

Dear Ms Bayliss,

Please find below responses to the questions posed in the September 2024 consultation document entitled: Independent Review of Education in Tasmania

### **Questions**

- What do you think are the reasons for finishing Year 12?
- What do you think success looks like during and after the formal years of schooling in Tasmania?
- How can we better encourage young people to aspire to achieve their ambitions?
- What is working well and why?

### **Response:**

There has been a shift towards higher levels of technology in most occupations that means that many aspects of adequate education and training, in previous years, are not sufficiently advanced to ensure a successful career for the current generation of students. The education system should aspire to produce students who have a strong prospect of a successful career in their chosen area of interest. In many areas this will require further training, either through apprenticeships, technical training or higher education. To achieve this the students need to have confidence in their ability to deploy their skills and an appreciation that further learning is both desirable and a rewarding way to promote their life goals. This latter point is not well reflected in the current community conversation, in most of the country. Too often education is presented as an unpleasant and unnecessary chore rather than an exciting journey to a better future. While there may be details about the current operation of the system that need adjustment, this overarching view of education as a positive force leading to a better life needs to be sold much more effectively than at present. There is a case for a public health style programme that addresses the whole community, like Life Be In It, that provides examples of good outcomes that arise from education and a positive view of the desirability of completing year 12. The current conversation is primarily about failure of the cohort to progress, peppered with examples of individuals who have done well in the past in spite of not having higher education. These people are rare, exceptional individuals, and should be recognised; but, for most, education is the path to improvement and that needs to be conveyed to the public in a more positive and consistent manner than at present. There is a need to harness public advocacy efforts to portray education as a way of life that dramatically improves both individual prospects and indeed the future of the state.

**Questions:**

- What do families do well to support their children and young people in their learning?
- What support helps families to do this?
- What can be done to better support students who are struggling or at risk of falling behind to get back on track?
- How can we ensure all Tasmanian learners get the most out of their education and reach their full potential?

**Response:**

Education is delivered during a period of enormous development, including social, emotional, cognitive and physical domains. Disruptions to the delivery of education can arise from difficulties, temporary or chronic, in all of these areas. The state needs to provide a fast-response process to address these disruptions in order to ensure the effective delivery of education and to support families in their role of encouraging education. The press is currently reporting delays in accessing school psychologists of over one year. This is disastrous for students who are experiencing treatable social, emotional and cognitive challenges. Appropriately trained and registered Psychologists are skilled in addressing these issues and need to be much more readily available for students in need, as they used to be in the government school system in Tasmania many years ago. The challenges facing current students are much greater with the impact of social media, both positive and negative, long-term sequelae from the pandemic, and significant increases in mental ill-health in young people, and the greater demand for advanced skills in the current workforce. The support processes are much more necessary now than they ever were before. This will require addressing the relatively poor remuneration of individuals in the support system. The state currently pays poorly for such roles in the schools and in health compared to other states, and it is a false economy because the needs are not being addressed in a timely manner and as a consequence start a cascade of diminished educational and social/emotional performance. There are people specifically trained with the skills that can assist. They need to be provided.

**Questions:**

- How best can students be supported to successfully complete and achieve by the end of Year 12?
- What are the top 2 or 3 priorities or changes you believe are needed so all Tasmanian young people can complete Year 12 or an equivalent?
- What are the most important ways to support choice for students?

**Response:**

One recurring argument has been that the College system in Tasmania is a major impediment to students continuing to year 12. That is not clear to me if we take an evidence-based approach to evaluating effectiveness. The state has had high schools running year 11 and 12 classes for many years now, in parallel with the college system, and that has not improved the proportion of students who are continuing to year 12. If the option to complete years 11 and 12 in a local school was the critical factor it should have made a difference by now. Clearly, the reasons for not completing year 12 must lie elsewhere.

Of course, the High schools do not match the range of facilities and course options available in the colleges. The colleges are excellent locations for students to take a variety of courses of interest and to be able to learn skills on modern equipment with excellent teachers. They gain this advantage because the numbers of students are high, allowing the colleges to employ more specialist teachers and to provide up-to-date shared equipment more effectively. The technical facilities could be matched at high schools, if the government was willing to fund it, but there will always be a limited pool of specialist teachers and courses that could be offered when student numbers are small and so the high schools are unlikely to be able to match the college breadth of offerings. Competitive national salaries and additional infrastructure funding could reduce this difference but there are efficiencies that come with larger numbers that won't be matched in many high schools. Networks of cooperating high schools have formed to address the need for access to a broader curriculum, but these introduce a very disruptive need for bussing between schools that recreates the travel issue raised in discussing the colleges, but with less effective access to cutting edge resources than is found at each of the colleges.

This situation leads to the conclusion that the existence of Colleges provides a teaching resource that is clearly superior in what students can be offered. Of note, in the ACT the college system works well and in Tasmania it works better than the current high school based alternative, in spite of the dedicated efforts of the teachers and those schools. This review of the Education system should take great care not to remove this excellent resource when the current alternative is less desirable.

Instead, it appears that the real reasons for lack of completion of year twelve are just as likely to be societal. We need a community that places high value on educational achievement. Public commentary rarely does that in Australia, and less so in Tasmania. As a career academic originating on the North West coast of Tasmania I find that disappointing but understand that it reflects the largely comfortable and successful lives many Tasmanians have had without that education. However, recent changes in the economy and demography of Tasmania means that is unlikely to be the outcome for the next generation, including those choosing traditional rural occupations, and we need to get on board with helping our children to prepare for the future. A committed

long-term public campaign on the merits of further education appears to be more critical than tinkering with the school system. Although full funding of the system to the level specified by the Gonski report should be an essential first step. That system should use evidence-based teaching practice, such as the recently re-introduced teaching of phonics to facilitate reading, to ensure a solid skill base is built within the students for their learning. A similar effort to establish and deliver critical skills in mathematics would also contribute to a broad skill set that can provide a foundation for further education. That is the best way to ensure students are successful and consequently can enjoy the learning process. Enjoyment of the process is likely to encourage the student to want more and so a solid skill base should be/remain a central aim of the early years of schooling. The recommendations should also include a rigorous examination of the efficacy of any introduced changes, as with any evidence-based policy. In parallel the state needs to find ways to ensure those enhanced skills can be put to good use locally. There are already some opportunities but the state needs more. Having a desirable job in mind always helps motivate student to learn.

**Questions:**

- How can we get more great teachers and school leaders and help them do their jobs well?
- How can we keep the existing workforce feeling energised and supported so they stay?

**Response:**

Remuneration and delegation are the essential ingredients influencing the ability to attract *and retain* well-trained staff. Salaries need to be competitive with other places that compete for our staff in order to retain them, especially now that housing costs essentially match those of mainland alternative destinations. Within the teaching role the state will get best value by having content staff focusing on using their core skills. Administration that is tangential to the teaching role should be minimised and performed by others. Support staff, such as school psychologists, should be readily available to assist with the timely addressing of student needs. Without that, teachers, who are not appropriately trained to deal with psychological issues, will be confronted with impossible teaching situations that can impact whole classes at a time. These are, of course, lessons that have been learnt many times in the past, but it is worth reiterating that effective teaching requires time, concentration and effort and like anyone else who is distracted from their main role, performance declines.

**Questions:**

- What helps teachers and school leaders implement initiatives so that the focus on improvement is maintained?
- How do we ensure that policy initiatives are effectively implemented and that resources are used to improve learning outcomes?

***Response:***

I am unclear on what is standard local practice, but it is always desirable to have regular monitoring of the implementation of new programmes with some form of structured assessment of progress against clear guidelines. This is best established as part of in-service training prior to the programme commencing. Provided the guidelines include measures that assess both the allocation of resources against requirements and the change in learning outcomes then this standard procedure for measuring efficacy should be sufficient. Teachers and schools should be involved in developing the guidelines, since they are best placed to know what is achievable, but clear and reasonable expectations at the outset will enhance the likelihood of positive outcomes.

I am more than willing to discuss any of these issues further if needed to help achieve a positive outcome for the state.

Yours sincerely

David Badcock

Emeritus Professor David Badcock FAPS FASSA FAPS (USA).

Senior Honorary Research Fellow, The University of Western Australia

Past-President, The Psychology Foundation of Australia inc.

Past-President, The Australasian Society for Experimental Psychology.

Past-Chair, The Australian Academy of Science, National Committee for Brain and Mind

Member, Executive Committee, The Australian Brain Alliance

Member, The Australian Psychological Society, Division of Psychological Research, Education and Training Advisory Committee.

Current address: Richmond, Tasmania.