

# **Response to the Independent Review of Education in Tasmania**

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## **Background**

I have been involved in education and training in Tasmania for over 50 years as a teacher, head of department, Assistant Principal, and Principal mainly in senior secondary colleges. In more recent times I have worked as a Project Manager for the Tasmanian Education Department establishing the Tasmanian Qualifications Authority (2001-2004), undertaking a Destination Study of post-Year 10 students over 4 years from the 2001 cohort (2002-2005), and a major review of the Tasmanian Certificate of Education (2005-2010).

From 1996-2001 I was the founding Executive Officer of national organisation VETNetwork Australia, a membership-based organisation supporting the uptake of VET in Schools programs.

Since 2010 I have run my own consultancy Mike Frost and Associates – Education and Training Consultancy – which has retained a strong focus on VET in Schools. Clients include the Australian Government's Department of Employment and Workplace Relations, Independent Schools Tasmanian, Tasmanian Assessment, Standards and Certification (TASC) and a range of smaller clients.

I was recently recognised for my service to VET for over 30 years at the Tasmanian Training Awards being awarded the Trevor Leo Medal for services to VET over a sustained period.

## **Defining Education Success**

There is still a reluctance in Tasmania to recognise post-school pathways other than to university as of equal validity or status. So educational success is still dominated by the view that an ATAR score is the pinnacle and the TCE an acceptable substitute.

As a result:

- Historically around 30% of year 12 students successfully complete a VET qualification – this has remained static for over 30 years.
- Less than 10% complete a School-based Apprenticeship or Traineeship.
- Around 30% of senior secondary students choose higher education pathways
- Around 50% of year 12 students fail to achieve a TCE.
- Note that TCE achievement for year 12 students from Catholic and Independent School students is around 75%
- Over 70% of these attain an ATAR score.
- Less than 15% of independent school students complete a VET qualification by year 12.

**So what conclusions can we draw from this in terms of success:**

- Independent and Catholic school students view success as achieving a TCE and ATAR – some boast over 90% of students gaining an ATAR – and they are successful.
- So non-school completion and disengagement is primarily a government school problem.

### **So what conclusions can we draw from this?**

- Parental expectation has a major role in accounting for non-government school achievement and aspiration, and its probably based on parents paying school fees and expecting some measure of achievement.
- Independent school principals are now asking for information to present to parent and student groups about the importance of VET as a valid pathway.
- Senior secondary colleges, while having some of the best VET programs in the country, have not been successful in raising the profile of VET and increasing participation in VET programs.
- Yet some smaller independent schools, like Circular Head Christian School, ensure that all their students are expected to participate in a VET program and are prepared to invest in staffing and infrastructure to support it.
- Where students do participate in VET there is a widely reported increased engagement in school, greater value placed on general learning and clearer ideas about future careers.
- Students from lower SES areas aspire to work and don't see great value in the TCE – this is where VET programs can play a crucial role providing skills training that can lead to part-time work and further training.

### **Outcomes at the conclusion of the formal years of schooling**

The management of students from year 9-12 needs to change broadly along the lines suggested in the ACER Years 9-12 Tasmanian Review.

The major change needs to be a shift toward individually packaged programs which have a clear focus on future career aspirations, information and experience.

There are schools that already do this very well – Circular Hard Christian School in Smithton has individually designed programs beginning in year 9 which ensure students have direct experience of VET, have good career planning support, are optimally equipped to achieve a VET qualification and or Skill Set and are supported by the school along the way.

Bradfield College in Sydney, St Columbans College in Caboolture QLD, and the new Technical Colleges in SA provide excellent models where student achievement is much more strongly aligned with career aspirations and further education and training.

The model for years 9-12 education that has been adopted could be adapted to Tasmanian senior secondary colleges easily because:

- Secondary colleges have extensive VET programs offering 12-13 VET qualifications across industry areas that are generally in demand.
- Have good counselling and career support for students that could be re-engineered to provide support for planned, individual programs that combine traditional education (TCE) subjects with VET programs that are high quality.
- Have an established tradition involving work placement as well as the more traditional work experience, often up to 30 days annually.
- Have good relations with local business and industry to provide work placements.
- Have VET qualified teachers with Certificate IV in Training and Assessment Qualifications (TAE).
- Have a dedicated Government Registered Training Organisation (RTO) to manage the delivery of high-quality training across the board.
- Are organizationally well set-up to deliver both VET and TCE programs with a supportive timetabling system and flexibility within the timetable to support on-the-job experience.
- Have suitable established resources across major areas of demand including in areas like automotive, construction, business, IT and hospitality.

The major obstacles to this shift to make VET a major part of all student programs in colleges:

- A prevailing culture in colleges that has strong links with their past as matriculation colleges so that more academic programs, particularly university bound, are given preferential treatment.
- The likely impact on resources if all students undertook a VET program as part of their year 9-12 preparation.
- A preference for VET classes where smaller groups of students combine in traditional class arrangements. Other schools use more online and self-managed but supported programs for students.
- A shift in student counselling and advice to enable individual programs to be negotiated and supervised.
- A shift in teacher responsibility for monitoring future career support particularly through Group Advisor or Home Group teacher responsibility.
- Promotion and marketing of VET as a core feature of each student's program to parents, potential employers including the advantages of a VET pathway compared with a university one. A comparison that shows a VET student completing a 4-year apprenticeship and earning \$200K compared with a degree student who incurs a \$50K HECs debt.
- Understanding and having up-to-date information on local, regional and state skills needs including in new areas – cybersecurity, drone piloting, and green industry skills demands are all emerging as major new skills areas.

- Acquiring a much better understanding of the VET system and how it can operate perfectly effectively in schools including in the provision of school-based apprenticeships and traineeships.

### **Supporting student choice**

The current model of wide choice for year 11 and 12 students leads often to poor subject mix that has no relationship with future career opportunities, particularly amongst students whose experience of schooling has been poor.

There is a wealth of evidence (including from the Years 9-12 program Packages of Learning) that show many students respond well to an agreed structured program. Bradfield College provides ample evidence of how this can work to advantage engagement.

This approach ensures that a student can have built into a program:

- The VET area of interest that could be future career enabling
- Literacy and Numeracy support based on Foundation Skills or Training Package Units of Competence that lead to direct application in the workplace.
- Complementary TCE subjects that support the chosen career direction
- Supportive career advice and planning.
- A one-on-one relationship with a teacher mentor for regular contact and feedback on progress.
- A selection process that involved parent consultation and approval leading to a signed education and training plan.
- That selection process including a written application and interview as part of the process
- A college system approach that supports students including in instances where problems arise or elements of the program need to be changed.

### **Establishing Vocational Colleges**

There have been several attempts in the past to establish vocational colleges in the state. In the 1970s a community college model was partially developed at the former Alanvale College in Launceston which would have brought senior secondary, TAFE and adult education under one roof. This was killed as so often has been the case in Tasmania through internecine union opposition with the government. Claremont College was established as a vocational college with strong industry links and vocational programs though this was dropped as it reverted to the secondary college model.

Both Newstead College in Launceston (which replaced Alanvale College when TasTAFE took over the site) and Claremont College could be re-designed as Vocational Colleges.

The key elements of these two vocational colleges should include:

- All students enrolling in a substantial VET program from Certificate I – III, including where appropriate as a School-based Apprenticeship
- Individual recruitment, selection and supervision across the life of the program.
- The major focus being on a VET qualification but encouraging TCE attainment through a carefully designed plan.
- The opportunity to attain an ATAR score should be supported but the priority should be VET and TCE qualifications.
- Strong links with TasTAFE including the opportunity to deliver courses by TasTAFE on site, particularly where fee-free opportunities exist.
- The recruitment of staff with strong industry backgrounds including TAE Certificate IV and teaching qualifications.
- Strong association with Skills Tasmania in the identification of, and commitment to, regional skills needs.
- Partnership agreements with employers to ensure close collaboration in the support and training of young people.
- A focussed and ongoing campaign in association with the regional Jobs Hubs to promote opportunities, identify training needs and match young people to desired training outcomes.
- Manage an active publicity campaign that highlights the advantages and achievements of the Vocational College through social media, celebratory events, student success and business support.
- Capacity to recruit across Hobart and Launceston and the associated regions.
- Develop strong partnerships with local schools to identify students who would be likely to flourish in the Vocational College environment.
- Build a culture of innovation and excellence that embraces the best of vocational education including from the work of the Big Picture schools and other alternative education models.

## Conclusion

I've witnessed time and again across Australia the transformational power of programs that are linked with the development of workplace skills and future career success. The ideas I have expressed here have already been adapted in other settings and could be successfully implemented here. There is an established culture in the secondary colleges that needs to be challenged – but there is also a huge amount of work in the vocational field already being done. Building those opportunities and nurturing students onto vocational pathways could have a big impact on the 60% of students who don't plan to go to university at least in the first instance.

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