

Submission in response to the Independent
Review of Education in Tasmania



11 October 2024

Introduction

The Youth Network of Tasmania (YNOT) welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Tasmanian Government *'Independent Review of Education in Tasmania'*.

YNOT is the peak body for young people aged 12-25 years and the non-government youth sector in Tasmania. We work to drive positive change with young people and ensure that the rights of young people are upheld and supported by government, community and decision-makers. We do this through meaningful youth participation and engagement, amplifying the views of young people and advocating for the inclusion of young people in decision-making on matters impacting them.

Our response to the Public Consultation Paper has been informed by young Tasmanians aged 12-25 years and YNOT members. The views of young people reflected in our response are based on previous YNOT consultations where education and training, employment and economic participation featured in discussions.

This submission highlights the need for transformational education reform to improve student attainment and retention in Tasmania. This includes the delivery of a contemporary curriculum that equips students with practical skills necessary for life beyond school, working together for reform and empowering students to have more autonomy and agency in decision making relating to their own learning.

Systems Reform

YNOT welcomes the independent review of the State's education system to improve educational outcomes for young Tasmanians. We support the objectives of the Review as outlined in the Terms of Reference, particularly the emphasis on accountability towards improving educational outcomes for all young people.

We are encouraged to see recognition of previous reviews undertaken in the Paper, such as the *Review of Years 9-12 Tasmania* (2016) and the *Tasmanian Education Act* (2016). Consideration of this work is critical to avoid duplication of efforts, ensure better use and allocation of resources, reduce consultation fatigue and drive meaningful systems reform. We are pleased this work will inform key findings and recommendations as part of this independent review.

Despite past efforts to improve student educational outcomes, young Tasmanians continue to express dissatisfaction with the States education curriculum. Young people want to engage in learning that is applicable to their real-life circumstances and future aspirations.

"I think we should be taught more useful things that will prepare us for adulthood like doing your taxes and job applications, and the process of finding and paying for a home. Some of us don't have parents or family to guide us and help us through life."¹

Significant reform is required to ensure that the Tasmanian education system not only supports young people to achieve their desired educational outcomes, but also offers a contemporary and flexible curriculum that prepares them for life after school, whatever that may look like.

The issues outlined in the consultation draft are multifaceted and complex. It is vital that a holistic approach to improving students' educational outcomes is taken.

It is often assumed that young people in education are solely focused on learning, but their lives are far more complex. Many students are dealing with pressures and adversity outside of school, such as work or caring responsibilities, housing and food insecurity, mental ill-health, family breakdown or social and economic disadvantage. These pressures can hinder their ability to meet rigid academic expectations, often leading to disengagement.

To address these challenges, reform efforts must take a holistic approach in responding to the needs of all learners. In recent years, the Tasmanian Government has embarked on an ambitious reform agenda to improve outcomes for Tasmania's children and young people. This includes the introduction of legislation to protect and promote the safety of children in our communities, and whole-of-government strategic policies aimed at improving health and wellbeing, and economic outcomes for children and young people. We welcome this. However, greater alignment and coordination between existing policy initiatives across government agencies is critical to maximise limited resources and achieve policy objectives.

Without systems reform and alignment to existing government initiatives, reviews like this will remain stop-gap solutions to broader, systemic issues.

A contemporary, real-world curriculum

Young people complete Year 12 for various reasons, influenced by their life circumstances, career aspirations and social environment. For some, it's a pathway to fulfil their career goals, while for others it's a way to develop the skills needed to enter the workforce and become financially independent. Some complete Year 12 to meet legislative requirements.

Despite these different motivations, common themes have emerged about what young people need to successfully complete Year 12. These include:

- An awareness of the pathways needed to transition from year 12 to further education or training or employment
- Awareness of pathways to transition into further education, training, or employment.
- Access to reliable information, support, and guidance to navigate post-Year 12 options.
- Job readiness, including confidence in entering the workforce.
- Having essential life skills, such as financial and health literacy, self-care, and social skills.

For many young people, success goes beyond academic achievement. It involves having the confidence, knowledge, and skills to pursue their life goals and aspirations.

*"[We need] more school based education towards life preparation. Financial literacy, superannuation, taxes, interest rates, budgeting."*²

However, many young people report that Tasmania's education system does not meet their needs, leaving them feeling unprepared for life after Year 12. Young people often describe the curriculum as outdated and struggle to see its relevance.

"When am I ever going to use calculus? I need to know how to get a job!"³

Without a clear understanding of the practical applications of what they are learning, some young people disengage from education. Young people want a curriculum that is contemporary, relevant, fit-for-purpose, and student-led, designed to help them achieve their personal goals and employment aspirations.

"More student involvement in curriculum development and the ways in which schools are run."⁴

Young people want to develop the basic skills needed to navigate adult life—financial literacy, understanding taxation, health and wellbeing (including sexual and mental health), and essential social skills. Additionally, they desire a greater focus on learning outcomes that build practical knowledge and workforce readiness. Skills such as resume writing, interview preparation, job seeking, and employer engagement are seen as crucial for their future success.

Recognition of, and adequate investment in, career awareness programs within Tasmanian schools is essential in supporting students to explore career possibilities, increase their confidence, build aspiration and understand the pathways needed to achieve their goals.

"[We need] Independent pathways planners - more support for young people figuring out where they're going and what they're doing - not affiliated with Uni/TAFE etc. as they will inform through the lens of their organisation"⁵

Career intermediaries are well-positioned to deliver career awareness programs in Tasmanian schools. Intermediaries can bridge the gap between education and employment by providing career education, facilitating work exposure opportunities and connecting young people with industry and employers. Drawing on their expertise, along with that of third-party organisations, can provide continuous support across all aspects of a young person's life. Involving young people in shaping how these intermediaries operate ensures that their education is relevant and motivating, leading to better outcomes for themselves and their communities.

"I don't know why more people don't want to do a trade. I love the hands on stuff... I know I'm gonna have a job and money quicker than anyone going to uni."⁶

Supporting the needs of students

The success of Tasmania's education system depends on its ability to support the unique needs and aspirations of all students, particularly those with complex needs. We are pleased that the paper recognise the importance of developing strategies to support students from disadvantaged backgrounds to ensure equity in education.

“We need people to help us when we think we don’t need it...which is challenging. We need positive support networks to help [young people] break free from people who bring them down.”⁷

Some students face multiple health, social, economic and learning barriers that impact educational attainment and retention. Holistic, tailored and timely interventions to keep students safe, well and engaged in education is required. The community services sector, through the provision of early intervention mental health, alcohol and other drugs and career awareness programs, alongside school-based professionals such as psychologists, social workers, and disability support staff, play a critical role in responding to student needs. Currently, the demand for school-based psychologists and social workers in Tasmanian secondary schools outstrips supply.⁸ Adequately resourcing all schools with equitable and appropriate education supports is needed to ensure that young people aren’t being left behind.

“I have autism. So it's devastating for me when I'm trying my best and you get treated like you're lazy because it takes you a little bit longer to pick up on things and other people.”⁹

Socio-economic status, cultural backgrounds and demographic characteristics of students also need to be considered in strengthening supports and engagement for all learners to reach their full potential. Responding to the complex needs of students should be prioritised in all schools, with strong engagement and collaboration between educators, community service providers and school based education support workers. Failure to do so not only impact the health, wellbeing and learning outcomes of young people but also places unnecessary strain on teaching staff who may not be equipped to respond appropriately.

“I dropped out of school the first week in Year 8 because I just couldn't retain the information. I got no help, just detentions and constant bullying. There needs to be better support for children with learning disabilities.”¹⁰

Supporting student choice

Many young people want to play an active role in shaping the education curriculum. This includes more flexibility and personalisation in the curriculum, allowing them to pursue subjects and learning styles that align with their interests and goals. Many young people report feeling disconnected from a system that is rigid and standardised, where their individual aspirations and learning needs are not always recognised.

“[We need to keep] Having flexibility so teachers can alter the lessons to suit each student and cater for their individual learning needs.”¹¹

Young people seek more autonomy in their learning, with a curriculum that supports diverse pathways and offers multiple ways to demonstrate their knowledge and skills. They want flexibility in how subjects are taught, with options to tailor lessons to their individual learning needs. Practical, hands-on learning experiences—such as career pathway planning, work-based learning, and the development of employability and essential life skills—are seen as essential to their future success.

“I would’ve loved to have entry level opportunities to at least try different industries and jobs. I chat with some friends about what it would be like for year 12 for example, or a year 13 where you can do 3 months of work in hospo, then 3 months in agribusiness, 3 in healthcare (even if it’s just watching or helping with admin) and 3 in retail... that way you come out of school with 1 year experience in pretty much every industry looking to employ people right away. That would be awesome!”¹²

Involving young people in decisions about their education—such as designing learning pathways and contributing to how schools operate—can significantly enhance their sense of agency. When students feel heard and are offered an opportunity to shape their educational experience, they are more likely to stay engaged and achieve better outcomes.

Flexible learning environments are essential to this approach. Allowing students to progress at their own pace and explore different pathways to success empowers them to take control of their education, fostering independence and confidence. Schools should be places where young people feel supported to make choices that reflect their unique strengths and ambitions.

By embracing student choice and fostering greater involvement in education, the Tasmanian education system can better support diverse learners and ensure that young people remain engaged, motivated, and empowered to pursue their goals.

Summary

YNOT is committed to ensuring that the views of young people on issues that affect them are heard and considered in decision making. To achieve a significant, long-lasting systems reform and improved educational outcomes, we recommend that:

- The Tasmanian Government drive systems reform, in collaboration with education and training sectors, community and health service sectors, young people and industry to improve student outcomes and support and retain a highly skilled workforce.
- Greater alignment and coordination between existing state policy initiatives across government occurs to avoid duplication of effort and maximise resources.
- Reform efforts prioritise student-led initiatives to understand the lived experience of young people and their solutions for supporting their educational goals and aspirations. Empower students to have more autonomy, agency and educational choice to pursue their goals.
- A holistic approach to improving students’ educational outcomes underpins systems reform.
- The Tasmanian education curriculum is modernised, evidence based, and supports students to connects concepts to the real world.
- Greater access to essential life skills, career planning, and job readiness training to better prepare young people for life beyond school is prioritised.
- All schools are adequately resourced with equitable and appropriate education supports, delivered by community service providers and school based professionals to meet demand.
- Introduce a contemporary and flexible curriculum that empowers and equips students with the knowledge and skills needed to pursue their interests, life goals and future aspirations. Recognise and adequately invest in third party intermediaries to support career awareness, work exposure and industry connections to explore career possibilities.

References

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- ³ YNOT 2024. South East Youth Engagement Project Consultation Report. https://www.ynot.org.au/sites/default/files/documents/2024-05/YNOT_SouthEastYouthEngagementReport_18042024.pdf
- ⁴ YNOT 2022. Tasmanian Youth Forum: I AM ME. https://www.ynot.org.au/sites/default/files/documents/2022-11/YNOT_Tasmanian_Youth_Forum_2022_I_am_Me_Report_-_FINAL.pdf
- ⁵ *Ibid. Pathways to Adulthood Consultation Report.*
- ⁶ *Ibid. South East Youth Engagement Project Consultation Report.*
- ⁷ YNOT & MHCT 2021. Child and Youth Wellbeing Strategy Consultation Report. https://www.ynot.org.au/sites/default/files/documents/2021-06/YNOT_MHCT_-_FINAL_-_Tasmanian_Child_and_Youth_Wellbeing_Strategy_Consultation_Report_-_February_2021.pdf
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- ⁹ YNOT 2023. Tasmanian Youth Story Consultation Report. https://www.ynot.org.au/sites/default/files/documents/2023-09/BrandTasmania_Youth-Story-Report_Final_Pages_HR.pdf
- ¹⁰ *Ibid. Tasmanian Youth Forum: Building a Better Tasmania for Young People.*
- ¹¹ *Ibid. Tasmanian Youth Forum: I AM ME.*
- ¹² *Ibid. Pathways to Adulthood Consultation Report.*