

## **IS MY EDUCATION BEST FOR TASMANIA?**

### INTRODUCTORY NOTE

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Education Minister Jeremy Rockliff has announced *My Education*, a new approach to 'career development in schools'. The details so far released can be found at <http://my-education-tased.blogspot.com.au/>. The proposal is meeting opposition in relation to the ending of the pathway planning program, with the consequent removal of the positions of Pathway Planners.

Stories critical of *My Education* have appeared in both *The Mercury* (<http://www.themercury.com.au/news/tasmania/parents-and-unions-hit-out-at-scrapping-of-pathway-planners-program/story-fnj4f7k1-1227041742403>) and *The Examiner* (<http://www.examiner.com.au/story/2538129/axed-program-lifted-college-enrolments/>).

But if you accept (as we do) that the Hodgman Government is genuinely committed to increasing the number of Tasmanian young people completing year 12, it follows that the Government believes that the work of Pathway Planners does not lead to an increased number of students succeeding at year 12. Or at least that the resources used to support the pathway planning program could be spent in other ways to achieve better results in terms of senior secondary school retention and the completion of the Tasmanian Certificate of Education (the TCE). So the Government should have some analysis that justifies this view.

Education Ambassador Garry Bailey in the post below looks at what evidence the Minister has presented to support the *My Education* policy, and questions whether the removal of Pathway Planners will in fact achieve the Government's stated aim of improving the rate of students completing year 12 – that is, achieving their TCE.

This not a question that we have looked at in any detail yet, so we welcome Garry's contribution.

We need evidence informed debate, focused not on protecting what currently exists, but on what will raise educational attainment levels for all young (and not so young) Tasmanians, and most especially significantly improving the rates of TCE attainment.

Indeed, given that less than half of Tasmania's young people are graduating from school, our default assumption needs to be that whatever we are currently doing must change, rather than what now exists should be preserved.

But what changes will raise attainment levels? Certainly we must change whatever stands in the way of every young person expecting to complete their TCE – that is, the student's expectation of themselves, their family's and

community's ambition for them, and most crucially their teachers' belief that this is possible and vital to every young person's chances of a healthy, happy and productive future.

We know that less than 50% of Tasmania's young people now complete the TCE, and in state schools the figure must be closer to 35% (as we discussed in [Tasmanian Education Today: digging around in the data](#), and [Tasmanian Colleges: fit for the purpose of post-compulsory schooling?](#)) Clearly, much change is required, but is removing Pathway Planners a change that will take us in the direction we desire?

Garry raises some important questions for the Government in that regard, and he has prompted us to suggest some of our own, directed also to those who are opposing the change.

First, according to the story in *The Examiner* referenced above, 'out of last year's 4,250 students in year 10, Pathway Planners helped get 86 per cent enrolled into college', while a 'further 8 per cent of students were found to be in further training, apprenticeships or employment, or were officially exempted by medical reasons, 1.5 per cent could not be accounted for, and just 0.6 per cent were registered as unemployed'.

But we know that only about 35% of Tasmanian public school year 10 students are completing year 12, and that youth unemployment is around 20%. So the figures quoted by *The Examiner* suggest that while 86% of the year 10s enrolled in college, most may simply be staying at school while they are legally obliged to do so, rather than genuinely committing to a successful educational pathway leading to the completion of year 12. So this data might actually support the Government's plans for change.

Second, we wonder whether the whole idea of pathway planning at year 10 subtly sends the message to students that this is a point in their life where big decisions about their future need to be made. To use a term familiar to educators, is this the **hidden curriculum** of pathway planning? If so, is that subverting the message we are trying to send to all Tasmanian young people that, just like their counterparts in all other states, school goes to year 12 and any chance they have of a successful pathway in adult life is greatly reduced if they do not complete their TCE? In other words, the only pathway year 10 students should be choosing is the optimal pathway taking them directly into years 11 and 12 and the completion of their TCE. It's after their year 12 graduation that students should be taking their different and separate pathways.

Surely we need to avoid doing anything that suggests to young people that year 10 is any more a point of transition in their lives than the end of primary schooling at year 6. If the *Guaranteeing Futures* program (which pathway planning sat within) sent the message that year 10 was a time for deciding their future, then it guaranteed that for the 65% or so of year 10 state school students that do not gain their TCE that their futures would be one of less secure and less well paid employment, with lower incomes and poorer health. Only in rare

exceptions does a student need any counsel other than to stay at school until they finish their TCE, and to choose their subjects to open up a wide range of exciting possibilities for their future. Then they need the support to make this possible.

Garry's questioning in his article below of the best way to achieve this certainly deserves our full attention.

**WE MUST HAVE EVIDENCE TO ENSURE POLICY WILL DELIVER THE  
OUTCOME WE NEED** **Garry Bailey**

There is deep concern among principals, teachers, students and parents over the decision to scrap pathway planning officers in Tasmanian high schools and colleges.

Comments strongly supporting this decade-long program have been flooding in to the Facebook site Keep Pathway Planning, which was established by the program's supporters and workers.

There is a campaign to encourage people to email the Premier, Will Hodgman, and plead for this decision to be overturned.

The Australian Education Union, strongly critical of the decision and the new load it will place on teachers, has taken action in the industrial jurisdiction to have it overturned.

The aims of the Education Minister Jeremy Rockliff's policy – which was not in the policy taken to the State election in March this year - are laudable. However, substantial questions remain over the evidence used to make the decision not to retain pathway planning officers.

Given the past support by Mr Rockliff for pathway planning and pathway planners when in Opposition, and a Liberal Party election policy in 2010 to increase funding for the program, there are questions about what caused the minister to change his mind, given the paucity of evidence.

Members of the Legislative Council have made their views abundantly clear during the appearance by Mr Rockliff on Thursday, September 11, before the Upper House estimates committee, which examines the Government 2014 budget in detail.

The issue of pathway planning and the future of pathway planning officers dominated that hearing and Elwick MLC Adriana Taylor read into the Hansard record the concerns of schools in her electorate about the decision.

The thrust of Ms Taylor's views was that while the aims of the minister's changes in embedding program planning in Tasmanian schools from

kindergarten to Year 12 were laudable, removing PPOs and giving the task to teachers was a retrograde step.

Under questioning, the minister would not say if there had been any consultation with schools, principals, teachers, PPOs, parents or the wider community before the decision but that there would be consultation now the decision has been made.

The Minister also talked of evidence, international and Tasmanian, which showed the new model would deliver better outcomes. This raises questions fundamental to the positive role Education Ambassadors Tasmania seeks to play in raising education standards in the state. This organisation has already endorsed the Government's policy to extend high schools to year 12 but that this alone will not lift Tasmania's school retention rates.

The heart of the work of Education Ambassadors Tasmania is research: the gathering of evidence to put on the public record so that the Tasmanian community can make fully informed judgments on education policy and outcomes. There is much work still to be done in that space.

So, what's the Tasmanian evidence behind this decision on pathway planning? According to the Minister, in an ABC interview, it's a 2007 review on pathway planning commissioned by the then Labor Government and conducted by the University of Tasmania.

That study is footnoted in the briefing notes sent to principals by the Education Department. It is also the only footnote the department secretary includes in his own message. There are no footnotes for the reference to international research.

In fact the 2007 UTAS study is strongly supportive of the program and makes recommendations to give pathway planners more resources, lessen their caseload and have teachers and principals more involved. That study was also conducted 18 months after the program began and before it was fully rolled out.

In 2007 then Labor Premier David Bartlett used that study as his reasons for winding back the program. He was lambasted by the report's lead author Peter Tatham for doing so. The Mercury reported this.

In 2009 the current minister strongly supported pathway planning in a speech in Parliament and attacked the government's winding back of the program. In 2010 in the state election the Liberal party pledged to increase the number of pathway planners and in the 2014 state poll it pledged not to cut front-line staff in any jurisdiction. The Premier, Will Hodgman, has since conceded that PPOs are front-line staff and that therefore an election promise was broken.

Mr Rockliff also describes his new pathway planning model as a reform. However, the Budget papers list the changes to Pathway Planning as a Budget Saving Strategy. (Budget paper No 2, volume 1).

There may well be need for improvement in how pathway planning is delivered but there is scant evidence on which to make that decision.

If one relies on the anecdotal, then based on the feedback on social media and the website now established for this campaign, there is overwhelming evidence that pathway planning should be retained.

There is certainly no anecdotal evidence to the contrary, apart from the TCCI saying the program needs to be more engaged with industry.

So what of the international research the Minister relies on? Under the heading References and Further Reading in briefing notes sent to principals and teachers (The full title of the document is My Education. Planning for my future. A guide for staff discussion) there is a list of sources, some of which are research.

For example, it mentions a document from the University of Derby, International Centre for Guidance Studies.

That document says: Evidence suggests that the most effective career development programs **involve teachers and school counsellors** working together and using a range of tools to develop students career awareness across the whole school experience.

There are three documents from Ontario, Canada, in the references.

- ❖ Two from the Ontario Ministry of Education 2013 which outline a program, similar to what the State Government is proposing.
- ❖ One from the Canadian Journal of Career Development.

The ministry documents are not research. They outline the program to be rolled out in Ontario schools.

The Ontario program, says in relation to career planning: **Teachers, guidance teachers/counsellors peers, mentors provide this instruction and support.**

And later: **Secondary school students also receive support.... from school guidance staff and, as required, from the Student Success team (which consists of a Student Success teacher, a school administrator, a guidance teacher/counsellor and, where applicable, a special education teacher).**

So, as you can see, the aims of the program in Ontario may be the same as proposed for Tasmania, but the resources are vastly different.

There are in the Ontario schools **guidance teachers, counsellors and a Student Success Team.**

In Tasmania there will be only teachers.

The My Education documents also point to research by Dr Peter Dietsche from the University of Toronto, published in the Canadian Journal of Career Development.

The article is called Career Planning in Ontario Grade 10: Students Perspectives. It makes no mention of counsellors, or mentors. So it would seem, standing alone, that it fits the minister's arguments.

However, the My Education document to staff does not mention a companion document, by the same author, that outlines the same subject from the counsellor perspective. It was published in the same journal, before the student perspective research.

That second document, not listed by the Education Department for references and further reading by staff, is predicated on the basis that there will continue to be counsellors in Ontario schools. Terminology may be differ between Ontario and Tasmania, but it is clear from that paper that the work referred to is pathway planning and that there people dedicated to that task.

In any event there is nothing in the Ontario documents from either the ministry or the University of Toronto that suggest doing away with counsellors, guidance officers and student success teams.

One could equally come to the view that all the documents referenced in the circular to staff could form the basis for a cogent argument in 2005 to establish pathway planning in Tasmania and appoint PPOs as the frontline staff.

Tasmanian Principals Association head David Raw made the point on ABC Radio: that there is no research on the Tasmanian experience apart from the 2007 UTAS study which examined pathway planning when it was only partly rolled out.

How can we use UK or Canadian perspectives without understanding more deeply how their systems work and what resources they have?

For example: what resources do Ontario teachers have in relation to pathway planning? What are the roles of counsellors, mentors and guidance teachers, because clearly they remain part of this Ontario reform.

The State Government may well say, yes, our school counsellors will be involved in the new pathway planning model. Thereby, inferring that

counsellor does not mean pathway planner in Ontario. (By any reading of the Ontario documents, it does).

So questions remain:

- ❖ Are we following the Ontario model?
- ❖ Is the Tasmanian strategy informed by the University of Derby and University of Toronto Research and, if so, where does it show that teachers alone can deliver pathway planning.
- ❖ How many counsellors/pathway planners/guidance teachers/teams does Ontario have to support teachers when pathway planning is part of the curriculum?

The then Premier David Bartlett used the same report in 2007 to justify his winding back of the program. And as a result he was criticised the lead author of that review, Peter Tatham, for taking it out of context. Mr Tatham could well be speaking today when he says, in 2007: "One of my concerns is that the real reason around this is saving funds."

Far from providing evidence for a wind-back, the UTAS report endorsed the program and recommended more resources for pathway planning officers and more involvement from teachers and school principals. It endorsed incorporating pathway planning in the curriculum, the centrepiece of this supposed Rockliff reform, but doesn't suggest ditching pathway planning officers.

In 2009 in fact Mr Rockliff strongly backed pathway planners in a speech in Parliament. They were fantastic, he said.

He took David Bartlett to task for failing to put forward evidence to justify the cuts. He criticised him for suggesting the changes were part of the Student at the Centre policy when in fact it was a cost-cutting measure.

Mr Rockliff is dressing up a budget saving strategy - the exact words used in the Budget papers in listing the change to pathway planning - as a reform.

There are two things we don't know: has pathway planning, delivered by pathway planners, made a positive impact on Tasmania's school retention rates and what is the evidence internationally to support what the State government now wants to do.

The 2007 UTAS report gets a footnote in the documents sent to principals outlining the Government's My Education program but the international research does not.

The positive thing about the My Education documents - which are laudable in their aims and outline all we would want to see in schools -- is that the UTAS report is highlighted. Those interested in the future of education in Tasmania can make up their own minds whether it provides

sufficient evidence to unravel the program Mr Rockliff lauded so eloquently five years ago.

The only Tasmanian evidence at the moment is anecdotal with passionate defences from pathway planners, teachers, students and parents on one side, and the Government and the TCCI saying the current program is not working (but with precious little anecdotal evidence of their own to match the Keeping Pathway Planning Facebook campaign.)

Pathway planning in Tasmania should be reviewed, given seven years has elapsed since the only review ever conducted. But stories from the well-intentioned on one side and a seven-year-old report on a system then only half rolled out on the other is not evidence.

The Government has a great opportunity to tackle the retention rate problem through its year 11 and 12 reforms but it needs to ensure all the elements are in place to make it succeed. One of those elements could well be the pathway planning program as it is, and ensuring increased teacher loads don't frustrate its retention strategy program if it sticks to its guns.