

Submission

to

Senate Employment, Workplace Relations and Education
References Committee

Inquiry into the progress and future direction of life-long learning

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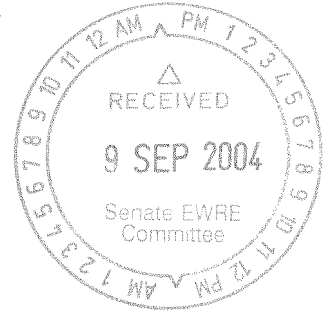
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PREMIER



Mr J Carter
Secretary
Senate Employment, Workplace Relations
and Education References Committee
Suite SG.52, Parliament House
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07 SEP 2004

Dear Mr Carter

I am writing to provide you with the Tasmanian Government's submission to the Senate Employment, Workplace Relations and Education Committee's Inquiry into Progress and Future Direction of Life-long Learning.

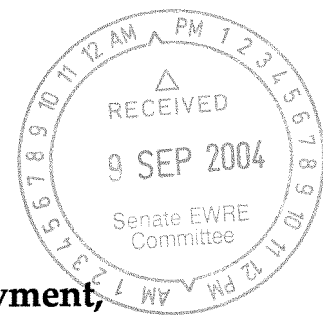
Life-long learning is very important in ensuring Tasmania's social and economic future. This has been recognised through Tasmania *Together*, the State's community driven long term social, environmental and economic plan. The attached submission outlines the Tasmanian Government's commitment to life long learning through Tasmania *Together* and supporting policy initiatives such as *Tasmania: A State of Learning* and the *Tasmanian Plan for Positive Ageing*.

The initial contact for any queries relating to this submission is Mr Nick Evans, Office of Post-Compulsory Education and Training, Department of Education. Mr Evans can be contacted by telephoning (03) 6233 2019 or via e-mail at nick.evans@education.tas.gov.au.

Thank you for providing the Tasmanian Government with the opportunity to contribute to this Inquiry.

Yours sincerely

Paul Lennon
Premier



Tasmanian Government Submission to the Senate Employment, Workplace Relations and Education References Committee Inquiry into the Progress and Future Direction of Life-long Learning

1. Introduction and Background

Current Tasmanian Government policy on life-long learning is premised upon the recognition that Tasmania's future social, cultural and economic wellbeing depends on how well we adapt to global societal changes, such as population and technological development, and effectively participate in the increasingly knowledge and information based society.

The Tasmanian Government recognises life-long learning as an important element in ensuring that Tasmania's social and economic future is strong and vibrant. This is reflected in a number of policy commitments including *Tasmania Together*, *Tasmania: A State of Learning*, the *Tasmanian Plan for Positive Ageing 2000-2005*, and the recently announced *Fast-Track Skills Development* initiative.

Life-long learning has the potential to improve social and economic outcomes for individuals, communities and for Tasmania as a whole. There are many benefits of life-long learning: for increasing an individual's knowledge and understanding of their health and well-being; for managing time and leisure activities; for active participation as a citizen; for encouraging further engagement with education and learning; for employment skills and quality of working life; for making consumer choices about goods and services; for an appreciation of the physical environment and social environment; and for personal safety.

Life-long learning builds social capital in the community – that is shared values, trust and networks - when individuals interact to exchange knowledge and to learn from each other both formally and informally. In addition to gaining knowledge and skills, learners derive other benefits from participating in learning activities, including relating to others socially, developing confidence, being accepted by others and developing a feeling of belonging.

Life-long learning is a vital ingredient in community capacity building. It enables individuals to draw on and share resources, knowledge and skills in the community. Communities are stronger and healthier where individuals are connected to each other through social networks, and people are willing to be involved in the community. The more highly skilled and self-sufficient the community, the greater the probability that community sustainability can be improved over time.

2. Tasmanian vision for life-long learning

The importance of life-long learning is highlighted in *Tasmania Together* the 20 year social, environmental and economic plan for the state. *Tasmania Together* has been developed through wide consultation with the Tasmanian community. The broad goals provide the framework for both government and non-government decision making. Ultimately, *Tasmania Together* is about the Government and the whole community working together to achieve a shared vision of Tasmania by the year 2020.

Tasmania Together provides the links between major Government policy initiatives, including strategies and goals of State and Local Government Partnership Agreements, *Learning Together*, the *Tasmanian Plan for Positive Ageing 2000-2005* and other major initiatives - all focus on achieving the vision and goals in *Tasmania Together*.

The Budget process has been modified to incorporate long-term planning and link policy and financial planning to achieve the community's goals for the year 2020. Social, economic, environmental and community results will now be directly linked to agency business. The Government's Budget strategy will concentrate on achieving community aspirations set in *Tasmania Together*. The *Tasmania Together* targets are the key to achieving the results and measuring progress along the way. Reports on progress are made to Parliament and widely circulated throughout the community.

A key reference falls within *Goal 4: Create a culture that encourages people to learn and develop new skills, including life skills, throughout their lives*. A series of contributory goals pertaining to life-long learning has been established in the central education policy *Learning Together*. These include *Goal 2: Enriching and fulfilling learning opportunities*, and in particular the initiatives under strategy 2.3: *Actively encourage life-long learning*.

Supporting *Tasmania Together* alongside *Learning Together* is the *Tasmanian Plan for Positive Ageing 2000-2005*, which includes the key objective of improving older Tasmanians' access to and understanding of information, continuing education and technology. This key objective responds to a strong desire expressed by older people to continue to learn through both formal and informal educational programs.

Tasmanians value and embrace life-long learning as a vital component in the pursuit of prosperity, high quality of life, informed decision making for the individual, business and the wider community, and for the development of personal, economic and social well-being.

Meeting these goals will require commitment to investment in life-long learning by:

- governments investing to enhance education and training at all levels;

- the broader community, including business, training existing and future employees; and
- individuals, developing their own abilities and careers.

There are some key challenges facing the Tasmanian Government as it implements life-long learning policy in this State. To support life-long learning the Department of Education is working towards addressing the following challenges, including:

- a. **Building foundations for all**
 - provision to ensure that everyone achieves the foundations for life-long learning including:
 - literacy, numeracy and information literacy;
 - learning to learn skills; and
 - motivation and desire for learning.
- b. **Strengthening and developing pathways, bridges and transitions**
 - strengthening and extending pathways through education and training into work;
 - supporting the key transitions individuals face; and
 - ensuring support for people who are disadvantaged.
- c. **Enabling access to information and learning technologies**
 - making modern learning technologies widely available through the community;
 - supporting and encouraging individuals lacking confidence in the use of these technologies; and
 - using modern technologies to widen equitable access to information, education and training opportunities.
- d. **Fostering learning organisations and institutions**
 - encouraging enterprises, institutions, and government agencies to develop as learning organisations;
 - integrating work and learning in enterprises; and
 - recognising informal learning in the workplace.
- e. **Developing learning communities**
 - encouraging and supporting communities at all levels to develop as learning communities: towns, cities, local communities, and common interest networks;
 - fostering partnership and network development as a key component of learning communities; and
 - generally fostering a learning culture to underpin economic activity and quality of life for all in a learning society.

3. Policies and strategies aimed at addressing the life-long learning needs of an ageing population.

3.1 The Tasmanian Plan for Positive Ageing 2000-2005

The *Tasmanian Plan for Positive Ageing 2000-2005* was developed, during 1999 - the International Year of Older Persons, to provide a planning framework that enables all sectors of the community (including Government) to work together to ensure that the needs and contributions of older Tasmanians are recognised and addressed.

The overarching vision of the *Tasmanian Plan for Positive Ageing 2000-2005* is that we will "develop a society in which people of all ages are recognised and valued, treated with dignity and respect and encouraged to contribute their wealth of experience and skills".

The Plan reflects the community view that access to information is a key to maintaining independence and facilitating choice. Community consultations associated with development of The Plan identified as a key priority the need to raise awareness and provide education to older people on how to use new technologies.

The Plan contains over 80 strategies to be achieved between 2000 and 2005. A number of these fall predominantly within the Department of Education's core business, and include:

- a. **Developing a partnership between schools and older people**
 - In 2001 the Education Department launched the *Partners in Time Resource Kit* to assist schools and older people to build active partnerships.
- b. **Offering workforce programs for older women**
- c. **Working with local older persons' organisations to increase the availability of School for Seniors services throughout Tasmania**
- d. **Increasing the number of Adult Education computer training classes offered to older people**
- e. **Promoting the use of Online Access Centres' services, including access to technologies, and providing training to older people on how to access government services through the Online Access Centres**
 - In 2003, 8730 Tasmanians aged 55+ years had used an Online Access Centre at least once and 4150 were current users. In addition, another 7% of Tasmanians aged 55-69 years and 1% aged 70+ years had used a private sector Internet café. (Dept Premier & Cabinet, 2003, *Older People in Tasmania: A Profile 2003*).

- Australian Bureau of Statistics data also shows that in 2001, 13% of persons aged 60+ years in Tasmania had access to a computer at home and 7 % had access to the Internet. This compared to 44% of persons aged 0-59 years who had a computer at home and 27% of persons in the same age group with Internet access at home. (DPAC, 2003, *Older People in Tasmania: A Profile 2003*)

f. Marketing libraries' information and accessing services

Tasmania Government initiatives relating to life-long and adult learning, have been addressed through the recent release by the Hon. Paula Wriedt MHA, Minister of Education, Tasmania: *A State of Learning*. This is the State's first strategy for post-Year 10 education and training. These initiatives demonstrate how the Tasmanian Government, business and the wider community propose to work together to support and enhance adult and life-long learning.

During 2005 the Tasmanian Government will review the Tasmanian Plan for Positive Ageing, particularly in the context of policy initiatives such as *Tasmania Together* and *Learning Together*. This review will form the basis of future positive ageing policy in Tasmania.

3.2 Tasmania: A State of Learning; A Strategy for Post-Year 10 Education and Learning

Tasmania: A State of Learning is the result of a wide-ranging consultation process involving learners, families, providers of education and training, enterprises, unions, government agencies and community organisations. A series of nine issues papers was released for consultation in 2003, including papers relating to Adult and Community Education, Literacy Throughout Life, Informal Learning, Workforce Skills Development and Community Learning Partnerships. These papers, together with regional and issues-based forums, enabled focused community engagement in the strategy's development.

Launched in December 2003, *State of Learning* encompasses four key elements: Guaranteeing Futures, Ensuring Essential Literacies, Enhancing Adult Learning and Building Learning Communities. Each element comprises a number of intended outcomes and a range of initiatives to achieve these.

Overall, the strategy aims to strengthen relationships between learners, providers, business and industry, governments and communities, as well as to build bridges across all fields of learning – including school, senior secondary education, vocational education and training, adult and community education, higher education and informal learning.

Excerpts from the strategy document are provided below to illustrate Tasmania's new, integrated approach to adult and life-long learning and some of the new initiatives to be implemented from 2004.

Enhancing Adult Learning

Tasmania: A State of Learning places adult learning at the centre of social, cultural and economic policy in Tasmania. It recognises that people of all ages can enhance the quality of their lives through learning, while acknowledging that many factors promote or impede adults' successful engagement in learning.

One of the strategy's four elements, *Enhancing Adult Learning* recognises the range and quality of current adult learning provision in Tasmania. For example:

- every year more than 26,000 Tasmanians engage in learning through the Institute of TAFE Tasmania. The Institute won national recognition as the leading provider of vocational education and training in 2000 and 2002;
- over 20,000 Tasmanians participated in non-accredited Adult Education programs in 2002, equating to almost 393,000 student contact hours; and
- around 50,000 Tasmanians are registered users of online access centres, established to accelerate the uptake of information technology by people living in rural and regional Tasmania.

Enhancing Adult Learning encompasses a set of intended outcomes, including:

- improved relationships and understanding between business and industry, education and training providers, and government;
- increased access to adult learning opportunities;
- increased acknowledgement of the role and importance of informal learning; and
- improved economic and social outcomes resulting from engagement in adult learning.

This element of the strategy also contains a range of initiatives including:

a. Repositioning adult education

Tasmania's Adult Education Program is the centrepiece of adult and community education (ACE) in Tasmania. Previously operated by the Institute of TAFE Tasmania, this Program was transferred to the Department of Education in January 2004. This transfer has both immediate and potential long-term benefits for adult learning in Tasmania, particularly in rural and region areas. Already it has strengthened relationships between Adult Education, schools, colleges, skill centres, libraries and online access centres.

b. Funding workforce development

The Tasmanian Government has recently announced the *Fast-Track Skills Development* package, designed to link business planning with training and skills development for small to medium sized employers. Enterprises successful in gaining funds will be required to match these on a dollar for dollar basis.

In addition, the Government is addressing the need to provide skilled labour by funding a four-year program to lift participation in education and training, improve adult literacy and build a skilled workforce for specific industries. It is also funding a four-year program to provide flexible training opportunities for early school leavers.

c. Reinvigorating recognition of prior learning

Community consultation in 2003 indicated that recognition of prior learning (RPL) is unreasonably difficult to obtain in Tasmania. RPL was considered by many to be too expensive, too time consuming and too bureaucratic. A taskforce of providers, professional associations and students is being established to address factors that currently inhibit the implementation of RPL in Tasmania, with a view to reinvigorating the RPL process for the benefit of all Tasmanians.

d. Promoting learning and skills recognition through technology

To ensure information on formal and informal learning is more accessible, a single website will be established to provide a gateway to post-Year 10 education and training options available in Tasmania.

A new electronic resource will also be developed to enable Tasmanians to more easily recognise the skills they have developed through work, learning, and life experience. This online resource will take the form of a 'skills mapper'.

e. Boosting community education provision

To extend adult learning opportunities through the ACE sector, an annual conference for the ACE community will also be established in 2004 to assist raise the status and profile of the ACE sector and to enable practitioners and others to share their knowledge and expertise.

f. Introducing an adult and community education policy

A policy for adult and community education will be finalised and officially launched at the inaugural ACE conference in September 2004. A first for Tasmania, this policy will:

- recognise and support the distinctive characteristics of ACE in Tasmania so that the learning needs of Tasmanians and their communities are better met;
- increase community awareness and understanding of the role and importance of ACE;
- recognise diversity and extend opportunities for participation in ACE; and

- improve the quality of ACE learning experiences and outcomes.

The policy's implementation, in conjunction with other measures contained in *State of Learning*, will ensure ACE takes its rightful place as the fourth sector of education and training in Tasmania.

In addition, the Tasmania Government is committed to the National Declaration for Adult Community Education which was launched in individual states and territories during Adult Learners Week 2002. This declaration, which has four goals, puts strong emphasis on the community provision of adult learning opportunities, to build community capacity and to provide pathways to further education and training.

The implementation of initiatives such as these and others outlined in *State of Learning* will be overseen by a new peak body for post-Year 10 education and training. The Tasmanian Learning and Skills Authority will be responsible for policy and planning relating to senior secondary education, vocational education and training, higher education and adult and community education in Tasmania. It will have a broad range of functions, including the development of stronger linkages and pathways between sectors of education and training.

The result of widespread consultation, *State of Learning* articulates the Tasmanian community's goals and priorities for adult learning. It recognises that life-long learning is vitally important to social, cultural and economic development and represents a shared commitment to enabling learning opportunities for people of all ages.

4. Life-long Learning – The Early Childhood and Secondary Schooling Years

This strategy encompasses policies, plans and projects involving children in the early childhood years. The Department of Education is responsible for pre-compulsory education and regulation of childcare and for ensuring effective coordination between childcare and the early years of schooling. There is increasing evidence that the early years contribute a disproportionate amount to the future life chances of young people. This strategy is therefore crucial to the overall planning of the Department's programs and services.

In late 1998, the Department commenced a major review of early childhood education. As childcare services had recently come under the Department's responsibility, the review attempted to include issues relevant to both the education and childcare sectors. There was widespread agreement that children's early experiences in childcare and education are crucial for their later well-being and success, and there was a strong commitment to providing a quality start for all young children in Tasmania. Arising from the Review has been the development of a set of principles, including

- a 'partnership approach' that values the respective contributions of parents, teachers and carers to the development of programs;
- the development of a broad and flexible framework for the early years curriculum;
- increased professional development initiatives to assist the implementation of this framework and extend the competencies of those involved with young children, whether teachers or child carers.

Tasmania: A State of Learning includes a set of initiatives under the 'Guaranteeing Futures' elements, targeted at young people in transition from compulsory education to independent young adulthood. By commencing a range of pathway planning and transition support programs in the early secondary schooling years young Tasmanians will be encouraged to engage in education and training beyond Year 10. A broad range of education, training and employment opportunities and pathways will be provided to promote their increased participation. New legislation will be introduced requiring young Tasmanians who have completed Year 10 or have turned 16 to participate in education and training for:

- a further two years, or
- until they have gained a Certificate III vocational qualification, or
- until they have turned 17.