24-77/UNI5032

11 October 2024

Independent Education Review
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Attention: Independent Education Review

Introduction
The Independent Education Union Victoria Tasmania Branch (IEU) appreciates this opportunity to make a submission consistent with the Terms of Reference provided through the Independent Review of Tasmania's Education System (Review).

The IEU was created in 1994 through the amalgamation of associations representing staff in independent schools, Catholic schools and English Language Colleges in Victoria and Tasmania. We represent all staff who work in non-government education, and we have over 20,000 members across Victoria and Tasmania who we represent and dedicate our efforts to achieving the best outcomes for in the workplace.

The IEU is a key stakeholder on behalf of members in all issues impacting education provision and education workers. IEU members understand that their work within the Tasmanian education system is critical to the future of the State, playing an important role in supporting young Tasmanians to gain the skills and knowledge they need to fully contribute to their communities, economic future and to lead their best lives.

This submission addresses the critical themes identified in the September 2024 Independent Review of Education in Tasmania Public Consultation Paper, which seeks to evaluate and enhance the educational landscape for Kindergarten to Year 12. Our focus emphasizes the educational challenges faced, particularly within non-government schools, and acknowledges the vital roles played by teachers, teacher assistants, and school leaders.

1. Defining Educational Success
To foster educational success, clear and consistent objectives must be agreed upon and transparently reported (Hattie, 2009). The frequent overhaul of educational programs within Tasmania has led to professional fatigue among educators and schools, making it difficult for them to fully implement and 'bed down' new strategies before further changes are introduced. For instance, teachers who are provided with professional development on one set of goals often find themselves shifting to an entirely new framework merely two to five years later (Gordon et al., 2016). This churn without an opportunity to refine, integrate and build on new learning both prevents PD investment being fully realised but also leads to disengagement from some until they

can be sure it's something that will last long-term as a focus.

Furthermore, the societal perception of success has evolved; students are increasingly influenced by social media figures whose paths to accomplishment differ markedly from traditional educational routes. This disconnect highlights the need for community engagement strategies that promote the value of education beyond high school (Stafford, 2017). Educators can only do so much in a limited timeframe, emphasizing the need for societal initiatives to foster aspiration among young people this work must also involve families and communities more broadly. Where this occurs in partnership with schools it requires time and support resources to integrate it into the work being undertaken to develop a career pathways approach rather than being an add on. Furthermore, fostering an understanding among parents about the nature of classroom dynamics and the diverse needs of students is crucial. Community support can significantly influence both student performance and teacher morale (Epstein, 2018).

A range of social changes included more advanced technologies, workplace flexible and the ageing population across Australia creates opportunities for Tasmanian students to train and enter the work force to both replace retiring workers and to take up new roles supporting these community members. The school system must continue to include pathways to these careers that encourage students to remain engaged in education including until the completion of Year 12 to ensure they are able to access new and emerging opportunities. We need to continue to work toward broadening the societal definition of educational success to elevate the status of vocational training and alternative pathways to support this.

2. Strengthening Supports and Engagement for All Learners
Supporting all students, particularly those requiring additional assistance, is paramount. Over the last 20 years, teacher assistants have taken on increasing responsibilities, necessitating specialized training in behaviour management and diverse educational needs (Howes et al., 2018). However, their employment conditions have not kept pace with these demands, often resulting in high turnover and burnout.

To facilitate high-quality intervention, the IEU advocates for enhanced professional development for teacher assistants, including paid training opportunities that address key areas like literacy and numeracy interventions. Implementing support teachers who collaborate with classroom educators can also enhance student learning without overwhelming the existing teaching faculty, creating a more sustainable model of support (Baker, 2020).

The demands on classroom teachers to address diverse learning needs have expanded significantly and the teacher-teacher assistant partnership has become key in meeting these needs, often working in challenging conditions (Miller et al., 2017). Despite their crucial roles, teacher assistants frequently receive limited professional development, hampering their effectiveness in supporting students with complex needs.

We advocate for staff in schools to have time to better case manage to address behavioural challenges and provide academic support effectively (Topping & Maloney, 2005), accompanied by targeted professional development that equips them to handle sometimes challenging behaviours. Additionally, implementing dedicated support teachers within schools can provide targeted assistance to students, ensuring that classroom teachers can focus on delivering quality instruction.

We see particular needs in areas of relative socio-economic disadvantage where increased funding, supporting smaller class sizes and other forms of early intervention would make significant improvement and provide on a good economic outcome as a result of investment.

3. Outcomes at the Conclusion of Formal Years of Schooling

For an educational system to be successful it must move beyond a one-size-fits-all policy that pressures all students into traditional pathways like Year 12 completion and university attendance. It is critical to acknowledge that many students may aspire to enter the workforce or trade vocational pathways earlier (Gartner, 2021).

To support varied learning desires, we recommend the development of greater flexibility in educational programs and the allocation of additional funding towards vocational training initiatives within senior secondary schools. This will also require a focus on attracting and retaining staff skilled to facilitate this work. This investment would ensure that students have a pathway that reflects their ambitions, ultimately improving retention and engagement (Myers, 2019). Investing in more diverse educational pathways—such as vocational training programs within senior secondary schools—can alleviate the challenges faced by disengaged students. Adequate funding for these programs is necessary to foster an inclusive educational environment that caters to varied interests and strengths.

4. Support for Our Teaching Workforce

The mental and emotional well-being of teachers is crucial for the delivery of quality education. Many educators feel vulnerable in their roles due to fears of facing disciplinary actions over student behaviour management (Day, 2014). This apprehension often leads to difficulty in managing the classroom effectively, ultimately undermining the learning environment.

The IEU calls for systemic changes that include mentoring programs, reduction in administrative burdens, and a focus on proactive support for teachers. By fostering parental engagement and advocating for accountability, teachers can feel supported in addressing diverse student needs without fear of reproach, improving overall educational outcomes (Darling-Hammond, 2010). Community engagement is essential, as educators can only work within the parameters set by societal values and expectations. The responsibility to inspire students should thus be a collective one, transcending the classroom (Senge, 2000).

Face to face teaching time remains high in Tasmania, when compared to other states like Victoria and by international standards. The IEU strongly advocates for a reduction in face to face teaching time So that the expectations placed on teachers which have increased considerably over time are able to be properly addressed. Where it may have once been feasible for a secondary teacher to have 5 classes in a full time load, the increase in administrative responsibility, compliance, data gathering and so on has conspired to make the teaching of these loads unmanageable. Reduced face to face teaching time which has the effect of removing a class from a teachers load (rather than decreasing teaching time to a class) is sorely needed to enable a deeper more individualised approach to supporting each students learning. It is a similar story at primary level where teachers need more release time to plan, work collaboratively and provide meaningful interventions based on the needs of individual students.

5. Accountability for Improved Outcomes
Ensuring that financial resources are allocated effectively toward educational initiatives is vital for achieving positive outcomes. The lack of transparency in the funding model, particularly within systemic frameworks like Catholic Education, raises concerns over the true allocation of resources intended for specific programs (Burns, 2019).

A robust and transparent reporting framework is essential to assure stakeholders that funds are utilized correctly, promoting accountability across all levels of education. Stakeholders, including educators, parents, and community members, should have access to financial reports to facilitate a clearer understanding of resource distribution. As mentioned previously, the pace of change in terms of curriculum reform has had a corrosive effect on the morale of the teaching profession. IEU members accept that change and adaptation are part of their profession but in the past the resources especially time required to successfully implement change has not been sufficiently included in the planning and implementation of new initiatives. This has left educators to scramble to 'do their best' on top of the already demanding work they already undertake each day. Genuinely building in better support for any future change will require all sectors, schools and staff to have access to time and resources that support new initiatives.

Conclusion
The Independent Education Union advocates for a comprehensive and nuanced approach to educational reform in Tasmania. We look forward to members continuing to have opportunities to provide input into the review during future stages, with adequate time being provided for this engagement to occur. By acknowledging the unique challenges faced within the non-government school sector and prioritizing the needs of all educational professionals, we can collectively move forward in shaping a Tasmanian system that supports both educators and learners alike.

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