasmania, given our extensive knowledge and experience working with educators and industry in the career education space, we welcome any opportunity to help inform any future initiatives focused on addressing the critical challenges facing the education sector in Tasmania.

## **Defining Educational Success**

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Beacon has had over three decades working with students from disadvantaged backgrounds to support them to have the aspiration, motivation, and ability to determine their working future. Through this experience we firmly believe that the purpose of education extends beyond the mere transmission of knowledge, it includes the holistic development of young people, equipping them to navigate and contribute positively to the world. Success in this context extends beyond academic achievement. It

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<sup>10</sup> The Role of Socioeconomic Status in Children's Educational Aspirations" **Authors:** A. J. McLeod, S. M. Kaiser **Journal:** *Sociology of Education* **Year:** 2018

encompasses well-being, social connectedness, self-awareness, confidence and personal agency.

**A successful student therefore is one that emerges from school literate, numerate and with a strong understanding of their strengths, interests and values and how they relate to the world of work.** This will enable them to find more meaningful roles in the workforce and society more broadly. This holistic view also prioritises lifelong learning and adaptability, ensuring individuals are not only productive economically (as taxpayers) but are also fulfilled and engaged members of their communities.

Although we understand labour market pressures, for many young people from highly disadvantaged backgrounds and intergenerational unemployment, the concept of aspiring to tertiary or even VET qualifications, seems unrealistic and unattainable. For many of these students having their fundamental daily needs met is their highest priority, before they can engage in any meaningful way with learning and education. For this cohort remaining engaged with education through their secondary years is an achievement in and of itself and beyond this, **completing Year 10 and transitioning into entry-level employment, a traineeship, or an apprenticeship is a successful outcome, worthy of celebration.**

Given this we strongly recommend revising the narrative around secondary schooling to emphasise that it can lead to a variety of successful pathways, including vocational education and training (VET) and other alternatives, not just university. Without this narrative, many young people struggle to envision their future and may not aspire to realise their full potential. We need to counter perceptions that non-tertiary routes are of lesser value by broadening our definition of success to include all pathways. This will empower students to pursue the options that best align with their skills and interests.

This shift in perspective is essential if we are to positively change current educational outcomes. It will enable young Tasmanians to see the value in VET and other pathways, helping them to forge fulfilling careers and contribute meaningfully to their communities. **By celebrating all forms of learning and achievement, we can cultivate a generation that is motivated, resilient, and prepared for the challenges of the future.**

To support this outcome exposing young people, especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds, to industry volunteers with varied career pathways is incredibly powerful and can be transformational for a young person. Beacon has been bringing industry volunteers into the classroom through our career education programs for over thirty years. We know from experience that when volunteers share their life stories and diverse career

paths, they highlight the fact that success isn't solely tied to a university degree or a predetermined career trajectory.

For young people who may lack role models in the workforce, hearing firsthand accounts from individuals that have come from similar backgrounds, who have carved out fulfilling careers through non-traditional routes can be particularly impactful. Their stories serve as beacons of hope, encouraging young people to continue to dream and aspire to engage in meaningful work. This exposure may not only ignite their interest in various career paths but also reinforces the vital message that they **should never lose hope in their potential to succeed**. This is where Beacon's role as an intermediary is so critical. By creating connections, we empower young Tasmanians to believe in themselves and their ability to shape their own futures.

A genuine collaboration and connection between industry and the education system, beyond exposing young people to positive role models, is the opportunity for students to also understand what skills, knowledge and experience will be required to transition into vacancies of the future. As an intermediary, Beacon through our career education programs for example, provide opportunities for young people to engage directly with industry volunteers and to develop essential transferable skills like communication, teamwork, and problem-solving. It ensures students' skills are aligning with current job market demands and emerging industries. Work experience or entry-level roles additionally provide students workplace experiences on which to build their confidence and readiness to take on future opportunities. Strengthening the role of intermediaries like Beacon will enhance the efficiency of connecting students with industry opportunities and ultimately improve the alignment between educational outcomes and industry needs.

**If a student emerging from school literate and numerate is a key indicator of educational success**, given Tasmania's low NAPLAN outcomes, this must continue to be a key area of focus. NAPLAN proficiency results are currently a key threat to attainment. For example, when we consider the year 9 results, 43.7% of Tasmanian students did not achieve proficiency in writing<sup>11</sup>. Furthermore, 12.5% of the enrolled students either had an exemption, withdrew or were absent. Therefore, around 2630 achieved a score below the level of proficient, whilst a further 840 did not participate in the test. As demographer Lisa Denny notes in her paper "given that it is the year 9 writing test that strongly predicts year 11 and 12 performance, it is unlikely that half of the 2024 year 9 cohort will continue to year 10 to 11 and then 12 (retention) and complete their schooling, successfully (attainment)." <sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> <https://www.acara.edu.au/reporting/national-report-on-schooling-in-australia/naplan-national-results>



in this context we welcome the Government's ***Lifting Literacy 3 Year Implementation Plan***, which recognises the imperative for additional resources to be provided to ensure all Tasmanians have basic foundational literacy and numeracy skills and encourage its prompt rollout and ongoing monitoring.

### **How can we collectively support Tasmanian learners to get the most out of their entire education experience and ensure all students reach their potential?**

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It is crucial for the education system in Tasmania to ensure that every student feels supported and that they belong. When students do not feel safe or accepted at school, their likelihood of disengaging from education significantly increases. Therefore, the system must be able to quickly identify students who are struggling and ensure they receive the additional support needed to catch up. Evidence shows that when students face challenges in their early years, they may never fully catch up to their peers without specific interventions<sup>13</sup>. Anecdotally, a child who cannot write their name on their first painting is likely to be the same student who disengages from learning early and ultimately fails to complete secondary school. Early identification of students falling behind is critical to mitigate these risks and additional remedial support essential to help them continue to achieve key milestones in literacy and numeracy throughout their education journey.

In this context, it's important to note that Tasmania lacks a mechanism to retain students in a grade if they do not meet the necessary educational standards. As a result, more Tasmanians risk becoming disengaged and failing to attain a qualification. Frustrated by their struggles, these students can become disruptive, which in turn hinders the learning of their peers. Again, early identification and intervention are crucial for helping students get back on track and remain educationally connected with their peers.

Beacon recognises that with increased personalisation of education comes increased relevance to each student. It is when education feels relevant that a young person is most likely to be motivated to meaningfully engage and get the most out of the experience.

Revisiting the standard pedagogy and being open to introducing greater flexibility through strength-based educational models, that have been shown to produce some of the most outstanding educational and employment outcomes globally, is what our young people deserve.

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<sup>13</sup> Australian Education Research Organisation, Learning Outcomes of Students with Early Low NAPLAN Performance, 2023.



Beacon call for three fundamental changes to be seriously considered if we are to realise the positive reform:

1. **Explicit instruction pedagogy** of foundational skills and knowledge
2. **Flexible project-based learning** aligned with identified strengths and interests
3. **Integrated career education** to contextualise learning from early-primary school

In earlier years of education explicit instruction would address foundational skill, primarily literacy and numeracy, while core social and emotional development is nurtured. Into high school explicit instruction would evolve to target curriculum delivery of core subject knowledge as aligned with an individual student's learning plan. Explicit instruction allows for targeted teaching that can address specific gaps in knowledge and understanding, ensuring that all students have the tools they need to succeed in more complex, project-based tasks. This helps build student confidence, and better positions them to succeed. An ideal model for the Department to consider is Marsden Road Primary School in NSW.

With the combination of some of the worst NAPLAN scores in the country, coupled with low retention and poor attainment, a major shake-up of the Tasmanian education system is vital. We are well past the point of making minor adjustments, and widescale reform is now necessary. Beacon firmly believes serious consideration of the explicit learning model is warranted. There is evidence of its successful application interstate and overseas, and in the first instance we propose that the Tasmanian Government could send a delegation of key stakeholders to see firsthand how this model of learning is applied in NSW. The delegation would be able to meet with the teaching staff and Department of Education counterparts in NSW whilst gaining a valuable look into the teaching methodologies in action at a school like Marsden Road Primary School. This could then be trialled across several schools in the first instance.

Prior to the introduction of the explicit learning methodology, the principal estimated 90% of the students they were sending to high school were below the standard for their age group in reading and writing. Now this Western Sydney school, where around 90% of the students come from non-English speaking backgrounds is outperforming schools in far better socio-economic areas. This model of explicit learning, coupled with the principal's commitment to discipline and manners deserves serious consideration as a best practice model. Beacon recommends trialling this approach across several schools, and closely monitoring the outcomes.

Flexible project-based learning would prioritise a student's ability to practically apply the theory gained through explicit instruction. Here, complementary skills development would further enhance confidence and competence of the student, capitalising on identified areas of innate strength and interest.

Integrated career education would add a critical layer of contextualised learning both on campus and in the workplace. Early career dreaming would lay the foundation of a broadened awareness of opportunities, which has been strongly correlated to improved employment outcomes later in adulthood. Strength and interest based exploration and curriculum aligned work based learning would provide greater industry relevance to learning, increase their social capital network and provide opportunities to apply their strengths, skills and theoretical knowledge in a real-world environment.

Importantly, both project-based learning and integrated career education (work-based learning) is not only proven valuable for students on traditional VET pathways but also for those following academic pathways to further education.

Some students may also thrive better in a nontraditional educational setting. This may take the form of a totally purpose built and designed Beacon school of industry or reconfigure an existing education facility to meet the needs of local industry. An example of this might be Cosgrove High School partnering with INCAT and other thriving manufacturing groups to become the Hobart School of Manufacturing to meet the employment needs and ensure young people are exposed to industry led curriculum that therefore leads to a more holistic education experience for young learners and the opportunity to experience firsthand the potential to access employment, that in turn provides the young person dignity and self-respect that we all experience from having a real job.

These nuanced educational offerings not only cater to diverse learning styles and interests but also promote the value of vocational training, apprenticeships, and other non-traditional routes. This approach helps dismantle the pervasive misconception that success is solely defined by university attendance. In fact, many fulfilling and prosperous careers are forged through hands-on experience and specialised training, which can lead to highly rewarding employment in various sectors.

By recognising and celebrating these alternative pathways, we can create a more inclusive education system that acknowledges the unique strengths and aspirations of every student. It is essential to showcase successful individuals who have taken these routes, illustrating that a rich and varied career landscape awaits those who pursue vocational and industry-aligned education.

Ultimately, fostering these alternatives not only supports individual student growth but also strengthens our economy by cultivating a skilled workforce that meets the evolving needs of local industries. By embracing a broader definition of success in education, we empower all young people to find their own paths and contribute meaningfully to their communities.

### **How can we improve attendance, retention, attainment and student outcomes to better support choice of learning and career pathways?**

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Attendance and engagement have strong correlation with student retention, attainment and educational outcomes. The latest Tasmanian data shows the average attendance at 77% for secondary school students, with the lowest attendance annual attendance at 58.9% at one school<sup>14</sup>. For years 11 and 12 the 2023 average attendance was 61%, with the lowest attendance at just 25.5% at another high school<sup>15</sup>. This is compared to the national average of 88.6%.<sup>16</sup> Given students from lower socio-economic backgrounds are more likely to be absent from school than their peers from more affluent communities, this trend is particularly concerning in Tasmania, given our high levels of intergenerational disadvantage. Only five Tasmanian Government high schools currently have an ICSEA above 1000, meaning the vast majority are low socio-economic schools.

Educational absenteeism has a cumulative detrimental impact, particularly with non-authorized absences compared to authorized ones<sup>17</sup>. Studies show this issue begins as early as kindergarten, where affected children demonstrate lower working memory and cognitive flexibility<sup>18</sup>. If this pattern of disadvantage continues, it leads to lower literacy and academic scores by age 15<sup>19</sup>. Over time gaps in learning widen, making it increasingly difficult for students to keep pace with their peers, resulting in significant academic disadvantages. As students fall behind their peers, they are more likely to struggle with academic content, leading to feelings of frustration and a sense of isolation and disconnection from their school community, which may further discourage them from attending regularly.

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<sup>14</sup> [Student engagement and participation data - Department for Education, Children and Young People \(decyp.tas.gov.au\)](https://decyp.tas.gov.au)

<sup>15</sup> [Student engagement and participation data - Department for Education, Children and Young People \(decyp.tas.gov.au\)](https://decyp.tas.gov.au)

<sup>16</sup> <https://www.acara.edu.au/reporting/national-report-on-schooling-in-australia/student-attendance#:~:text=In%20Australia%20in%202023%3A,up%20from%2049.9%25%20in%202022.>

<sup>17</sup> Hancock, K. J., Shepherd, C. C. J., Lawrence, D., & Zubrick, S. R. (2013). Student attendance and educational outcomes: Every Day Counts. Report for the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, Canberra

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Ansari, A, & Gottfried, M.A (2021). The grade-level and cumulative outcomes of absenteeism, *Child Development*, 92(4), e 548-564.

Beacon recognises that many of the factors contributing to a student's capacity to attend school in a state conducive to positive engagement with learning, arise prior to them reaching the school gate. Not specialising in the provision of services or interventions outside of school, we defer recommendations for addressing these social challenges to those organisations actively working in this space. Beacon recommends and commits to collaboration with these service providers. This continuity of support structures will be critical for those students most at risk.

Within our scope of expertise, that is where students are engaging with school, we have identified many of the contributing factors that lead to disengagement, lower attendance, retention and ultimately purposeful learning and career pathway choices. We believe the foundation to positively influencing attendance and engagement is for students to recognise **education as being personally relevant**. Attendance and retention data in Tasmania, would suggest fewer students are understanding this relevance.

When students identify their strengths and align their learning with their interests, they are more likely to be engaged and motivated. This personal connection can lead to a more meaningful educational experience, increasing the relevance of education and positively influencing attendance, behaviour, retention and attainment.

By concentrating on their innate strengths, students can develop complementary skills that may lead to greater proficiency in areas they are passionate about. This targeted approach can enhance confidence and promote deeper learning. Understanding their strengths allows students to make more informed decisions about their future careers. This clarity can guide their educational choices, ensuring they pursue pathways that align with their aspirations and capabilities.

A strength-based framework can inform individualised learning plans that cater to each student's unique profile. This personalised approach can be more effective than a one-size-fits-all pedagogy, providing tailored support and resources. Focusing on strengths can foster a growth mindset, encouraging students to see challenges as opportunities for improvement. This can promote resilience and adaptability in their learning journey.

Increased personal relevance of education will likely have a positive influence on other social challenges seen in school, such as classroom behaviour, bullying and teacher harassment.

As outlined above, Beacon believes that the introduction of explicit teaching, project-based learning and integrated career education that targets individual

strengths and interests, would see increased relevance of the learning experience for each student.

Not surprisingly young Tasmanians also experience higher rates of disengagement from learning (and work) compared to their Australian counterparts with many experiencing multiple, intersecting and compounding barriers, such as financial hardship<sup>20</sup>, limited access to reliable transport, stable housing and home life. The evidence also shows that lower socio-economic families have a higher prevalence of health conditions and can lead to young family members assuming a care giving role, with 32% of disengaged and partially disengaged youth having caring responsibilities<sup>21</sup>, impacting their school attendance. Since the COVID 19 pandemic, there has also been a spike in mental health issues, anxiety and depression. These conditions are leading to a number of students missing school. With the recent Tasmanian Budget Estimates hearing learning 2217 students were on the waitlist to see a school psychologist<sup>22</sup>, there is clear evidence of the mental health crisis in schools.

Anecdotally, educators in Tasmania are reporting an increase in student disengagement, particularly around Year 8 (approximately age 13). This is a pivotal time in a young person's life, as they are forming critical perceptions of their sense of self and are beginning to understand their place in the world. Interventions to keep this cohort connected with learning is key at this time, as without this we risk them disengaging and dropping out of the system altogether. From Beacon's experience the introduction of career education programs from Year 7 (if not earlier) is a proactive measure to combat disengagement. As mentioned previously, students are forming critical perceptions about their future at this time and early career education helps broaden their horizons and challenge socio-economic stereotypes that may otherwise limit their ambitions.

By engaging students with career possibilities early, they develop a clearer vision of how their education connects with their future goals, significantly enhancing their motivation and engagement. This proactive approach not only supports student engagement but also enhances overall educational outcomes, reducing the long-term costs associated with student disengagement. Research supports the idea that early career education leads to better long-term outcomes. For example, a study by Mann and Percy (2014) revealed that students who engaged in multiple employer interactions

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<sup>20</sup> <https://povertyandinequality.acoss.org.au/poverty/rate-of-poverty-by-location-in-2019-20-and-change-in-poverty/>

<sup>21</sup> Youth Jobs Strategy 2024-25, p 23.

<sup>22</sup> [https://www.parliament.tas.gov.au/data/assets/pdf\\_file/0029/85493/HA-Estimates-B-Wednesday-25-September-Palmer.pdf](https://www.parliament.tas.gov.au/data/assets/pdf_file/0029/85493/HA-Estimates-B-Wednesday-25-September-Palmer.pdf) page 6

(4+) earned, on average, 18%<sup>23</sup> more than their peers who had minimal or no interactions. Students who start exploring career options earlier, in addition to staying more engaged, are more likely to make informed decisions, which can contribute to better educational and career outcomes.

Beacon's career education programs involving industry volunteers, also provide an opportunity to expose young people to positive role models. This is particularly powerful when volunteers themselves have come from disadvantaged backgrounds and share their life and career journey with students, because the risk is **“you can't be what you can't see”** and many of the young people we work with may not have people in their life in the workforce. By seeing relatable examples of achievement and resilience, young people can develop greater ambition and confidence, empowering them to pursue their goals and overcome the limitations imposed by their environment.

### **The Case for an Increased Focus on Career Education**

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Tasmanian Government schools lack a standardised and comprehensive career education policy. While DECYP has supported educators in gaining formal qualifications, such as Graduate Certificates or Cert IV in Career Development, the absence of a clear framework to apply this learning, results in the inconsistent delivery of career education across the state. Additionally, schools have inadequate resources and support required to offer high-quality career education, work readiness, and transition advice. As a result, students receive varying levels of exposure to activities to boost career knowledge, connections, and confidence, which are key enablers of a smooth transition from school to employment or further education. Additionally, the lack of a policy risks a mismatch between the skills students are developing and the skills employers need, resulting in a workforce that struggles to meet labour market demands. A well-structured career education policy benefits both individuals and the broader economy by preparing students with essential skills and knowledge, boosting productivity, and supporting economic growth.

Through Beacon's lived experience over the last 35 years, we know integrating activities which strengthen career understanding, connections and confidence with industry provides the best chance to help students make the successful transition from education to employment. We know that students who participate in four or more industry engagements are 86% more likely to engage in further education, training, or employment after school<sup>24</sup>.

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<sup>23</sup> Mann, A, Percy, C, 2014, Employer Engagement in British Secondary Education: Wage Earning Outcomes Experienced by Young Adults

<sup>24</sup> Mann, A., Rehill, J., & Kashefpakdel, E. T (2018), Employer engagement in education: Insights from international evidence for effective practice and future research, (January). Retrieved from

**If educational success implies a student leaves school literate and numerate and with a strong understanding of their strengths, interests and values and how they relate to the world of work, the case for sustained investment in career readiness programs is compelling.** The inclusion of careers education early in the curriculum, especially where young people gain exposure to various industries and career pathways, has a significant impact on young people<sup>25</sup> Ideally career exploration activities commence from the start of high school (if not earlier) and build each year, culminating in comprehensive work experience. By enabling young people to see various careers firsthand, we give them something to aspire to, broadening their horizons and showing them options they may not have realised existed.

Not only is a strength-based approach to learning and career education supported by global evidence but Beacon have also seen the benefits to increasing career confidence for participants of our career readiness program. Core to this program is the facilitated identification of areas of strength and interest so that personalised career exploration and experience can provide as much relevance to each student as possible.

Beacon has been very successful in the provision of the Beacon Career Program, where we work closely with students in years 9 and 10 over the course of 8 sessions. This programme was designed by examination of global best practice and exposes students to industry. This builds their understanding of the world of work, whilst boosting the confidence of industry to hire young people. An enhanced rollout of this programme to 48 more schools would see approximately 1200 students assisted in getting practical work experience and an understanding of the workplace in almost 500 local businesses.

Students' awareness of career opportunities and pathways available to them from early in their high school studies, assists with retention and attainment. This enables them to plan their subjects and map their future, whilst being aware of alternative pathways, should their options or preferences change. We know that parents and teachers influence career choices, however, recognise that often their understanding of certain roles, or currency of knowledge is lacking. By having a dedicated careers adviser, and coupling this with work experience, students will be better positioned to make informed decisions regarding their futures. Beacon as an intermediary can work in conjunction with school-based careers advisers, as a conduit between

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[https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/public/files/Employer\\_Engagement\\_in\\_education.pdf](https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/public/files/Employer_Engagement_in_education.pdf)

<sup>25</sup> Mann, A, Percy, C, 2014, Employer Engagement in British Secondary Education: Wage Earning Outcomes Experienced by Young Adults



schools, students and industry. This ensures students get a genuine understanding of employment options and they can begin to truly envisage their future in work.

## **Conclusion**

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Recognising the challenge ahead of us for the social and economic wellbeing of our State, we encourage the Government to take the most of this opportunity and consider bold and innovative strategies to attest the decline in educational achievement.

There are many Tasmanian organisations like Beacon with a proven track record in delivering outcomes, and we welcome the opportunity to work in close collaboration with the Department, to ensure real and meaningful improvement to the Tasmanian education system over the coming years.

However, education does not operate in a silo, and whilst educational reform is needed, there are many other aspects we must consider and improve if we are to achieve success. We know that there is increasing disparity within society, thereby reducing social mobility and increasing the likelihood of this disadvantage perpetuating.

We are failing our young people by not providing the supports they need to succeed in school and make the transition to further education or employment, and ultimately failing our State, as the cost of inaction now will only see a far heavier economic and social cost into the future.

Beacon will continue to engage positively with this important agenda, as the Government works towards a solution. We recognise the monumental size of the challenge; however, this presents a genuine opportunity for the Tasmanian Government to leave a lasting legacy, positioning Tasmania for a better and brighter future