

# ***Secondary Education: The Future. Policy Statement***

Tasmania. Education Department, 1987

## **Overview of the document**

29 page booklet that sets future policy directions for Tasmanian secondary education. It has a foreword by the Minister for Education, Peter Rae, and a preface by the Director-General of Education, K.I. Axton. The booklet names six learning areas, or as described in the document “the most important fields of knowledge and experience”.

## **Keywords**

Social change; competitive world; competencies; students need to be adaptable and flexible; schools should instil self-worth; cultural diversity; equity; isolated students; balanced learning program; competencies and characteristics; self-assessment.

## **Table of Contents**

FOREWORD

PREFACE

INTRODUCTION

1. TRENDS IN THE ECONOMY AND IN SOCIETY

2. PROVISION FOR SECONDARY EDUCATION

3. THE CURRICULUM

4. STUDENTS

5. TEACHERS

6. PARENTS AND THE COMMUNITY

CONCLUSION

## **Summary of Contents**

### **FOREWORD**

- Written by the Minister for Education, Peter Rae.
- Notes the great responsibility and challenge of education in equipping people for the adult world and the particular challenge facing education in the context accelerating change and that young people need to be equipped to enter a highly competitive world.
- Argues that the education system must:
  - Develop in students the basic competencies associated with reading, writing and calculating;
  - Equip them to handle the realities of the world beyond the classroom; and
  - Be sufficiently flexible to respond promptly to the changes that take place in our community. (p. iii)
- Acknowledges the role of education in helping young people develop talents, “achieve a sense of self worth” and contribute to society and the community. Notes that “this booklet provides positive guidelines for achieving these aims”. (p. iii)

### **PREFACE**

- Written by the Director-General of Education, K.I. Axton.
- Notes that this policy document is a revised version of a discussion paper published the previous year, *Secondary Education: The Future*. Notes that the discussion paper “took account of the principles set out in the Scott Report” (1977) and extensive consultation followed.

- Notes that this document provides “the basis for planning and action” and that the Department and schools and colleges “should now work together to implement the principles set out in this policy statement”. (p. vii)

## **INTRODUCTION**

- Begins with: “This document is a statement of principles”. Notes that the document has been kept brief to “make the ideas accessible to a wide audience” and that supporting documents will be produced to assist schools with the implementation of these principles. Notes that each section of document is of equal importance. (p. ix)

## **1. TRENDS IN THE ECONOMY AND IN SOCIETY**

- Begins with the statement: “Society is changing at an ever-increasing rate” and goes on to say that the nature and speed of these changes mean that it is essential for young people to be “adaptable and flexible” to operate in a “competitive world”. (p. 1)
- Argues that it is necessary to balance the needs of a changing society with the importance of preserving traditions and values of the culture.
- Notes that school programs should assist students to develop “a set of personal values and characteristics that embody the essential beliefs held by our society”. (p. 1)
- Argues that students should “display initiative, act responsibly and honestly, show care and concern for others, value democratic processes and develop a sense of national pride”. (p. 1)

### **1.1 Employment**

- Overviews labour market changes over previous 10-20 years and notes the increasing unemployment and competition and that young women are particularly disadvantaged and make up two-thirds of job-seekers. Notes the increase in part-time employment and that many available jobs “were dead-end in nature”. (p. 1)
- States that unemployment “is creating a subculture that is detrimental to many young Tasmanians” and that “this is happening at a time in their development when their attitudes to life are being formed and set.” (p. 2)

### **1.2 The Economy**

- Notes the impact of “fundamental changes” in the economy and the problems this creates for Tasmania due to its isolation.
- Argues that Tasmania must compete in international and national economies and that education is critical to Tasmania’s competitiveness.
- Argues that it is therefore essential that the education system offer young people and education that “prepares them for a future characterised by change and uncertainty, and by challenge”. (p. 2)
- Notes that the future not only depends on the adults of today, but future school leavers, who must be “adaptable and flexible”. (p. 3)

### **1.3 Technology**

- Highlights the extent of technological change (beyond “the microchip and its computer applications”) and its impact on society, including employment, social and political institutions, gender relations, and moral and ethical views. (p. 3)
- Notes that the electronic media “are playing a major role in shaping people’s lives, values and culture” and that education must take account of these factors. (p. 3)

#### **1.4 The Family**

- Notes that the incidence of family breakdown is at an all time high and “the emotional disturbance generated by such events can seriously affect the capacity of some students to benefit from school”. (pp. 3-4)
- Suggests that programs in “personal relationships” can help students deal with this stress.

#### **1.5 The role of women**

- Notes that changes to the role of women in society have a direct bearing upon the ways girls participate in school.
- Notes that despite improved rates of post-compulsory participation, women still have fewer post-school qualifications than men, earn less, are more likely to be dependent upon social welfare and are underrepresented in positions of power.
- Cites recent research that indicates gender differences in the way boys and girls learn. Notes that some girls underestimate their capacities and “have a restricted view of the future”. (p. 4)

#### **1.6 Cultural diversity**

- Notes that although Tasmania is less culturally diverse than other parts of Australia, diversity “must be taken into account to ensure equity, understanding and the enrichment of our culture and traditional values”. (p. 4)

#### **1.7 Implications of these trends**

- States that “Current economic and social trends make changes in secondary schools a matter for immediate action.” (p. 5)
- Notes that the traditional purpose of secondary schools “to prepare students to make a living and to make their lives worth living” remains central but the way in which this task is carried out needs to be transformed. (p. 5)
- States that “Because the future is characterised by uncertainty, challenge and increasing economic competition, schools must provide programs that enable students to make important decisions themselves, act responsibly, act independently and flexibly, and show initiative.” (p. 5)
- Notes that students must realise that they will enter a world where competition is inescapable and that school programs should ensure that this understanding is well developed.
- Notes that economic and social trends have meant an emphasis on competencies and job-related skills and argues that equal emphasis must also be placed on students’ moral development.
- Notes that given the increase in leisure, students should be prepared for “the constructive use of leisure”. (p. 5)
- Notes that students should develop understanding of the importance of family and parenthood. (pp. 5-6)

## **2. PROVISION FOR SECONDARY EDUCATION**

### **2.1 The Education Department should provide a continuous curriculum that extends from kindergarten to year 12.**

- States that “Since the development of a person through childhood and adolescence to adulthood is a continuous process, it follows that the path of learning should also be continuous.” (p. 7)

- Notes that the separation between the levels of schooling can have a detrimental effect on learning.
- States that “The future is bleak for many students who do not have the knowledge, training and maturity that can be gained in years 11 and 12, or through technical college studies”. (p. 7)
- Notes that changes in course development and certification adopted by the Schools Board will encourage students to extend their education.
- Argues that curriculum in years 5-8 should be linked.

## **2.2 Secondary schools and colleges should co-operate to provide for students from year 7 to year 12.**

- Notes that that Tasmanian population is diverse and isolated with many students in rural areas.
- Recognises the impediments to participation in secondary colleges and notes the cost for some and for others the disinclination of parents to have their children leave home at the age of 15 to attend school.
- Notes that years 11 and 12 are regarded as irrelevant by some students and parents.
- Argues that to address the above issues it is important for high schools, colleges and support services to work closely together.
- States that “These agencies should provide a curriculum that meets the needs of three groups: those who have in mind tertiary level study; those who intend to undertake TAFE studies after year 10, 11 or 12; and those who intend to seek work after completing their secondary education.” (p. 9)
- Argues that all students should have access to a “balanced range of courses”. (p. 9)
- Argues that schools and colleges should combine to provide courses for isolated students.

## **2.3 Secondary education must provide for individual needs and differences.**

- States that “The longer students continue their education the more their individual differences become evident, and the task of providing effectively for them becomes more complex.” (p. 9)
- Argues that special effort is needed to engage students who display negative attitude to learning.
- Argues that schools and teachers need to recognise difference in gender, geographic location, economic and ethnic background as well as those with “special talents” and those who are “handicapped in some way” as all these factors affect student learning. (pp. 9-10)
- Notes that promoting individual talent in the pursuit of success is essential. Suggests that this should be done with the recognition that students will display talents in different areas and success should be measured for each student.

## **3. THE CURRICULUM**

- States that “‘Curriculum’ is used here to cover all the planned programs of study and learning activities provided by a school or college. These programs and activities should take account of changing economic, technological and social conditions.” (p. 11)

### **3.1 The curriculum should provide all students with opportunities to gain knowledge and to participate in experiences that:**

- **are widely regarded as being valuable because they enrich life and understanding;**
- **contribute to the students' development as independent and interdependent people;**
- **prepare them to become adult citizens who contribute to culture, welfare and prosperity of the community; and**
- **enable students to develop a sense of Australian identity and international understanding.**
  - Notes that the curriculum should provide all students with experiences that:
    - “require them to apply their learning in everyday life, now and in the future;
    - encourage them to develop their talents to the full;
    - enable them to work successfully on tasks they believe are worth doing; and
    - equip them to cope with the competitive world outside school.” (p. 11)
  - Notes that experience gained through school should increase knowledge and competencies.

### **3.2 The most important fields of knowledge and experience are:**

- **Languages – using and studying the English language and other languages;**
- **The sciences and mathematics – including their applications;**
- **The arts – including literature, music, art, drama, the media and other expressive and practical arts;**
- **The social sciences – including history and geography, and studies of economics, politics, cultures and religions;**
- **The study of work and daily life; and**
- **Health, physical education, and recreation.**
  - Notes that the order in which these fields of knowledge and experience have been listed is not significant and that these areas in themselves do not constitute courses and subjects.
  - Argues that student background and interest should be considered.
  - Notes that some courses may need to be interdisciplinary and that grouping students vertically may give flexibility to program design.
  - Offers some detailed advice for each of these learning areas.

### **3.3 The courses studied should illustrate and apply ideas and principles that are generally regarded as being central to the fields of knowledge and experience from which they are derived.**

- Acknowledges that “knowledge is growing and changing rapidly” and that the quality of education cannot be achieved simply by providing students with “ever-increasing amounts of information”. (p. 15)
- Argues that course content should be relevant to students' past experience and present stage of development.

### **3.4 The curriculum should provide students with opportunities to develop the competencies and characteristics that are essential for life and work in our society.**

- Defines competencies as “the broad groupings of skills that cross subject boundaries”. Notes that they are considered “at least as important as knowledge itself”. (p. 16)
- Notes that most students develop competencies associated with reading, writing, conversing and calculating in primary school, but some will need help in secondary school.

- Other competencies enable the student to extend their learning throughout life and these competencies become more complex as students progress. These competencies should be incorporated into all courses:
  - Acquiring information.
  - Conveying information.
  - Applying logical processes.
  - Undertaking practical tasks as an individual.
  - Undertaking practical tasks as a member of a group.
  - Making judgements and decisions.
  - Working creatively and solving problems. (pp. 16-18).
- Beyond competencies, students need to develop the following characteristics which reflect the values of society:
  - Acting autonomously.
  - Acting responsibly.
  - Showing care and concern for other people.
  - Being concerned about values and beliefs. (p.18)

**3.5 The competencies and characteristics should be encouraged and developed deliberately and systematically through example, and through the courses that are provided. Their development must not be left to chance.**

**3.6 All courses must contain clear statements of purpose and the criteria for assessment.**

- Notes that statements of purpose should be clear about what the course is intended to develop in the student, and should include the competencies and ideas of the course, the kind of learning style to be used, and the relationship of the course to other areas of the curriculum.
- Notes that student achievement should be assessed according to: the extent that the student has developed competencies and characteristics; the extent to which the student can apply ideas; and the extent to which the student knows the content of the course.

**3.7 The organisation of the curriculum of the school must be flexible enough to cater for the needs and abilities and interests of all students**

#### **4. STUDENTS**

- Begins by noting the challenges facing students in secondary schools, including adolescence, participation in adult life and school learning. (p. 20)

**4.1 The social environment in which students learn should be developed deliberately to promote learning.**

- Stresses the importance of cultivating a supportive school environment.
- Notes that with increased retention, schools must work hard to create positive learning culture so that schools do not become places of disaffection and apathy.
- Notes that students should be encouraged to build on their achievements.
- Discusses the benefits of positive personal relationships between students and teachers.

**4.2 The courses studied by students should match and extend their abilities and interests.**

- Notes that goals should be achievable.

**4.3 Courses should be selected and developed in consultation with students and their parents.**

- Notes that this is based on the idea that students “do best when they feel involved in decisions about their work and are strongly motivated to learn”. (p. 21)
- Notes that this “consultative approach should be deliberate and systematic”. (p. 21)

**4.4 Where students’ attitudes and behaviour cause problems, a range of problem-solving strategies should be used.**

- Stresses the importance of systematically addressing behaviour issues.

**4.5 The main purpose of assessment is to help students learn.**

- Recognises that competitive assessment can discourage some students, notes that positive assessment identifies areas where students can improve and identifies self-assessment as a powerful learning aid.

**4.6 Students should prepare records of their achievements to help them enter adult life.**

**4.7 Students’ achievements should be celebrated regularly.**

**5. TEACHERS**

**5.1 For the principles in this statement to be implemented teachers must have the requisite knowledge, and an extensive repertoire of teaching competencies and characteristics.**

- Lists the competencies “that are basic to the art of teaching”. (p. 26)
- Lists the competencies associated with the management of a class.
- Recognises that these competencies take time to acquire and that teachers should work to improve their competencies.
- Lists “personal characteristics that teachers must exhibit” including many of the characteristics listed as important to develop in the student, such as showing care and concern for all students, being adaptable and flexible, as well as others such as being fair and displaying enthusiasm. (p. 26)

**5.2 Teachers must continually update their knowledge to ensure what the students are taught is what they need to know.**

**5.3 Teachers need the skills that enable them to act as effective tutors and counsellors.**

**5.4 All schools should implement a continuous program for staff development.**

**6. PARENTS AND THE COMMUNITY**

**6.1 Schools and the community are interdependent.**

**6.2 Teachers and educators at all levels in the education system should consult and work with students, parents and community representatives.**

**CONCLUSION**

- Reiterates that “this statement of principles describes the goals and objectives of secondary education in the future, and indicates how they should be interpreted.” (p. 29)
- Notes that these principles should be implemented immediately.
- Notes that a system of evaluation should be established to ensure these principles are put into practice.