

## **Independent Education Review – Submission by Mary GARLAND**

In making this submission, I am drawing on professional and lived experience:

1. in a range of curriculum development, delivery and assessment roles both in Tasmania, in Queensland, nationally, internationally and globally including curriculum leadership roles with the IB, overseeing the development of curriculum for 140,000 students worldwide,
2. as the former Curriculum Leader for Languages in Years 9-12 Learning, and
3. as the former Principal Education Officer, Curriculum Accreditation and Recognition at TASC.

### **Theme 1 – Defining educational success**

1. One stated intention of the courses offered in the Years 9-12 Project was to entice non-attendees to return to school. This notion was flawed from the beginning as the problem of inattendance is a result of issues in earlier years of schooling and attitudes emanating from the home. By the time students have reached Year 11, it is too late. The question of why students should attend must be squarely addressed to pre-senior secondary years, 7-10 in particular as this is where the attendance slide begins.

2. Students need to be supported to learn to read and write English in primary school, otherwise it brings into question the effectiveness of their high school learning opportunities.

3. The reintroduction to phonics is a positive move but must be supported effectively through adequate resourcing to ensure students learn to read in primary school.

4. All Year 11 and 12 students should do a full Maths and English course and not just a set of booklets or a brief test.

5. Teaching should be explicit and teachers should be supported to do this through the provision of a Tasmanian Curriculum and supporting resources (perhaps an Australian Curriculum for Tasmania similar to the approach that has been used in Victoria). Year 11-12 courses that currently offer students up to 40 hours of independent work within a 50-hour module should be reviewed and rewritten to favour explicit teaching (e.g. Data Science and Digital Solutions L3 – 40 hrs, English Inquiry L3 – 35 hours).

5. All students, including in Years 11 and 12, should have a broad-based education. Given that the world is changing so quickly, we cannot know exactly what skills and knowledge our current students will need in twenty years' time, so, rather than providing very specialised subjects, a solid grounding in reading and writing English, numeracy, the principles of science, an understanding of the world through history and current affairs, a second language and critical thinking will serve our students better. From this solid grounding, they will then be able to pivot to whatever as yet unknown specialised knowledge and skills may be required in the future.

6. All students in Years 11-12 should be offered courses that align closely in nature and standard to those offered in other jurisdictions. Currently, some Tasmanian courses are, possibly quite rightly, viewed as inferior by some mainland tertiary institutions. For

example, when English Writing L3 was originally accredited, students found out the hard way that some mainland universities, where a pre-tertiary English is required for entry to certain courses, it was not recognised, resulting in students missing out on their chosen pathway. The replacement course for English Writing L3, English Studio L3, may suffer the same experience at the end of 2024, when it is first presented by Tasmanian students wishing to study at Mainland institutions. In 2023, when I was PEO Curriculum Accreditation at TASC, I asked the leadership of Years 9-12 Learning to share their draft with mainland institutions to ensure that the course would meet their standards as there is no equivalent in other states, but my request was declined. TASC eventually went ahead and accredited the course without any guarantee that it would be accepted. A similar issue has arisen with Physical Sciences L3, which is a blend of some physics and some chemistry. In 2023, TASC had a query from a Tasmanian student regarding the validity of this course as her enrolment into Chemistry had been rejected. The university, in the state of NSW had declined to recognise that the student's Physical Sciences L3 contained sufficient Chemistry to allow her to study Chemistry 2 and instead they insisted the student go back and start Chemistry again. As more and more students take up the opportunity to study interstate, either in situ or virtually, Tasmanian students must be offered courses that ensure students can have success in all educational settings, not just at the University of Tasmania.

7. Courses need to be challenging at all levels of schooling. An approach whereby the lowest common denominator is the accepted standard neither inspires nor motivate students. The current number of Level 1 and Level 2 courses being offered in Years 11-12 goes against the advice that Tasmania received in the ACER report (2016), partly because of the tendency to not encourage students to push themselves to excel.

9. It is a sad indictment on the Tasmanian education system that Year 11 and 12 teachers are now being trained to teach students how to read. This raises the question: "What has been happening in K-10 for the last few decades?" This does not represent a concerted, prolonged drive for success.

10. It is also a sad indictment on the current teacher training methods in Tasmania that teachers seem to graduate without having an understanding of how comprehension of the written word is achieved. This also does not represent a concerted drive for success.

**My definition of educational success:**

- All students can read and write English successfully by the time they finish primary school.
- All students are numerate (all basic functions) by the time they finish primary school.
- All students study a broad-based range of subjects to prepare them for the unknowns of a future workforce.
- All schools monitor and rapidly respond to early signs of attendance issues, so that there is no need to "try to entice students back to school in Years 11 and 12."
- All students are able to think critically and have an understanding of how the world works and what their part in wider society is.
- Students see the end of schooling as either Year 12 or a pathway to TAFE and/or an apprenticeship after Year 10, 11 or 12.
- All students have a pathway that leads to a qualification that is recognised and respected in other states and overseas.

## **Theme 2 – Strengthening supports and engagement for all learners at all stages of their education**

1. Currently there is no Tasmanian curriculum K-10. DECYP explains this away by saying that we “use Australian Curriculum”. However, this is a framework designed with the intention that each jurisdiction interpret it as the basis of their own K-10 curriculum. This has happened in most other jurisdictions with Victoria, Western Australia and New South Wales being examples. It has not happened in Tasmania.

2. In my time as Curriculum Leader in the Years 9-12 team (2019-2021), I was often asked for advice on matters pertaining to Languages in K-10 and represented Tasmania on national work groups such as the Australian Curriculum review because Tasmania had no curriculum staff for Languages at all for K-10. This was also the case for the Arts. It seems this situation has deteriorated further in the last two years.

3. The lack of Tasmanian curriculum K-10 means there is no guide to exactly what the learning looks like in our schools. As a result, there is also no indication as to the expected standards that the state aspires to for its young people. This lack of any standards becomes very obvious when students leave Year 10 to move to Year 11 at a college. In any given class there can be a number of students all with an “A” in a subject, but who demonstrate a significant variation in the content they have addressed in Year 10 and the actual level of their capacity in that subject. It is unfair on students to give them the impression they have achieved well in Year 10, only to have them discover in Year 11 that they do not have anywhere near the breadth or depth of knowledge and skills that their new classmates do.

4. Although “moderation days” are listed on school calendars, there is currently no body that articulates and monitors standards, let alone any mechanism for requiring schools to adjust their courses to ensure students equally benefit from a given course.

5. Bring back Languages in K-10 to support first language literacy skills and support Tasmanian students to develop a greater understanding of the world and the potential it offers them for their future. The current inward-looking, somewhat isolationist view of the needs of Tasmanian students does not do them a service. In a rapidly changing world where technology already allows us to live on one continent and do work for an organisation on another, the almost complete lack of consistent, cohesive, cumulative language courses in K-10 is nothing short of shameful. In 2021 (my last year with 9-12 Learning when I had access to estimates as no reliable data exists) only five high schools in the whole state offered a cumulative language program in Years 7-10; it is very doubtful that that number has increased in 2024.

### **My recommendations for strengthening support and engagement for all learners:**

- Rebuild the curriculum team K-12. This is a vital part of the Department’s work, yet it has been decimated numerous times over the last three decades, but never more so than at the present time.
- Fund experienced curriculum staff to research, develop, consult and implement a consistent curriculum K-10 that works together with Years 11-12 courses.

- Deliver regular and targeted subject-specific professional development to address teachers' articulated needs. There is currently a dearth of subject-specific PL in Tasmania and has been for some years. Instead, the precious PL time teachers have is compulsorily taken up with generic administrative matters and reinforcement of Department positions.
- Ensure that all learning areas are supported for effective delivery K-10.
- Ensure that all students are taught a second language K-10, as research shows this is a highly effective way of improving students' literacy skills.

### **Theme 3 – Outcomes at the conclusion of the formal years of schooling**

1. Attendance needs to be addressed from the earliest years – it is not something that can be “fixed” in Year 11, once a student has developed a habit of only attending sporadically without seeing any significant response from DECYP.

2. Schools in isolated areas should use the extension school structure but do this in a way that pools resources rather than promoting competition (e.g. there should logically only be one lot of Yr 11-12 classes on the West Coast to try to make for a viable number of students, teachers and subjects.)

3. Schools that are nearby to colleges should have continued support to send students to the colleges as this is where the teaching expertise is, the full range of subjects and the specific resources. The reality is that the colleges are the only aspect of Tasmanian education where there is any accountability for learning and assessment. Under legislation, the first time that any teaching and learning is held to some form of account is in senior secondary through the role of TASC.

4. The move away from the notion that high school ends at Year 10 is a generational change that cannot be hurried; however, it could be supported by greater consistency of teaching and application of standards so that students do not experience setbacks when they do move to a college for Year 11.

5. Year 11 and 12 should be a two year course, as in other jurisdictions. This would mean that more subjects could be studied to a greater breadth and depth than is currently the case. Students would have five or six subjects with depth, rather than four subjects per year with less depth. Given the academic year is 32 weeks for senior secondary, there is currently little time to build any depth of knowledge.

6. The courses should be structured and assessed in a way that reflects and values the integrity of the discipline rather than having a generic requirement of three modules, all with work requirements and eight criteria, regardless of whether that provides the best representation for the demands of the subject or not.

7. The process of assessment and reporting needs an overhaul to serve students better:

At K-10 the simple five-point scale (A-E or 1-5 or a five-word scale), as agreed by the states' Education Ministers has not been applied in Tasmania, but instead a 9-point scale with the bulk of results gathered around the mid-range à la Essential Learnings has been developed.

8. Year 11 and 12 courses should move away from Tasmania's very rigid and outdated method of criterion-based assessment, which has become very anachronistic and somewhat fossilised. I was part of the Schools Board of Tasmania writing team that developed the criteria for Languages in the late 1980s and can attest to the fact that it has not changed since, despite this system no longer being current in other jurisdictions. Tasmanian results do not directly align with other states, making it difficult to compare results (e.g. for applications to mainland institutions). It assumes a range of A-C rather than A-E, according to the descriptors provided in course documents and uses final awards that also do not neatly align to other jurisdictions with a PA (Preliminary Achievement) often being interpreted as PA for PASS, which it is not, at least not in the way that a "Pass" is applied in other jurisdictions. Our current assessment structure and terminology regime do not serve our students well.

**My vision for outcomes at the conclusion of the formal years of schooling:**

- All students have done six subjects over two years, thereby developing depth of understanding, knowledge and skills.
- Students are offered a reduced number of subjects in line with the offerings available in other jurisdictions with the aim of ensuring a smaller but higher quality range of highly regarded offerings.
- All students have done Maths and English in their senior years.
- Students have successfully completed courses that align with those of their mainland peers with regard to content and level of complexity *and* are guaranteed to be recognised by mainland institutions, not just the University of Tasmania.
- Students have been explicitly taught in all their subjects.
- Students' capacity for critical thinking has been stimulated.
- Students are supported to travel to a college if there is one within a reasonable travelling distance and where there is not (e.g. West Coast, East Coast, Huon Valley, Tasman Peninsula) one central point for senior secondary classes should be established to provide quality and variety in teaching and resourcing.

**Theme 4 – Support for our teaching workforce**

1. Tasmania needs syllabus documents K-10 so that all schools are teaching similar interpretations and applications of the Australian Curriculum Framework.
2. The development of a curriculum needs to be resourced by curriculum staff who are experts in the work, led by educators who are experts in this role. It would help Tasmania if they were to be brought in from the mainland and supported by the necessary resources for delivery in schools so that teachers do not have to spend all their time developing the resources they need to provide high quality learning experiences for their students.

3. The provision of a curriculum document and support materials (as had been promised but not delivered across the board in the Years 9-12 Project) would increase accountability and consistency for students moving through into Year 11, who at the moment have no consistency of standard when they leave their respective high schools as there is also no curriculum benchmarking in K-10.

4. The first point at which there is any accountability demanded by Tasmania in the Tasmanian education system is in Year 11 through the use of courses, assessment and reporting under TASC legislation. The development of consistent resources that could allow for some individualisation depending on the school's and students' needs would support accountability.

5. Currently each school K-10 has to develop their own teaching plan and resources, which puts an additional burden on teachers. Provision of centrally developed resources that allow for adaptation would reduce the amount of pressure on teachers, as would the regular provision of high quality, subject-specific Professional Learning. Currently, every school is regularly reinventing the wheel and one wonders whether anyone at the corporate levels of leadership in DECYP could say exactly what is happening at any given time in our schools for K-10.

6. In Tasmania, unlike other jurisdictions, teachers are only ever registered as a "teacher". It is standard professional practice in other jurisdiction within Australia and around the world that a teacher is employed for their professional expertise; for example, a teacher in Victoria who wishes to work as a German teacher must demonstrate their subject-specific skills and then that is their registration and how they are employed. In Tasmania, there is nothing but an opaquely generic approach, saying that we are all just "teachers". This means a teacher can be sent to any school anywhere to teach any subject at any level, resulting in not only significantly increased workloads and stress for the individual teacher and an added burden on the school to support them, not to mention the students potentially receiving a less than ideal learning experience, but also a consistent erosion of the value placed on the profession of all teachers in Tasmania. DECYP does not show respect for teachers' knowledge and skills, otherwise teachers would not regularly be timetabled to teach subjects for which they have no training or expertise. DECYP will respond to this idea saying that there are not enough teachers to be able to do this but that is not a justification to maintain mediocrity; it is, however, an argument for improvement to the teacher training and registration process.

**My recommendations for support for our teaching workforce:**

- Develop a curriculum for K-10 so that all schools are teaching consistently.
- Provide adaptable support materials to all schools so that teachers' workload is reduced and they can concentrate on the teaching and learning process.
- Introduce accountability measures for K-10, or at the very least 6 – 10 through the use of formal moderation processes such as are applied in other jurisdictions (e.g. Queensland, Victoria, South Australia).
- Provide regular, subject-specific PL for teachers that will reduce their workload.

- Push for legislative change so that all teachers are registered according to their training, qualifications and expertise. It would then be up to schools to ask a teacher if they are interested in teaching other subjects.

### **Theme 5 – Accountability for improved outcomes**

For a more extensive background to the curriculum dilemma in Tasmania, refer to the following links, with the second being a succinct article presenting information that is outlined in greater detail in the first document.

[https://figshare.utas.edu.au/articles/thesis/ Death by a thousand cuts a history of the Tasmanian Essential Learnings Curriculum 2000-06/23243546?file=40948763](https://figshare.utas.edu.au/articles/thesis/Death%20by%20a%20thousand%20cuts%20a%20history%20of%20the%20Tasmanian%20Essential%20Learnings%20Curriculum%202000-06/23243546?file=40948763)

[http://erpjournal.net/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/ERP36-2\\_Rodwell-G.-2009.pdf](http://erpjournal.net/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/ERP36-2_Rodwell-G.-2009.pdf)

1. It is true that the Tasmanian education system has a history of reforms, none of which since the early 1990s has been successfully implemented. Tasmania has lurched from one crisis to the next: CRESAP slashed the curriculum support available at the time within the Department of Education, then Essential Learnings was an unmitigated disaster, Tasmania Tomorrow was a failure and now 9-12 Learning has also been the latest problematic and incomplete contribution to the curriculum landscape in Tasmania. In more recent years of this sorry mess, senior secondary students have suffered the most. It is very telling that many senior secondary teachers were already referring to the 9-12 Project as “Tasmania Tomorrow Mk II”, even before the courses started to be released.

2. It is not helpful to ask what would support teachers and schools to implement changes unless we have a well-researched, carefully planned and meticulously executed curriculum initiative to present to schools and teachers. Regrettably, this was not the case with the Years 9-12 Project.

3. As one of the Curriculum Leaders (CLs) appointed to contribute to the design of the new Years 9-12 curriculum, and to develop and deliver courses, I was witness to regular changes in the design of the project, generally without any evidence of in-depth research and discussion. A series of “discussion papers” was produced, but were quite superficial and, based on my experience of curriculum development in other arenas, they lacked consistency and evidence of deep research and extensive consultation. As a CL at the time, I raised questions the state of some of the materials and undertook to rewrite some pamphlets to ensure academic integrity before they were released to the public.

4. When initial draft course skeletons were sent out for consultation, 9-12 Learning often received very stridently critical feedback from teachers, which was downplayed so that a “positive” view of teacher support could be reported. I expressed concern at the time that this was professionally worrying me and that we should listen to, take seriously and act upon teacher feedback. Until Years 9-12 Learning paused its development of courses in 2023, teachers were still consistently being ignored in the case of some of their feedback. It seemed to me at the time that the focus was on maintaining certain course structures and formats, rather than improving courses so that they could be a quality product.

5. Because the population of Tasmania is so small, it lacks depth and expertise at the level of program leadership. The state needs some fresh, independent, informed input into the education system to promote and foster a stronger leadership talent pool.

6. What helps leaders implement initiatives? Having a realistic, relevant, manageable initiative in the first place. From its inception, the Years 9-12 Project ignored much of the advice of the ACER review in 2016 and often bore little relationship to the reality of the classroom.

7. Much was promised but little was delivered. Even before the first course was written, it was obvious to me, given my past experience in curriculum development and implementation, that the number of intended courses could not be successfully rolled out in the proposed timeframe. Of the 80+ courses that were to be rolled out by now, only 41 have been delivered and 30 of those have already had to be adjusted after one or two years of delivery because of significant issues that remain with the courses.

7. The current status of TASC:

<https://www.legislation.tas.gov.au/view/html/inforce/current/act-2003-062#GS24B@EN>

Look at Division 1 and 1A, especially Section 24A and 24B: TASC was once an independent statutory authority that was able to insist on standards for curriculum, but since the legislative changes a few years ago, TASC has had its independence greatly eroded by DECYP. I make this observation from my time as the Principal Education Officer Accreditation and Recognition at TASC. I was appointed to review course drafts submitted by 9-12 Learning, provide feedback and offer guidance for any adjustments required to ensure the course would meet the requirements of the legislation. Initially this happened, but gradually 9-12 Learning leadership started to object to the advice provided, assuring us (TASC) that there was no need for advice and that TASC had to accept and accredit the courses as they were presented to TASC. The majority of the courses developed by 9-12 Learning had issues ranging from minor to significant (e.g. a criterion to be assessed, but nothing in the content of the course against which the criterion could be assessed.) I had a responsibility to ensure the quality of the courses for the sake of Tasmanian students and to try to maintain the reputation of the Tasmanian senior secondary curriculum offerings (and TASC).

If TASC is pressured by DECYP to accept standards, senior secondary education in Tasmania will continue to suffer. This requires legislative change, but the Minister has asked for advice and can propose legislative change. Considering the nature of statutory authorities in other jurisdictions, this is a clearly needed change back to a former status.

**My recommendations for accountability for improved outcomes are to:**

- employ experienced education leaders as change managers who understand and have experience of curriculum development and delivery.
- research, research, research
- test and confirm capacity to deliver before you promise the world, otherwise the resultant outcome may be the delivery of very little of educational quality.



- be realistic about timelines – not too dragged out, otherwise the momentum and enthusiasm will have waned, allowing cracks in the first batch of courses to show up with the result that the attitudes of teachers to further deliverables become tainted.
- resource change properly (i.e. within the capacity of the state of Tasmania to deliver), but make sure that the money is spent wisely on a realistic project, one that is thoroughly grounded in evidence and demonstrates reliability.
- remove impediments to TASC's capacity to act as an independent authority – the quality of Tasmanian education will not improve as long as DECYP is able to pressure TASC to act at DECYP's volition.