



# Submission to the Independent Education Review, Tasmania

Peter Underwood Centre  
University of Tasmania  
October 2024



## *Acknowledgement*

The submission was prepared on *lutruwita* (Tasmania) Aboriginal land. We acknowledge, with deep respect the traditional owners of this land, the palawa people.

The palawa people belong to the oldest continuing culture in the world. They cared and protected Country for thousands of years. They knew this land; they lived on the land, and they died on these lands. We honour them.

We pay respects to elders past and present and to the many Aboriginal people that did not make elder status and to the Tasmanian Aboriginal community that continue to care for Country.

We recognise a history of truth which acknowledges the impacts of invasion and colonisation upon Aboriginal people resulting in the forcible removal from their lands.

Our Island is deeply unique, with spectacular landscapes with our cities and towns surrounded by bushland, wilderness, mountain ranges and beaches.

We stand for a future that profoundly respects and acknowledges Aboriginal perspectives, culture, language, and history. And a continued effort to fight for Aboriginal justice and rights paving the way for a strong future.

### **Cover image credits (left to right)**

Top: Oi Studios; Richard Jupe

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## *Introductory statement*

The Peter Underwood Centre welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to the Independent Education Review.

This submission is made alongside the University of Tasmania's submission. The submission has been prepared on the basis of the Peter Underwood Centre's current work and research. It has been prepared at a time where the Centre will come under new leadership and a new strategy will be considered.

We give permission for our submission to be made publicly available.

## *The Peter Underwood Centre*

Launched in 2015, the Peter Underwood Centre is a partnership between the University of Tasmania and the Tasmanian Government in association with the Office of the Governor of Tasmania.

During his time as Tasmania's 27th Governor, the Honourable Peter Underwood AC began conversations with the University of Tasmania about the importance of educational attainment to Tasmania. Following his passing in 2014, the Peter Underwood Centre for Educational Attainment was established in his name, serving to honour his belief in the transformative power of education.

Our focus is on research, partnerships and initiatives that contribute to positive and sustained change in educational outcomes for children and young people.

Our research focus is to produce knowledge on educational attainment that is of direct benefit to Tasmanians and that both learns from and informs national and international research. Our research connects with local, national, and international organisations, think tanks, policy groups, and allied professional groups to share information and knowledge.

Along with research, our Centre is focussed on creating, delivering, and supporting programs and initiatives that contribute to positive and sustained change in educational outcomes for children and young people. Along with young people themselves, we are honoured to work with a range of partners including schools, teachers, parents, industry, and community members as well as those within the University who contribute to the vision of the Peter Underwood Centre.

## Section 1: Early years

In Australia, and other comparable countries as represented by the OECD, a ‘policy moment’ occurred with a call for and adoption of a ‘universal approach to access’ and the notion of ‘universal and inclusive early childhood education and care’<sup>1</sup>. This is due to the well documented benefits for health, wellbeing, and human capital of participation in high quality early childhood education and care.

Regrettably, Tasmania has been identified as a childcare ‘desert’ with the lowest accessibility levels of any state or territory<sup>2</sup>. Tasmania also has the highest proportion nationally of people living in the most disadvantaged areas (30%)<sup>3</sup>.

An initial proposal for legislative reform to improve access to early childhood education and care in Tasmania within a draft Education Bill proposed lowering the school starting age from 5 years to 4 years and 6 months, with a flow on to kindergarten entry age of 3 years and 6 months. This was removed from the Bill and the universal reform was substituted with a targeted initiative delivered through several early childhood education and care centres, not regionally dispersed schools.

Clearly, there are structural challenges in translating an evidence base and apparent policy consensus into systemic change in Tasmania to enable universal access<sup>4</sup>.

Current efforts to incentivise working within early childhood education and care are laudable given an accepted body of knowledge about the critical importance of quality early childhood education and predicted skills shortages<sup>5</sup>.

### Recommendation

Noting the strong focus placed on the early years, significant further focus and leadership will be required to achieve universal access.

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<sup>1</sup> Molla, Tebeje, and Andrea Nolan. 2019. “The ‘Universal Access to Early Childhood Education’ Agenda in Australia: Rationales and Instruments.” *Educational Research for Policy and Practice* 18 (1): 1–16. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10671-017-9224-0>

<sup>2</sup> Hurley, P., Tham, M, Nguyen H., 2024. “Mapping the deserts: Childcare accessibility in Australia”, Mitchell Institute, Victoria University

<sup>3</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics Census – Index of Relative Socio-Economic Disadvantage (2021), [www.abs.gov.au](http://www.abs.gov.au)

<sup>4</sup> Shelley, B., 2022. “System Reform in the Early Childhood Education and Care Sector in Australia”

Oxford Research Encyclopedias, Education, Oxford University Press,

<https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190264093.013.1668>

<sup>5</sup><https://www.jobsandskills.gov.au/data/skills-shortages-analysis/skills-priority-list>

## Section 2: Primary and middle years

### *Introduction*

Compared with the early years and adolescence, young people in their middle years (ages 8-14 years) have received relatively little attention from policymakers other than in the space of academic achievement<sup>6</sup>.

### *UCTV*

Initiated by the Centre during COVID-19, [UCTV Alive for Kids](#) is a monthly webinar for students in Year 5 and 6 that aims to support learning in and out of the classroom.

Each UCTV online seminar features an interesting Tasmanian (usually a University of Tasmania academic or alum). Students send in questions to be answered live during the online seminar.

During 2023, 38 different schools tuned in to watch episodes live, along with five home schools, and the Tasmanian eSchool. Approximately 1522 Tasmanian students watched at least one episode. Engagement data indicates lowest ICSEA value was 863, and the highest 1137. The average ICSEA of the thirty-eight schools watching was 970. Slightly more outer regional schools watched (47%) than inner regional (45%), while 8% of the attending schools were remote.

### *Aspiration and Attainment*

The Aspiration and Attainment team at the Peter Underwood Centre focuses on three interdependent initiatives:

- Children's University Tasmania
- Limitless Learning
- Building an evidence-base through research and evaluation, including co-research with children.

Together these initiatives contribute to system reform, educational equity, research, and intervention innovation. They form part of a democratic vision of education, in which skills of participation can be practised, debated, and analysed by students themselves as they participate and have agency in their own learning, and within their community.

Originating in the United Kingdom during the 1990s, Children's University Tasmania is part of a social franchise. The University of Adelaide holds the national licence for the brand. Since 2015, it has been delivered through a sub-licence agreement with the University of Tasmania.

Excluding independent schools, one in four primary schools in Tasmania participate in Children's University as do one in five combined schools (see Table 1). There is unmet demand for the program. At present there are eight schools that are unable to sign up to the program due to Peter Underwood Centre capacity constraints. Among participating schools, 38% have an ICSEA level below 900, with the lowest level sitting at 793.

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<sup>6</sup> Redmond, G., Skattebol, J., Saunders, P., Lietz, P., Zizzo, G., O'Grady, E., ... & Roberts, K. (2016). Are the kids alright? Young Australians in their middle years: Final report of the Australian Child Wellbeing Project

Table 1: Total Schools and Children’s University Schools (Tasmania)

SCHOOL TYPE	GOVERNMENT & CATHOLIC SCHOOLS	CU SCHOOLS	PERCENTAGE
Primary	148	37	25%
Secondary	41	5	12%
Combined	33	7	21%
Special schools	5	0	0%
<b>Total</b>	<b>227</b>	<b>49</b>	<b>22%</b>

Children’s University facilitates the voluntary participation of children in learning outside of the curriculum. The participants may not otherwise have access to extracurricular educational experiences or aspire to university study, due to their economic circumstances, geographic isolation, and/or absence of university-educated role models<sup>7</sup>. Children’s University challenges children to engage with education in multiple ways, “beyond the constraints of curriculum, encouraging comfort/discomfort that occurs in any new learning experiences”<sup>8</sup>.

Hours of extracurricular learning are captured in Passports to Learning. These include a mix of online activities, UCTV, lunch time and afterschool activities (often facilitated by School Coordinators and other staff) or include existing extracurricular activity offered within schools (see Figure 1).

Core to the intervention is the development of relationships across, within and through communities. Schools, parents, and carers, public learning destinations, communities, and the University of Tasmania each play a role.

### Role of schools

Principals determine whether their school will participate in Children’s University, Limitless Learning and/or assist with building an evidence base through our research and evaluation.

Principals determine who will be tasked with the role of Children’s University School Coordinator. Currently, the School Coordinator role is occupied by chaplains, class teachers, business managers, advanced skills teachers, Assistant Principals and Principals.

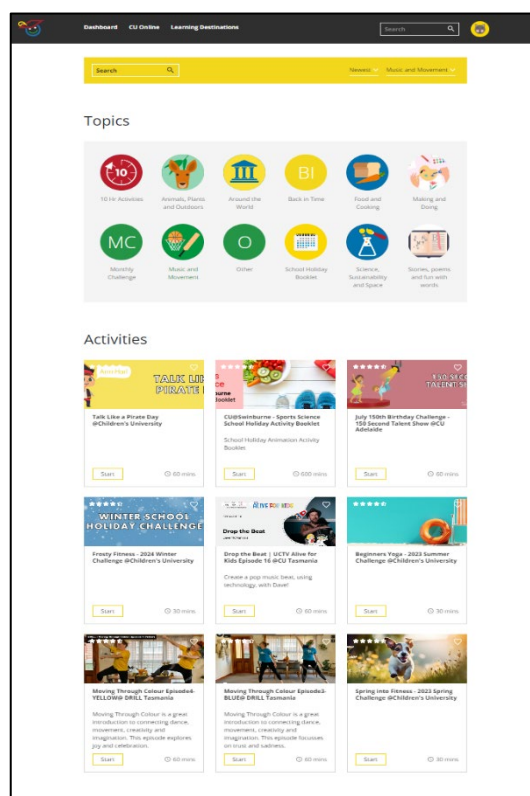


Figure 1: Children’s University Portal

<sup>7</sup> Dix, K., Sniedze, S., & Van Der Zant, T. (2024). Children’s University in Australia and New Zealand: Reach and impact.

<sup>8</sup> Children’s University Newcastle Evaluation Report <https://nova.newcastle.edu.au/>

School Coordinators ensure implementation and program fidelity within a school. They are supported by a regionally dispersed team of Regional Leads from the Peter Underwood Centre, based in Zeehan, Smithton, Burnie, Devonport, Launceston, and Hobart.

School Coordinators are provided with professional learning about the program's quality assurance framework "Planning for Learning." School Coordinators are asked to ensure that:



- 1) Valid extracurricular activities are promoted to Children's University participants and families.
- 2) There are regular catch ups with participants at school to stamp hours of activity in passports to learning.
- 3) Only activity that meets the Children's University validation requirements are included in 'passports to learning' (see Figure 2).
- 4) Participant hours of validated activities are tallied and submitted in time for graduation events.

Figure 2: Children's University passports to learning

We request School Coordinators to make available 30 hours of validated activity within their school. This is so that children can attain the minimum number of hours required to graduate even if they are unable to access additional extracurricular learning outside of school.

Nonetheless, some schools face challenges in offering 30 hours of extracurricular activities. The challenges stem from short recess and lunch periods as well as limited availability of staff or community members to run activities or clubs within their school. These challenges compound the problem because it also restricts time available for external providers to school-outreach programs.

A recent scan of thirty-seven participating schools indicated that 53% of these schools had lunch breaks that were less than thirty minutes, with one school reporting a lunch break of only 15 minutes.

Children's University is most effective when:

- There is strong Principal support.
- School Coordinators broker and provide lunch time catch ups and clubs and afterschool learning opportunities.
- Schools connect children and families to the Children's University Australia portal where over eight hundred high quality learning activities are available,
- School Coordinators liaise well with Children's University team members in their regions, providing data and information to enable participants to graduate (Table 2).



Table 2: Children's University Tasmania Enrolments and Graduations

# Total Extracurricular hours 2016-2023	295 124							
<b>Years</b>	<b>2016</b>	<b>2017</b>	<b>2018</b>	<b>2019</b>	<b>2020</b>	<b>2021</b>	<b>2022</b>	<b>2023</b>
# Schools and Hubs	14	23	49	48	44	46	42	52
# Public Learning Destinations	102	110	150	191	220	85*	93	93
# Participants	280	273	700	900	1048	911	998	1343
# Graduates	123	169	331	543	340	515	558	742
% Graduates	44%	62%	47%	60%	32%	57%	56%	55%

\*Change in how sporting clubs were categorised led to reduction in numbers of public learning destinations.

Program fidelity is key to impact because the influence on NAPLAN is evident upon achievement of a threshold dose (>150 hours) of extracurricular learning.

Our longitudinal research linking DECYP data and Peter Underwood Centre data, reveals test on test there is a relative difference reflected in improved NAPLAN outcomes in reading and mathematics (2019, 2021, 2022). Using a predictive model there is a relationship between the number of hours of validated extracurricular learning and reading and maths scores for participants. There is a small but significant effect size with the odds ratio driven by a combination of dose (>150 hours) and parental level of education.

A preliminary latent class analysis of the data conducted in 2023 seems to suggest that parental qualifications and child's level of educational attainment are not a barrier to participation in Children's University, but that children with higher educational attainment tend to have higher levels of participation in Children's University activities.

### *Role of families, carers, and children*

The Aspiration and Attainment portfolio of programs aim to build confidence and curiosity in children and frameworks for families to engage in and support their child's learning.

Opportunities for parents to share and listen to others, means more students are likely to receive common messages from various people about the importance of school, working hard, thinking creatively, helping one another, and staying in school<sup>9</sup>. This is of particular importance because although parents hold high aspirations for their children, they may not have the educational experiences themselves to draw upon to support their children.

<sup>9</sup> Epstein, J. (1995). School/family/community partnerships: Caring for the children we share. The Phi Delta Kappan, 76(9), 701

The program provides a bridge enabling sharing of education information, which is particularly important for parents living in regional and rural Australia who, in common with other rural adults are less likely than their urban counterparts to have continued onto post-year 12 education<sup>10</sup>.

Parents and carers are enthusiastic in their support and engagement with the intervention. This might include enabling access to online learning resources through the portal, bringing children to school holiday programs and other programs facilitated by the Peter Underwood Centre and regular activities outside of school, along with attending graduations. Family members can also get involved by offering activity at school on areas of their interests.

There are consistent trends in our research, monitoring, and evaluation data. Most parents indicated during the 2023 survey (n) 167 that they were motivated to participate due to the opportunity for their child to engage in more learning and to be able to follow their interests (37%). A further 28% reported that they were motivated by their child wanting to join.

Our research with students suggests that they are interested in their learning and work that is “not homework but fun stuff” (see Figure 3). A survey of (n) 123 student participants in 2022 indicated that children valued Children’s University because they could go to new places (71%), learn new things (65%), attend graduations (65%), try new things (57%), get recognition for hours spent learning (55%), and spend time with family (46%).

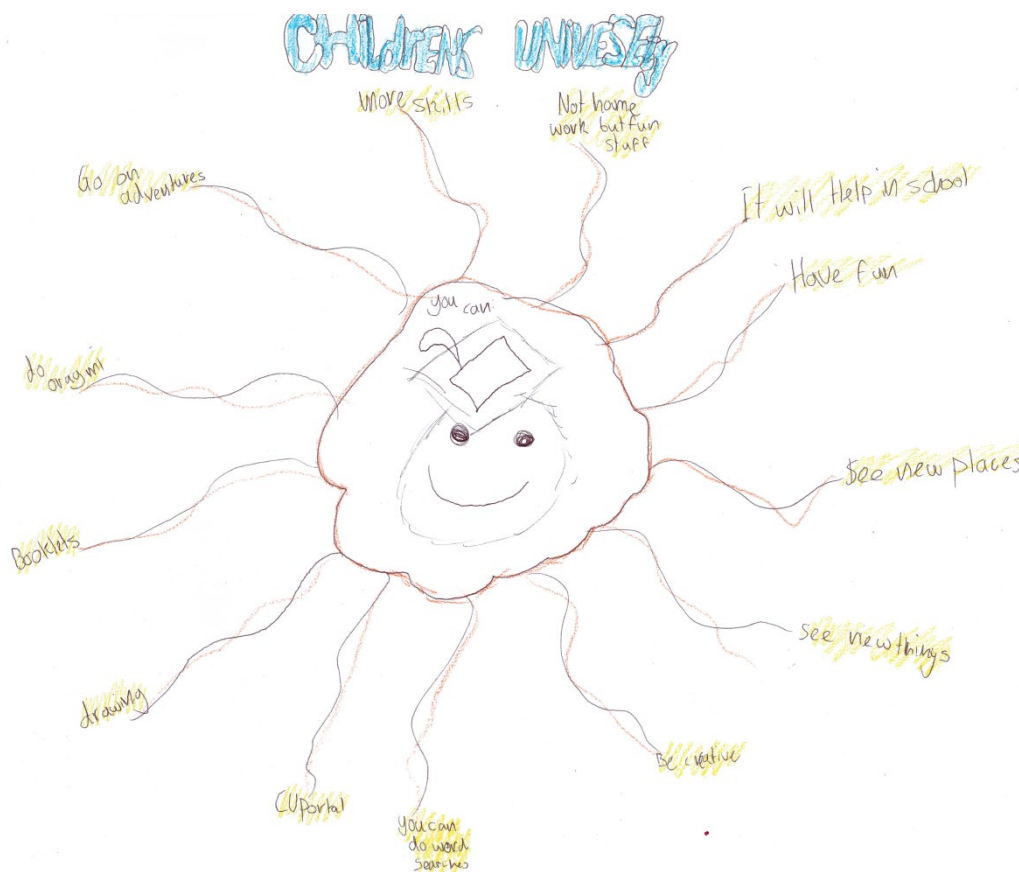


Figure 3: Poster for other children describing Children’s University produced by a primary school aged child at a remote school (2024)

<sup>10</sup> Kilpatrick, S., Burns, G., Barnes, R. K., Kerrison, M., & Fischer, S. (2020). Parents matter: Empowering parents to inform other parents of post-year 10 pathway options in disadvantaged communities. *Australian and International Journal of Rural Education*, 30(3), 21-35

## Role of communities

Public learning destinations are validated organisations such as museums, tourism sites, libraries, parks, and other community-based entities.

Limitless Learning, an intervention developed by researchers at the Peter Underwood Centre, runs in parallel to Children’s University (see Figure 4). Co-funded by philanthropy and the University of Tasmania, Limitless Learning aims to improve the quality of extracurricular learning opportunities, increase the number of hours children engage in extracurricular learning and collaborate with others to co-create family friendly experiences.

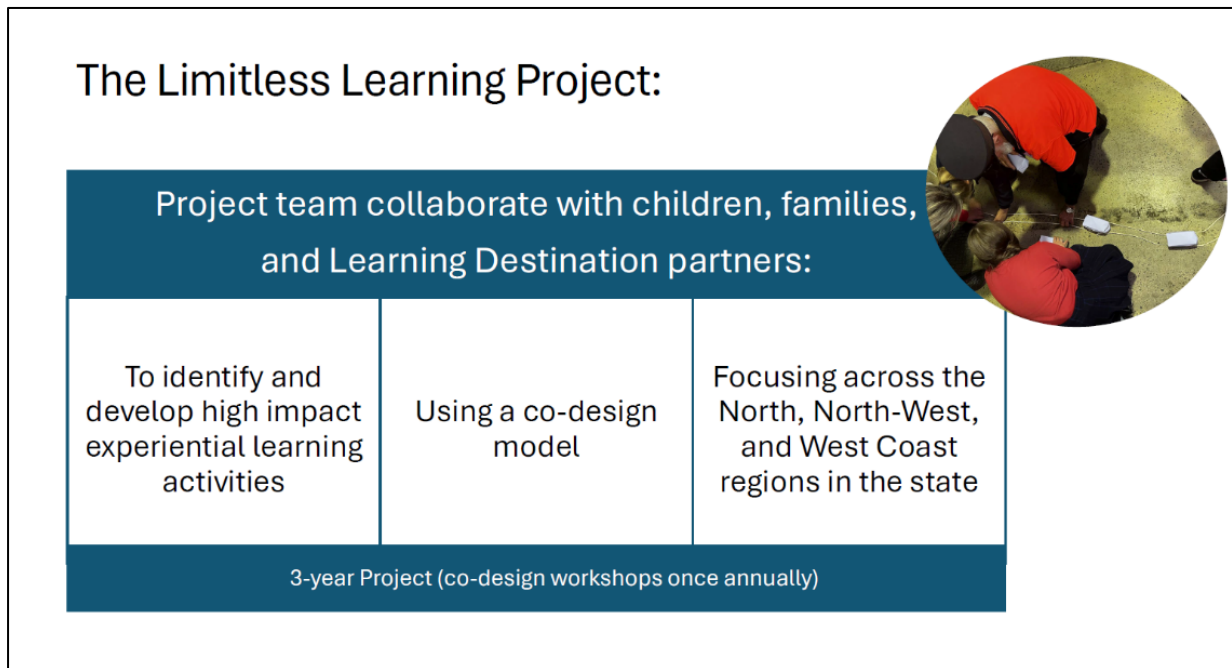


Figure 4: Limitless Learning project approach<sup>11</sup>

The collaboration between schools, families, and local social history museums and sites amplifies the range and quality of extracurricular learning experiences available in communities. The benefit of this is that it builds community capacity and connection *within* and *between* schools and their communities. It also foregrounds the skills in the community.

Limitless Learning, in tandem with Children’s University, recognises that not all families will feel comfortable in the space of public institutions such as schools or museums. Our initiatives bridge these barriers and acknowledge rich family and community histories that may influence how children’s aspirations are constituted<sup>12</sup>.

"The most memorable thing I did was take part in the Limitless Learning workshops run by the Tramway Museum. It ran for a couple of months, and we had to find better ways for children to learn about the history of my suburb, Invermay, and the tram system it used to have in the olden days" - *Grade 4 student, Launceston Tramway Museum*

<sup>11</sup> Bakhtiar, A., and Shelley, B., "Co-designing Extracurricular Learning with Children and Their Families", ACEID Tokyo, 29 March 2024

<sup>12</sup> Zipin, L., Sellar, S., Brennan, M., & Gale, T. (2015). Educating for futures in marginalized regions: A sociological framework for rethinking and researching aspirations. *Educational philosophy and theory*, 47(3), 227-246

Children’s University and Limitless Learning are providing a mechanism to connect schools where children may experience locational disadvantage with local cultural heritage, and environmental resources<sup>13</sup>. In regional areas this can include mobilising public and private assets that have been developed for tourism<sup>14</sup>.

## Conclusion

Barriers to participation in the types of informal learning that support formal learning is well documented.

Researchers at ACER recently conducted a literature review for Children’s University Australia. They scanned four systematic reviews and identified benefits of extracurricular activities:

Metsäpelto and Pulkkinen found that primary school students’ participation in before and after-school activities was related to higher academic attainments, lower social anxiety, and depressive symptoms; longer participation (two to three years) was associated with more positive outcomes<sup>15</sup>.

In Shulruf’s review, it was found that most effect sizes on academic achievement were small: although there were associations between participation in extracurricular activities, causality could not be shown<sup>16</sup>. Shulruf also notes methodological limitations in the reviewed research that may have impacted the meta-analysis.

Lewis reviewed six extracurricular categories (sports, vocational, performing arts, pro-social, community-based, and general activities), and found that different activities had different impact for school-age children<sup>17</sup>. For example, “General activities and pro-social activities had the most impact on academic achievement, while performing arts and pro-social activities... [had] the largest effect on identity and self-esteem related outcomes... [while] student workers had more negative outcomes than any other activity participants<sup>18</sup>.”

The most recent review by Rahayu and Dong found that participation in extracurricular activities has a positive association with student character education and that these two elements can be mutually reinforcing<sup>19</sup>.

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<sup>13</sup> Ooi, C. S., & Shelley, B. (2023). Shifting from benefiting to serving community: a case of regenerative tourism and building cultural capital through the Children’s University Tasmania. In *Handbook on tourism and rural community development* (pp. 359-372). Edward Elgar Publishing

<sup>14</sup> Mir, M. A. M., Ooi, C. S., & Shelley, B. (2024). Tourism development, educational attainment, and the achievement of Sustainable Development Goals in the West Coast of Tasmania. In *The Elgar Companion to Tourism and the Sustainable Development Goals* (pp. 284-300). Edward Elgar Publishing

<sup>15</sup> Metsäpelto, R.-L., & Pulkkinen, L. (2014). The benefits of extracurricular activities for socioemotional behaviour and school achievement in middle childhood: An overview of the research. *Journal for educational research online*, 6(3), 10-33. <https://doi.org/10.25656/01:9685>

<sup>16</sup> Shulruf, B. (2010). Do extra-curricular activities in schools improve educational outcomes? A critical review and meta-analysis of the literature. *International Review of Education*, 56(5/6), 591-612. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11159-010-9180-x>

<sup>17</sup> Lewis, C. P. (2004). *The Relation Between Extracurricular Activities with Academic and Social Competencies in School Age Children: A Meta-Analysis*. College Station, TX: Texas A&M University

<sup>18</sup> Lewis, (2004), pp. iii-iv

<sup>19</sup> Rahayu, A. P., & Dong, Y. (2023). The Relationship of Extracurricular Activities with Students' Character Education and Determinant Factors: A Systematic Literature Review. *Al-Ishlah: Journal Pendidikan*, 15(1), 459-474. <https://doi.org/10.35445/alishlah.v15i1.2968>

Findings from the international literature confirm Peter Underwood Centre research conducted in the Tasmanian context.

Through our work within the Aspiration and Attainment portfolio, we are taking the concept of learner-centredness even further through encouraging children's agency and mediating the boundaries between home and school, and formal and informal learning<sup>20</sup>.

### *Recommendation*

There are clear benefits for learner outcomes when there are opportunities for students to engage in voluntary, extracurricular learning during lunch hours and after school.

Enabling learner participation in extracurricular activity within the school system is important, particularly in areas where there is identified locational and educational disadvantage.

Initiatives such as Children's University and Limitless Learning can be enabled to succeed if:

- lunch times are sufficiently long to support outreach activities; and
- the education system has the capacity to sustain and support extracurricular learning opportunities for children and young people equitably.

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<sup>20</sup> Shelley, B., Ooi, C. S., & Brown, N. (2019). Playful learning? An extreme comparison of the Children's University in Malaysia and in Australia. *Journal of Applied Learning and Teaching*, 2(1), 16-23

## Section 3: Year 9-12 and post school pathways

The impetus for this section on Year 9-12 and post school pathways is a set of statistical indicators about education attainment that indicate both challenges and opportunities for supporting young Tasmanians to flourish at and beyond school.

### **Year 12 attainment rate (2022)**

**TAS: 53.1%      AUS: 76.3% (proportion of potential Year 12 population)**

Published in the annual Report on Government Services<sup>21</sup>, this rate is calculated as a percentage of the potential Year 12 population. It includes the standard Year 12 certificate (TCE in Tasmania) and may include other certificates such as the International Baccalaureate (not included in Tasmania)<sup>22</sup>.

Concerns about the low rate in Tasmania are based on:

- Comparison over time: the rate in Tasmania has gone down from 60% in 2016, to 58% in 2021 and 53% in 2022. This trend occurred despite the 2016 Education Act which sought to keep more young Tasmanians engaged in formal schooling or training.
- Comparison to other jurisdictions: The data are not comparable across jurisdictions because each state uses different measures of attainment. E.g. SA and VIC include a much broader range of attainments than Tasmania<sup>23</sup>. Nevertheless, the gap between Tasmania and the next (3<sup>rd</sup>) lowest (NSW, 70.5% in 2022) is substantial.

### **Year 12 or Equivalent or AQF Certificate III (or above) attainment (2023)**

**TAS: 21.7%      AUS: 31.5% (proportion of 15–19-year-olds)**

**TAS: 86.5%      AUS: 89.6% (proportion of 20–24-year-olds)**

ACARA uses as a key performance measure for student attainment the proportion of the 20–24-year-old population having attained at least Year 12 or equivalent or AQF Certificate III or above<sup>24</sup>. The data for two age cohorts above highlights that:

- At age cohort 15-19 this attainment rate is much lower in TAS than nationally.
- At age cohort 20-24 Tasmanian has almost caught up to the national average.

### **TASC Direct continuation and attainment**

5,938	2020	number of students in Year 10 in Tasmania
87.8%	2021	of the 2020 Year 10 cohort were in Year 11 in 2021
75.9%	2022	of the 2020 Year 10 cohort were in Year 12 in 2022
53.6%	2022	of the 2020 Year 10 cohort attained the TCE in 2022
70.6%	2022	of students in Year 12 in 2022 attained the TCE in that same year <sup>25</sup>

<sup>21</sup> ROGS, 2024, Table 4A.51: [Data downloads - Report on Government Services 2024 - Productivity Commission \(pc.gov.au\)](#)

<sup>22</sup> [Education and Work, Australia methodology, May 2023 | Australian Bureau of Statistics \(abs.gov.au\)](#)

<sup>23</sup> <https://www.parliament.tas.gov.au/legislative-council/tables-papers/2024/d31fd9bae0b17578a8f8e9466331450b4ef8b4ed.pdf>

<sup>24</sup> P. 14 in 2020 Framework [ACARA - Measurement Framework for Schooling](#). The Framework also includes the option of AQF Certificate II as equivalent, however, this is widely considered too low. Lim and Karmel (2011) argue that a vocational Certificate III (rather than Certificate II) can be reasonably considered as an alternative credential to Year 12 attainment See [The vocational equivalent to year 12 \(ncver.edu.au\)](#)

<sup>25</sup> See: [2022 Direct Continuation data.pdf \(tasc.tas.gov.au\)](#)

## The value of upper secondary education attainment

There is compelling evidence about the value of young people completing an upper secondary education qualification:

- Completing at least Year 12 makes it more likely to be in work or study than early school leaving<sup>26</sup> and is associated with a much-reduced risk of experiencing subsequent deep social exclusion<sup>27</sup>. One of the best ways to break poverty cycles is through ensuring access to education, particularly post-school education<sup>28</sup>.
- Overcoming disadvantage through upper secondary education completion has benefits for more positive personal / family relationships, enhanced social cohesion, and enhanced civil society<sup>29</sup>.
- The lifetime cost of early school leaving (i.e. not achieving a Year 12 or equivalent by age 19) has been estimated at \$12.6billion (fiscal costs) and \$23.2billion (social costs)<sup>30</sup>.

### 53% Year 12 attainment rate in Tasmania (2022)

In Tasmania, the low Year 12 attainment rate is sometimes explained through claims that many children, young people and families (especially from low SES and regional communities) do not value education. As a result, enhancing educational attainment is commonly linked with the ‘need to raise aspirations’.

In contrast, evidence from both research and outreach activities with Tasmanian children, young people and families by the Peter Underwood Centre demonstrates that learning is valued, and high aspirations are widely prevalent – including among children and young people from disadvantaged communities.

Our 2021 survey<sup>31</sup> of 1055 Year 10/11/12 students from all three school sectors showed high levels of agreement with the value of completing Year 12, see figure below.

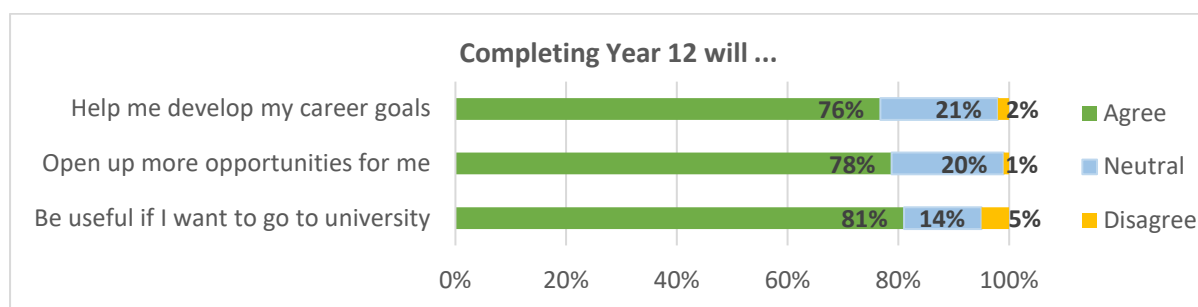


Figure 5: Tasmanian student perspectives on completing Year 12

<sup>26</sup> See ABS Education and Work (2023) Engagement in employment and/or study, Table 15 (time series) [Education and Work, Australia, May 2023 | Australian Bureau of Statistics \(abs.gov.au\)](#); and also, The Smith Family (2024) Pathways, engagement, and transitions: experience of early school leavers, <https://www.thesmithfamily.com.au/media/research/reports/experiences-of-early-school-leavers>

<sup>27</sup> McLachlan, R., Gilfillan, G. and Gordon, J. 2013, *Deep and Persistent Disadvantage in Australia*, rev., Productivity Commission Staff Working Paper, Canberra. (Table A.3 p.207)

<sup>28</sup> Bessell, S. and O'Sullivan, C. 2024. *More for Children: Children's Experiences of Poverty in Australia*, Canberra: The Children's Policy Centre, The Australian National University. <https://doi.org/10.13140/RG.2.2.12416.24321>

<sup>29</sup> McLachlan et al. 2013, *Ibid* (p.155)

<sup>30</sup> Lamb, S. and Huo, S. (2017) *Counting the costs of lost opportunity in Australian education*. Mitchell Institute report No. 02/2017. Mitchell Institute, Melbourne

<sup>31</sup> See: [SPSPI-Survey2021-OverviewReport-nov2022.pdf \(utas.edu.au\)](#)

It is more appropriate to aim to *inform* aspirations, rather than *raise* them. Young Tasmanians and their families already have strong aspirations, but they do not always have the information needed to help shape their aspirations<sup>32</sup>. Strength-based models of engagement can do this in a way which is meaningful for children, young people and key influencers in their life- including parents, teachers, employers and industry and community organisations<sup>33</sup>.

Research by the Peter Underwood Centre into what Year 11/12 students valued most about learning, especially where they were able to explore “what’s next” in their lives (including further education and training), showed that young people value<sup>34</sup>:

- *Place based and real-world learning*: connecting education to real-world applications and future career opportunities, workplaces, university campuses and community.
- *Agency* to explore topics and issues of interest in their studies, including the ability to choose subjects that align with their interests, strengths, aspirations and career goals.
- *Building motivation and confidence*: developing self-efficacy through building confidence to undertake new tasks. This relies on teachers who are supportive, knowledgeable, approachable, and engaging; can scaffold learning and cater to different learning styles; encourage reflection; and challenge students.
- *Authenticity*: meeting “real” people and hearing authentic stories about pathways from school to further education, training and employment.



Figure 6: Kiara, Kaden, Hayden, Brock and Daneika attending “Know Your Options” day - a collaboration between Newstead College and the University of Tasmania

<sup>32</sup> See: [Final report SPSPi phase 4 \(utas.edu.au\)](https://utas.edu.au)

<sup>33</sup> See: <https://journal.spera.asn.au/index.php/AIJRE/article/view/697> and

Kilpatrick, Susan; Fischer, Sarah; Koirala, Subhash; Woodroffe, Jessica; Barnes, Nicoli; Groves, O; et al. (2021). Informing key influencers of low SES regional, rural, and remote students' education and career pathway choices: A whole community approach. University of Tasmania. Report. <https://hdl.handle.net/102.100.100/495207>

<sup>34</sup> Woodroffe, Jessica; Viney, T; Craw, Michael; Spencer, L; Long, L (2019). Exploring Successful Learning with Lucas and Lily: What Can a School-University Partnership Offer to Enhance the Education of Senior Secondary Students and Prepare Them for What’s Next in Their Learning?. University of Tasmania. Chapter. <https://hdl.handle.net/102.100.100/531730>

For a similar national perspective see: <https://www.monash.edu/education/cvpep/research/the-2024-australian-youth-barometer-understanding-young-people-in-australia-today>



## *Vocational learning and VET*

Vocational learning is highly valuable. The Australian Universities Accord (2024) final report outlines the critical challenge ahead for Australia. It highlights that as a nation, we will not meet our current or future skills needs unless we produce far greater numbers of higher education and VET graduates<sup>35</sup>. Jobs and Skills Australia data that shows that almost half (about 44%) of new jobs created in the next decade will require VET qualifications. Over 90% of new jobs will require post-secondary qualification<sup>36</sup>.

*86.5% Year 12 or equivalent or AQF Certificate III (or above) attainment in Tasmania (20-24 year olds, 2023)*

The high proportion of young Tasmanian (age 20-24) who have completed Year 12 or equivalent or AQF Certificate III (or above) suggests vocational education is a vital component of the education landscape in Tasmania.

However, the much lower rate of attainment at age 15-19 indicates there is a need to capitalise on interest in VET earlier. Investing in the current generation of young Tasmanians is critically important given the ageing labour force<sup>37</sup>.

The plans for the year after leaving school (pre- or post-Year 12) in our 2021 survey<sup>38</sup> of (n) 1055 Year 10/11/12 Tasmanian students from all three school sectors showed:

- 38% intend to go to university
- 26% intend to undertake vocational training (inc. apprenticeships)
- 11% intend to get a job
- 17% intend to take a gap year

Research in the Peter Underwood Centre has pointed to the valuable role that project-based learning and Australian School Based Apprenticeships can play for engaging students from Year 9 or Year 10 onwards<sup>39</sup>. Essential to success is collaboration between schools and workplaces that prioritises relevant and engaging learning opportunities for students.

There is strong evidence that young Tasmanians with higher level vocational qualifications are currently too often employed in lower skilled jobs, limiting their career progression, and under-utilising their skills and expertise. Workforce planning, job creation and re-design at industry and employer level should sit alongside career planning in and beyond schools<sup>40</sup>. The Tasmanian youth jobs strategy<sup>41</sup> and the UTAS University College<sup>42</sup> are well-placed to support young Tasmanians into valuable vocational and work pathways.

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<sup>35</sup> See: [Australian Universities Accord Final Report Document - Department of Education, Australian Government](#)

<sup>36</sup> See: <https://www.nationalskillsweek.com.au/media-release-vocational-education-and-training-vet-is-a-game-changer-for-peoples-lives/> Also see: [Youth Jobs Strategy](#)

<sup>37</sup> See: [Tasmania's workforce \(lisadenny.com.au\)](https://www.lisadenny.com.au/tasmanias-workforce)

<sup>38</sup> See: [SPSPI-Survey2021-OverviewReport-nov2022.pdf \(utas.edu.au\)](https://www.utas.edu.au/SPSPI-Survey2021-OverviewReport-nov2022.pdf)

<sup>39</sup> See: <https://www.utas.edu.au/community-and-partners/peter-underwood-centre/research/learning-and-wellbeing-in-schools> Projects: '2019-2020 Evaluation of the Packages of Learning (POL) initiative' and '2018-2020 Impact evaluation of the Aboriginal Student Engagement Australian School-based Apprenticeship'

<sup>40</sup> See: [Tasmania's workforce \(lisadenny.com.au\)](https://www.lisadenny.com.au/tasmanias-workforce)

<sup>41</sup> See: [Youth Jobs Strategy](#)

<sup>42</sup> See: [University College | University of Tasmania \(utas.edu.au\)](https://www.utas.edu.au/university-college)

Engagement in VET during school has shown to have many benefits, including<sup>43</sup>:

- Practical Skills: VET provides hands-on experience and practical skills that are directly applicable to various industries. This can make students more job-ready upon graduation.
- Pathways to Employment: Students who complete VET courses are more likely to gain apprenticeships or other employment opportunities when they leave school.
- Industry Recognition: VET courses are designed by industry experts, ensuring that the skills and knowledge gained are up-to-date and relevant to current job markets.
- Confidence and Adaptability: Engaging in VET can boost students' confidence and adaptability, preparing them to navigate a rapidly changing work environment.
- Higher Education Opportunities: VET qualifications can also serve as a stepping stone to higher-level VET qualifications or university degrees, offering multiple pathways for further education.

An issue to be resolved is that Tasmania is one of the only states that does not recognise VET learning in the Australian Tertiary Admission Rank (ATAR) calculation. Including VET in the ATAR is designed to recognise the value of practical skills, provide diverse educational pathways, encourage practical learning, and promote equity and inclusivity.

Other Australian states have implemented policies to include VET qualifications in the ATAR, to ensure fair and equitable recognition of the value of vocational education in senior secondary education, and to provide more inclusive pathway to higher education.

The rationale behind integrating VET into the ATAR system in Tasmania (as well as nationally) is based on several principles including:

- Equity and Fairness: including VET subjects in the ATAR to ensure all students have equitable opportunities, regardless of their chosen study path.
- Recognition of Skills: Including VET subjects acknowledges the value of practical and vocational skills alongside academic achievements.
- Pathway Flexibility: Students can now choose a combination of VET and academic subjects, providing more flexibility in their education and career pathways.

Current work being undertaken by the Peter Underwood Centre in collaboration with the Office of Tasmanian Accreditation, Standards and Certification (TASC), has been investigating how such policy reforms can be implemented in Tasmania to include VET in the ATAR and TCE and the importance of such work for improving educational attainment.

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<sup>43</sup> See: (<https://education.nsw.gov.au/teaching-and-learning/curriculum/career-learning-and-vet/career-and-workplace-learning/vocational-education-and-training> and <https://education.nsw.gov.au/skills-nsw/students-and-job-seekers/what-is-vet-and-what-are-the-benefits> and [https://www.qtac.edu.au/wp-content/staticfiles/ATAR\\_fact\\_sheet\\_VET.pdf](https://www.qtac.edu.au/wp-content/staticfiles/ATAR_fact_sheet_VET.pdf))

## *Supporting fit-for-purpose pathways*

53.1% Year 12 attainment rate in Tasmania (2022)

53.6% of the 2020 Year 10 cohort attained the TCE in 2022

The data above are sometimes taken to mean that almost half of young Tasmanians are ‘drop outs’ or have ‘failed.’ Such comments undermine the validity of other pathways, such as vocational education and training or employment, for positive and productive engagement.

Young Tasmanians need to be supported to navigate pathways that are positive and appropriate for their circumstances. The implications from our research with students in three Year 11/12 Colleges intending to go to university apply more broadly across various pathways<sup>44</sup>:

- Make pathways visible: support to explore and plan future options when courses, jobs and careers are visible to them.
- Make pathways possible: support to pursue future options when they have access to trustworthy and relevant knowledge and to practical resources.
- Make pathways “real”: support to feel that a pathway is concrete and achievable when they are connected to people and places with direct and authentic relevance to that pathway.
- Make pathways attractive: support to consider a pathway attractive when immediate and longer-term benefits for themselves and their communities are made clear and explicit.

## *Tasmanian UniHUBs - A partnership to supporting senior secondary student pathways*

Collaborative partnerships between schools, universities, vocational education providers, and industry which open up these pathways are essential in contemporary career education<sup>45</sup>.

One example of making careers and post school pathways visible in Tasmania is a partnership between the DECYP and the Peter Underwood Centre. The “UniHUBs” have now run for seven years at Newstead College and Claremont College – schools with traditionally high social disadvantage, and low transition rates of learners to further education and training. The UniHUBs deliver the following objectives as driven by the school:

1. Informing the aspirations of all students through building and enhancing levels of knowledge and awareness of university pathways and study and courses, particularly those offered by the University of Tasmania.
2. Developing and providing place-based programs and links from and to the University which align with the senior secondary curriculum and/or highlight different pathways, careers, and opportunities within and from higher education.
3. Growing confidence levels amongst learners to pursue and transition to higher education, through designated support and engagement.
4. Building a strong sense of what works for the College and its students with regards to higher education outreach and aspiration raising.
5. Growing the numbers of students who transition to and succeed in higher education.

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<sup>44</sup> See p.34 in: [Microsoft Word - Final report SPSPi phase 4 230710 \(utas.edu.au\)](https://www.utas.edu.au)

<sup>45</sup> See: <https://www.fya.org.au/resource/new-work-order-research/> and <https://www.education.gov.au/quality-schools-package/resources/through-growth-achievement-report-review-achieve-educational-excellence-australian-schools>

The model below demonstrates how the Newstead UniHUB works and how it connects with the College it operates in, and its structure. It is deeply embedded in the school with its activity driven by the needs of students and staff.

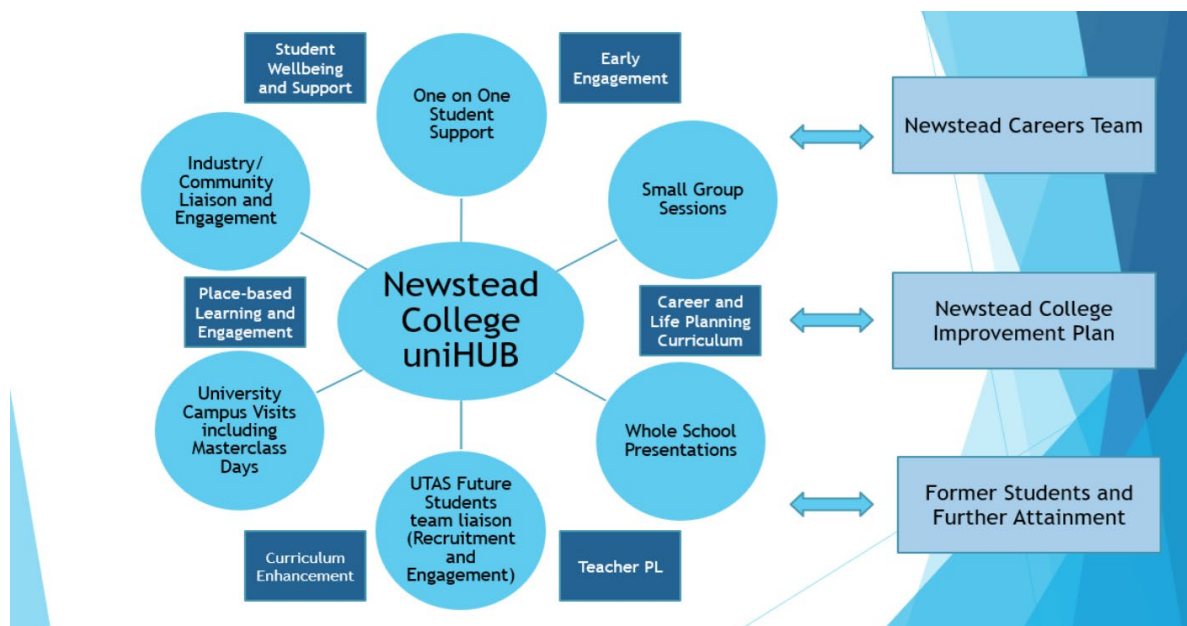


Figure 7: Newstead College UniHUB model

Our 2023/24 evaluation of the Newstead College UniHUB program demonstrates its value:

- 70% of students self-reported that their support from the UniHUB had positively changed their aspirations for university (with 30% unchanged).
- 94% of students strongly agreed that accessing the UniHUB increased their confidence, knowledge, skills, preparation and understanding of transitioning to university.
- 60% of students rated their confidence and knowledge of university as very low/low prior to accessing the UniHUB. Following their interactions with the Hub, this shifted significantly to only 3% of students rating their knowledge/confidence as low/very low.
- 92% of the Year 12 students supported by the UniHUB in 2023 applied to UTAS, and of those who applied 91% accepted their offer and transitioned to UTAS in 2024.

Successful expansion of the UniHUBs to four other sites in Tasmania in 2022, showed the feasibility of this program and the model as being transferable to other school contexts.

There is a real and critical need to support young Tasmanians to have supported conversations about “what’s next” in their post school lives, and to open up opportunities for them to confidently pursue further education, training, or employment.

This is not just the responsibility of schools alone – multi-stakeholder partnerships are essential for ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education and career learning<sup>46</sup>.

<sup>46</sup> See: <https://www.education.gov.au/quality-schools-package/resources/looking-future-report-review-senior-secondary-pathways-work-further-education-and-training> and <https://www.education.gov.au/school-work-transitions/australian-blueprint-career-development>

### *Non-linear pathways and post-school support*

Linear pathways – through school, into further education and then work – are not always the most suitable. Young people may take a gap year, work in a low-skilled job to financially support themselves or their families or focus on being a parent or carer – before returning to study. Smooth and easy to navigate re-entry opportunities therefore are essential.

For example, the TASC direct continuation data indicate about 2700 young Tasmanians who were in Year 10 in 2022 have not completed the TCE two years later. Many of these young people are likely to be doing well in other pathways. We need to know which young people are not (or not fully) engaged in employment, education, or training to target support to them.

A snapshot in the Youth Jobs Strategy<sup>47</sup> shows that of the 63,700 Tasmanians aged 15-24:

- 21,500 were attending school
- 42,200 were not attending school, of those:
  - 29,700 engaged full-time in employment and/or study
  - 5,500 partially engaged in employment and/or study
  - 6,500 not engaged in employment and/or study

This highlights that over 80% of young Tasmanians are fully engaged in school, other education, or employment. Among the cohort that are partially or not engaged some may be productive in other ways. Nevertheless, these 12,000 young Tasmanians are where support is best directed.

Based on national (rather than only for Tasmania) research that tracked young people ‘left behind’ their peers over time, it is likely that a substantial proportion of these 12,000 young Tasmanians have actually completed Year 12<sup>48</sup>. In other words, Year 12 attainment is certainly valuable, but it is not a guarantee of being fully engaged after leaving school. Importantly:

Young people who are missing out can recover and gain ground. Being behind at any point need not be a life sentence, even for the disadvantaged [... But ...] The most advantaged learners are not only less likely to fall below expected standards in the first place but more likely to catch up again if they do<sup>49</sup>.



Figure 8: Students and staff in the Newstead College and University of Tasmania UniHUB

<sup>47</sup> See p.10 in: [Youth Jobs Strategy](#)

<sup>48</sup> Over half of the national cohort not fully engaged at age 24 had previously completed Year 12 by age 19. See p.iv: [Educational Opportunity in Australia 2015: Who Succeeds and Who Misses Out \(vu.edu.au\)](#)

<sup>49</sup> Ibid, p.iv

The evaluation of the UniHUB (see above) also identified that students need support and a designated trusted contact to ask questions beyond formal schooling (e.g. after gap year/s or a break). However, they often have no one to turn to or ask advice. The initial vision of the UniHUB was for it to be a place that former students could return for assistance.

Each year there has been an increase in the number of former students contacting Hubs for assistance. Since 2019, more than 50 students have reached out for assistance- some three or more years after finishing formal schooling. This assistance has included; general advice on university, applications (course, scholarship, accommodation), course enrolments, exploring pathway options.

### *Need for better data*

Finally, the data at the start of this section highlights that better data is needed. For example, there is lack of data about:

- What activities are undertaken in the years after being in Year 10 by those who are no longer at school two years later;
- The number of students who attain the TCE later (i.e. not as direct continuation);
- The pathway between leaving school (with or without the TCE) and being fully, partially, or not engaged in employment and/or study at age;
- The number of students engaged in targeted and supported career-based conversations/support and their longitudinal outcomes.

Moreover, there is lack of knowledge about:

- The reasons young Tasmanians leave school before Year 12;
- The quality of various post-school experiences for young Tasmanians leaving before or after completing Year 12;
- The key influences and enablers to pursuing further education and training post school.

This data and knowledge is vital for being able to target the right kinds of support for those young Tasmanians who most need it.

### *Recommendations*

To better support young Tasmanians in Years 9-12 and post-school:

- Explicitly support a range of positive pathways, including TCE, vocational learning, and re-entry opportunities.
- Support all forms of learning in educational attainment policies and qualifications where feasible (e.g. VET in the ATAR and Everyday Adult Standards).
- Recognise existing aspirations and use strengths-based approaches to build on those.
- Invest in and expand evidence-informed collaborative partnerships and initiatives which support young Tasmanians to access and understand post school options.
- Enable streamlined data collection by TASC and commission research to fill current knowledge gaps.

## **In conclusion**

This submission is based on deep expertise in the Peter Underwood Centre through reflective practice in our programs as well as our own research and analysis of research elsewhere.

**We would welcome the opportunity to discuss the contents of our submission in further detail in order to support the Independent Education Review.**



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