

# A road map to a Literate Tasmania

---

THE TASMANIAN #100PERCENTLITERACY ALLIANCE  
FEBRUARY 2021

## Prepared by:

**Lisa Denny**, Workforce Demographer, Adjunct Associate Professor, Institute for Social Change, University of Tasmania

**Saul Eslake**, Economist, Vice-Chancellor's Fellow at the University of Tasmania

**Amelia Jones**, Chair, Square Pegs Dyslexia Association

**Rosie Martin**, Speech and Language Pathologist, 2017 Tasmanian of the Year

**Rikki Mawad**, Chair, Connect 42

**Anthea Pritchard**, Co-founder, Tasmanian Leaders Program

**Michael Rowan**, Emeritus Professor, University of South Australia, Co-founder Education Ambassadors

## Contents

Executive Summary.....	3
Literacy in Tasmania.....	6
Educational outcomes of the working age population.....	9
Economic implications and educational attainment .....	11
Structured Literacy: the evidence-base for best practice reading instruction .....	13
Road map to #100PercentLiteracy: a Literate Tasmania .....	14
Develop and implement a plan for a Literate Tasmania.....	14
Commit to achieving the Primary Reading Pledge by 2031.....	15
Proactively support literacy improvement throughout the wider community .....	16
Operationalisation .....	16
Appendix A.....	21
What is literacy? .....	21
Current literacy policies .....	21
Federal education policies .....	22
Tasmanian government education policies .....	22
Other education and literacy advocates.....	23

## Executive Summary

The Tasmanian #100PercentLiteracy Alliance's mission is to achieve #100PercentLiteracy for Tasmanians by advocating for change and providing the evidence base to support that change. This plan for a **Literate Tasmania** sets out a clear road map for achieving sustainable social and economic improvements in Tasmania by improving literacy outcomes. This means reading, writing, and spelling. Moreover, the skills of spoken language comprehension and spoken language expression underpin literacy – so it also means increasing oral language skills across the developmental stages of life and adulthood.

As such, the Alliance is committed to ensuring evidence-aligned literacy instruction in Tasmania is scaled with a sense of urgency in a comprehensive and systematic way by multiple stakeholders.

Intergenerational and regional disadvantage, as well as lower education attainment among young people, have been identified in numerous reports into the state of the Tasmania economy, and, most recently, in the Premier's Economic and Social Recovery Advisory Council (PESRAC) Interim Report as areas of current challenge in Tasmania. While social inequalities have a profound effect on educational attainment, they should not be an excuse for lower levels of literacy in the State.

As this plan will highlight, a **Literate Tasmania** is an essential foundation for long-term economic and social renewal in Tasmania. High, population-wide literacy has the potential to break down intergenerational and regional disadvantage and build social cohesion and resilience.

Improving Tasmania's poor literacy skills and subsequent educational outcomes is important for the economy and wider society – and to make rapid positive impact, it is also *urgent*.

The swift, decisive and dynamic policy responses to the COVID-19 global pandemic in Tasmania have demonstrated what is possible in urgent situations. Furthermore, the response was grounded in science-based evidence. The same urgent response, grounded in the relevant science of the same high quality, is warranted for Tasmania's poor educational outcomes stemming as they do, from poor language and literacy skills.

For decades economic and social commentators have lamented Tasmania's poor educational outcomes, and successive governments have vowed to improve participation and engagement with education. However, despite various legislative and policy changes and implementation of a range of programs across the developmental stages of life, the data suggests little sustained improvement in Tasmanians' educational outcomes.

### Social inequality and educational attainment

The discrepancy between Tasmanian students' educational attainment and other states and territories cannot be explained by a high proportion of students from low SES backgrounds, nor by regionality or remoteness. Students from equally 'disadvantaged' areas in other parts of Australia achieve higher rates of educational attainment than Tasmanian students from high SES backgrounds.

This Tasmanian #100percent literacy Alliance road map outlines three over-arching strategies under a plan for a **Literate Tasmania**:

- 1) Develop a strategic, whole-of-government, community-wide framework to achieve a **Literate Tasmania**, including implementation, ensuring evidence-aligned literacy instruction in Tasmania is scaled with a sense of urgency in a comprehensive and systematic way by multiple stakeholders
  - This should be informed by an independent, expert advisory panel or Ministerial Taskforce (including whole-of-government, community wide stakeholders and leading experts from Tasmania and other jurisdictions) to:
    - Undertake a peer review of existing policies and programs to identify any evidence of practice gaps, and programme or skills gaps along with opportunities to redirect resources to more effective, impactful strategies;
    - Establish short- and medium-term measurable targets, aligned with the long-term goal for #100PercentLiteracy in Tasmania; and
    - Map existing organisations and resources to develop an integrated framework for a **Literate Tasmania** that links and leverages these strategies and resources.
- 2) Adopt and implement as an immediate priority the recommendations of the [Primary Reading Pledge](#) and invest in the resources (human and physical) and capacity building required to achieve the goal of close to zero Tasmanians starting grade 7 at or below the national minimum standard (NMS) for reading by 2031;
- 3) Proactively support literacy improvement throughout the wider community, including in the early years (pre-school), secondary schooling, adult education, the justice system, and among other vulnerable Tasmanians, integrated into the plan for a **Literate Tasmania**. This is in addition to strategies that target primary-school-aged children, because #100PercentLiteracy is wider than schools alone.

A consistent and whole-state approach to investment in the systemic change required is important, and urgent. Not losing sight of this, roll out should first commence in those regional areas identified as most disadvantaged on the SIEFA Index, as well as to those areas and schools in which a high proportion of children are identified as being at or below the National Minimum Standard for reading.

Poor literacy is a community wide issue which exists throughout the developmental stages of life and into adulthood. It is timely that the scope of the current approach to literacy improvement in Tasmania is expanded to a whole of government, community-wide approach.

#### Literacy in Tasmania

- 1 in 5 Tasmanians start school developmentally vulnerable
- 1 in 5 Tasmanians start grade seven at or below the National Minimum Standard for reading
- 1 in 4 Tasmanians do not complete their schooling
- 3 in 5 Tasmanians who undertake year 12 successfully complete it
- 1 in 2 Tasmanians of working age are functionally illiterate

Almost one in two Tasmanians of working age are functionally illiterate<sup>1,2,3</sup>. Without functional literacy skills as an adult, an individual has difficulty engaging the activities of daily life as well as in the broader economy and community, including meaningful employment. Not only do poor functional literacy skills have lifelong implications for individuals, but the consequences for the economy are also wide-reaching.

The economic return on investment of getting this right is significant. Moreover, it is sustainable and cumulative – through not only increased productivity but also reducing costs in high public-spend areas such as health, justice and welfare.

As cited in [The Primary Reading Pledge](#), students with low literacy in Year 7 have rates of school completion approximately half that of their peers. It has been estimated that at current rates, each annual cohort of early school leavers costs the economy \$12 billion over their lifetime<sup>4</sup>.

Sustained improvements in population-wide literacy levels is possible. Poor literacy is not an intractable issue. Nor is it an issue that is peculiar to Tasmania. South Australia and Queensland have demonstrated that change is possible. In 2008 Queensland was one of the lowest performing education systems, ranked behind the Northern Territory. Since then, there have been major reviews and reforms and sustained improvements. More recently, reading levels for South Australian Year 1 students have risen again: results from the 2020 Phonics Screening Check show significant improvement for the second year in a row in South Australia. Almost two thirds (63 per cent) of Year 1 South Australian students met or exceeded the expected achievement level last year. This is up from 52 per cent in 2019, and from 43 per cent in 2018 when the check was first introduced for all Year 1 students. An improvement of 20 percentage points in just two years is a massive step forward.

## TO ACHIEVE #100PERCENTLITERACY IN TASMANIA:

We must ensure that:

- 1) Tasmanian children are developmentally on track in emotional maturity and in language and cognitive skills, because language directly underpins literacy – and emotional maturity underpins readiness to learn (AEDC)
- 2) All grade seven students start high school above the National Minimum Standard for Reading [#primaryreadingpledge](#), because without reading skills students are unable to access the wider curriculum and are more likely to not complete school (NAPLAN)
- 3) All secondary school students meet or exceed international benchmark standards for age in reading, otherwise students are unlikely to pursue further education (PISA)
- 4) The working age population is functionally literate, so they are able to engage in life and work (OECD)

<sup>1</sup> ABS, OECD Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies, Australia, 2011-12, <https://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/DetailsPage/4228.02011-12?OpenDocument>


<sup>2</sup> The proportion of functionally illiterate Tasmanians in 2011/12 *increased* from 46.3 per cent when the previous assessment was undertaken in 2006.

<sup>3</sup> Australia's functionally illiterate rate was 41.7 per cent.

<sup>4</sup> Lamb, s, & Huo, S (2017) Counting the costs of lost opportunity in Australian education, Mitchell Institute Report No. 02/2017, Mitchell Institute

It will not be any more difficult to achieve such gains for Tasmanian children. Though we will of course have our own unique challenges as we set about this.

According to the Australian Early Development Census, the percentage of children developmentally vulnerable in Tasmania in 2018 was lower than the proportion for Australia for both measures; developmentally vulnerable in one or more indicators (21.5 per cent and 21.7 per cent respectively) and developmentally vulnerable in two or more indicators (10.7 per cent and 11.0 per cent respectively). However, while the percentage of Tasmanian children developmentally on track in 2018 was above the national percentage for three of the five indicators – physical health, social competence and communication – fewer Tasmanian children were developmentally on track in emotional maturity and in language and cognitive skills<sup>5</sup>. This has considerable consequences for literacy development because language directly underpins literacy – and emotional maturity underpins readiness to learn.



**The plan for a *Literate Tasmania* must begin in the early years and extend to the wider community and working age population.**

## Literacy in Tasmania

The definition, and understanding, of literacy is continually evolving<sup>6</sup>. UNESCO defines functional literacy as involving a continuum of reading and writing skills, and often includes basic arithmetic skills (numeracy)<sup>7</sup>. As such the ability to read is an indicator of future lifelong literacy skills and thus economic and social well-being. For this reason, reading ability is often used as a proxy for defining and measuring literacy skills.

Almost one in two Tasmanians of working age are functionally illiterate<sup>8, 9, 10</sup>. This pathway to illiteracy in adulthood begins from the moment a child is born and throughout their stages of development, culminating in their inability to engage in all those activities in which literacy is required for effective function of his or her group and community and also for enabling him/her to continue to use reading, writing and calculation for his/her own and the community's development.

In 2018, over one in five (21.5 per cent, 1,255) children in Tasmania started school developmentally vulnerable across five indicators: physical, social, emotional, language and communication. A further

---

<sup>5</sup> Australian Early Development Census <https://www.aedc.gov.au/data/data-explorer>

<sup>6</sup> See Appendix A for an overview of definitions of literacy, approaches to teaching literacy, current literacy policies and advocates for improvements in literacy instruction.

<sup>7</sup> <http://uis.unesco.org/en/glossary>

<sup>8</sup> ABS, OECD Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies, Australia, 2011-12, <https://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/DetailsPage/4228.02011-12?OpenDocument>

<sup>9</sup> The proportion of functionally illiterate Tasmanians in 2011/12 *increased* from 46.3 per cent when the previous assessment was undertaken in 2006.

<sup>10</sup> Australia's functionally illiterate rate was 41.7 per cent.

11.3 per cent (625) were at risk of being developmentally vulnerable. A similar proportion was vulnerable in 2012 (21.5 per cent) and 2015 (21.0 per cent)<sup>11</sup>.

In 2019, one in five of our grade 7 students started the year at or below the NAPLAN National Minimum Standard (NMS) for reading<sup>12</sup>. The minimum standard represents a very low level of reading skill, so the 1,437 Tasmanians who started grade 7 in 2019 at or below the NMS, is a conservative estimate of the true number of grade 7 Tasmanian students who struggle with reading.

Unfortunately, the proportion of grade seven students at or above the NMS has been declining. In 2008, 93.9 per cent of grade seven students were at or above the NMS, whereas by 2019, the proportion had declined to 92.0 per cent, despite a gain in the average mean score.

For those grade seven students whose parents' highest level of completed schooling was year 11 or below, two in five students (40 per cent) were at or below the NMS for reading.

This poor level of reading skill was identified in both the Year 3 and Year 5 NAPLAN assessments for this grade 7 cohort. Most students who were at or below the NMS in grade 3 and grade 5, still were by the time they started high school.

In terms of comparison by state and territory, the percentage of Tasmanian grade 7 students who are at or above the NMS for reading is lower. Moreover, this measure is statistically significantly different than most other states and territories. Exceptions to this are for Western Australia and South Australia, where the results are comparable; and also the Northern Territory, where the percentage of grade 7 students at or below the NMS is higher than in Tasmania.

Those who are not reading proficiently by grade seven are highly likely to struggle with the demands of the wider curriculum. They are more likely to not complete school, leading to poorer health and well-being over their lifetimes.

This is evident in NAPLAN data for year 9 students in Tasmania. Compared with when the cohort was in grade 7, for each of the years 2014 to 2019 the proportion of grade 9 students at or above the NMS for reading was less than for the same cohort in grade 7. That is, reading skills persistently declined relative to the NMS for their year level the older the cohort got and the more they 'progressed' through schooling.

**Table 1. Proportion of students at or above the national minimum standard for reading, Tasmania**

	2008	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
<b>year 3</b>	92.8	92.1	92.9	94.0	94.4	93.9	94.6
<b>year 5</b>	89.7	91.3	92.1	90.8	92.3	92.6	92.7
<b>year 7</b>	93.9	94.7	94.7	93.7	93.1	92.5	92.0
<b>year 9</b>	93.0	90.5	91.4	92.7	88.7	91.9	89.3

Source: National Assessment Program, [nap.edu.au](http://nap.edu.au)

A recent report from the Mitchell Institute, *Educational opportunity in Australia 2020: Who succeeds and who misses out* found that, nationally, about one-fifth to one-third of young people are behind or missing out in Australia's education systems. The report's indicators cover the various stages of learning and development from early childhood through to early adulthood to assess how well Australia's systems are doing in preparing young people with the lifelong knowledge and skills

<sup>11</sup> Australian Early Development Census <https://www.aedc.gov.au/data/data-explorer>

<sup>12</sup> National Assessment Program, [www.acara.edu.au](http://www.acara.edu.au)

needed to contribute successfully and meaningfully to social, economic and cultural life. The report found that the ‘results are at odds with our national goals for education’.

The Mitchell Report found that Tasmanians fare worse than the national average in 16 of the 23 indicators for all four stages of learning and development. Of the total 23 indicators, Tasmania ranks 7<sup>th</sup> or 8<sup>th</sup> (out of 8) in 12.

Of the 5 successful lifelong learner indicators which include literacy skills, Tasmania ranks 7<sup>th</sup> or 8<sup>th</sup> in four. See Table 2 below.

**Table 2. Successful lifelong learner literacy indicators, Australia and Tasmania**

Age group	Indicator	Australia (%)	Tasmania (%)	Rank
Entry to school age	Developmentally on track in literacy and numeracy	84.5	82.1	6
Middle school years	Performs above the National Minimum Standard (NMS) in both literacy and numeracy	75.2	70.6	7
Senior school years	Meets or exceeds international benchmark standards for age in maths, science and reading	72.2	62.7	7
Early Adulthood	Engaged fully in education, training or work	70.3	61.8	8
	Gains post school qualification	73.1	63.7	7

Source: Educational Opportunities in Australia 2020: who succeeds and who misses out, The Mitchell Institute

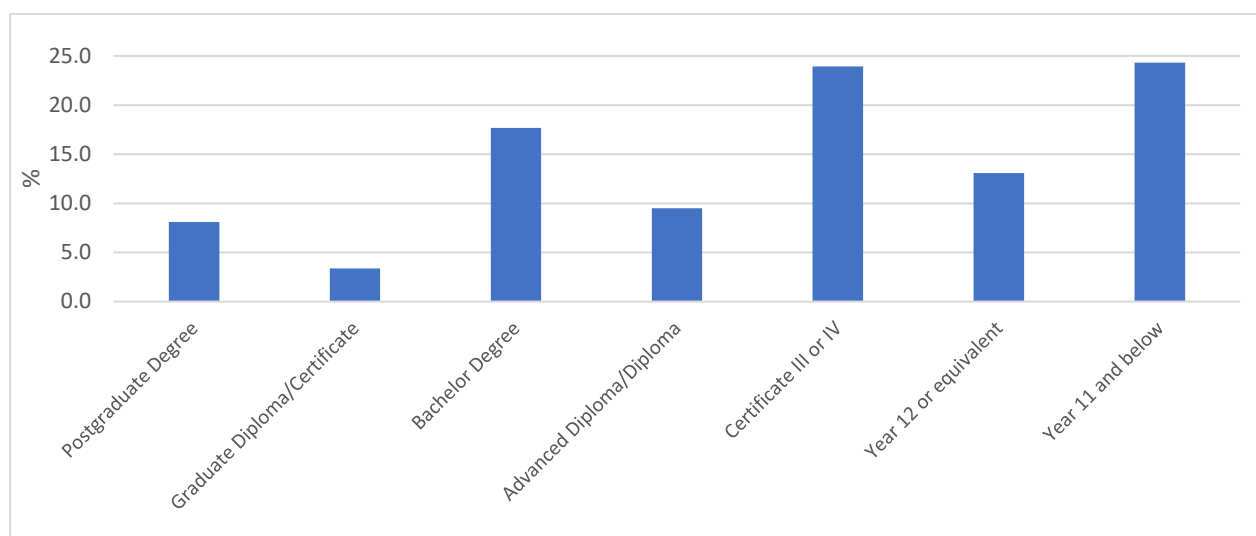


## Educational outcomes of the working age population

Data regarding the literacy skills of the working age population is not readily available, however, clear inferences can be made given that poor literacy skills are associated with not completing school and not continuing further education.

In 2020, around a quarter (24.3 per cent) of Tasmanians aged 25 to 64 years (the working age<sup>13</sup>) had completed year 11 or below, another quarter (23.9 per cent) had completed a certificate III or IV and almost three in ten (29.2 per cent) had completed a bachelor degree or higher.

**Figure 1. Highest level of educational attainment, 25- to 64-year-olds, Tasmania, 2020**



Source: ABS, Education and Work

Of the working age population, a quarter (24.6 per cent) were not engaged in employment or education at all, as were close to a quarter (23.5 per cent) of 25- to 34-year-olds. The majority (73.7 per cent) of 15- to 24-year-olds were engaged in either full time study (52.1 per cent) or full-time work (19.7 per cent).

**Table 3. Engagement in education or study, Tasmania**

	15-24 years	25-34 years	35-44 years	45-54 years	55-64 years	Total working age
Fully engaged	73.7	57.0	56.6	54.0	40.4	51.9
Partially engaged	16.4	19.8	26.5	23.7	23.8	23.3
No study or employment	11.1	23.5	16.2	21.8	35.9	24.6
Number	62,800	66,800	61,800	68,300	74,300	271,900

Source: ABS, Education and Work

When engagement with employment or study is considered for the working age population by their highest level of schooling completed, for those who had completed year 12 one in five were not engaged in work or study, compared with almost half for those who had completed year 9 or below.

<sup>13</sup> For the purposes of this analysis, the working age population is deemed to be those aged 25 to 64 years to account for both the completion of school and any further education undertaken.

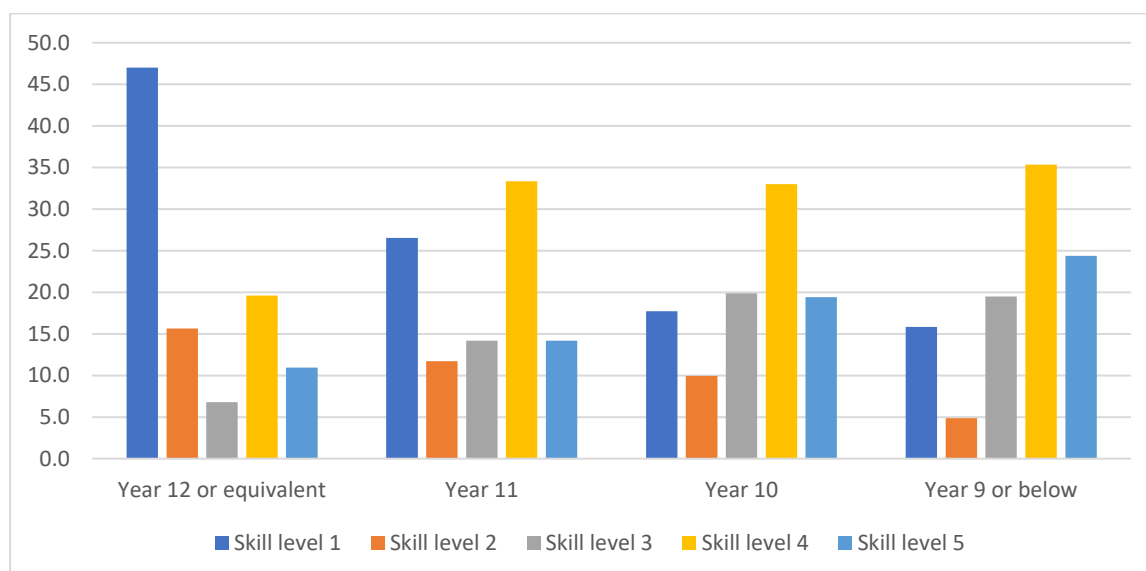
**Table 4. Engagement in employment or study by highest level of schooling completed, Tasmania**

	Year 12 or equivalent	Year 11	Year 10	Year 9 or below	Total
Fully engaged	55.5	51.1	49.7	40.0	51.9
Partially engaged	24.2	26.4	22.2	16.9	23.3
No study or employment	20.1	25.1	28.1	47.5	24.6

Source: ABS, Education and Work

For the working age who were engaged in employment, those who had completed year 12 were more likely to be working in skill level 1 jobs (47.0 per cent) – jobs that require a bachelor degree or higher to undertake the tasks of the job - than those with lower levels of school completion. Those whose highest level of schooling was year 11, 10, 9 or below, were more likely to be working in skill level 4 jobs – jobs that require a certificate II to undertaken their job-related tasks (33.3 per cent, 33.0 per cent and 35.4 per cent respectively). It is likely that many of these workers experience challenges with language, literacy and numeracy. Even so, a high proportion, almost one in three (30.5 per cent) of those who had completed year 12, were working in low skill jobs (skill level 4 or 5).

**Figure 2. Skill level of job by highest level of schooling completed, Tasmania**



Source: ABS, Education and Work

For those Tasmanians who do not complete school and pursue further education opportunities, it is very difficult to participate in higher skilled work which is more likely to offer higher income and greater job security and provide for better health and well-being outcomes. The implications for the economy are outlined below.

## Economic implications and educational attainment

Tasmania persistently underperforms the national average in key economic indicators; GSP, employment engagement and productivity, which can be directly attributable to considerably lower levels of educational attainment<sup>14</sup>.

- Tasmania's employment participation rate is the lowest in Australia (partly explained by a larger proportion of Tasmania's population being over the age of 65, considered the end of working life age);
- Tasmanians work fewer hours per week than the national average, reflecting the greater prevalence of part-time work in Tasmania than elsewhere and have the highest level of underemployment (want to work more hours);
- For each hour that they worked, Tasmanians with jobs contribute less to GSP than the average Australian, that is the labour productivity of Tasmanians is considerably lower than the labour productivity of Australians; and
- This lower labour productivity is partly explained by Tasmania's industrial structure. The workforce is dominated by five low productivity industries (health care and social assistance, retail trade, accommodation and food services, education and training and public administration and safety) and the below-average presence of intrinsically 'high labour productivity' industries like mining and financial services compared with the rest of Australia.

This poor economic performance and lack of diverse and high productivity industry sectors can be attributable to Tasmania's poor educational outcomes across all developmental stages of life.

However, Tasmania's persistent underperformance, also reflects the fact that Tasmanians are typically less well-educated than other Australians because of the failings of our education system.

While Tasmania's apparent school retention rate has improved since the extension of high schools to year 11 and 12 (74.3%), successful completion of year 12 has not. Around 58 per cent of Tasmanian school leavers successfully completed year 12, 14 percentage points less than the national rate. The attainment rate gap is much higher for low SES students (16 percentage points) who make up over half of our school leavers, than students from medium (10 percentage points) or high (9 percentage points) socio-economic areas.

Further, students from low SES backgrounds in Vic, SA and WA have higher Y12 attainment rates than students from high SES backgrounds in Tasmania. And, students from "remote" or "very remote" areas of NSW, Victoria, SA and WA have higher Y12 attainment rates than Tasmanian students from inner or outer regional classifications e.g., Greater Hobart and Launceston.

Furthermore, a student from a high SES household in Tasmania is not only less likely to get a Y12 certificate than one from a similar background in any other state or territory (except Queensland), but also less likely to do so than a student from a medium SES household in three other states or the ACT, and less likely even than a student from a low SES household in Victoria, SA or WA.

A student from a medium SES household in Tasmania is less likely to get a Y12 certificate than a student from a low SES household in any other state except Queensland. A student from Hobart is less likely to attain a TCE than one from 'inner & outer regional', 'remote' or even 'very remote' areas of NSW, Victoria, SA or WA – let alone from any of the 'major cities' – is to attain the

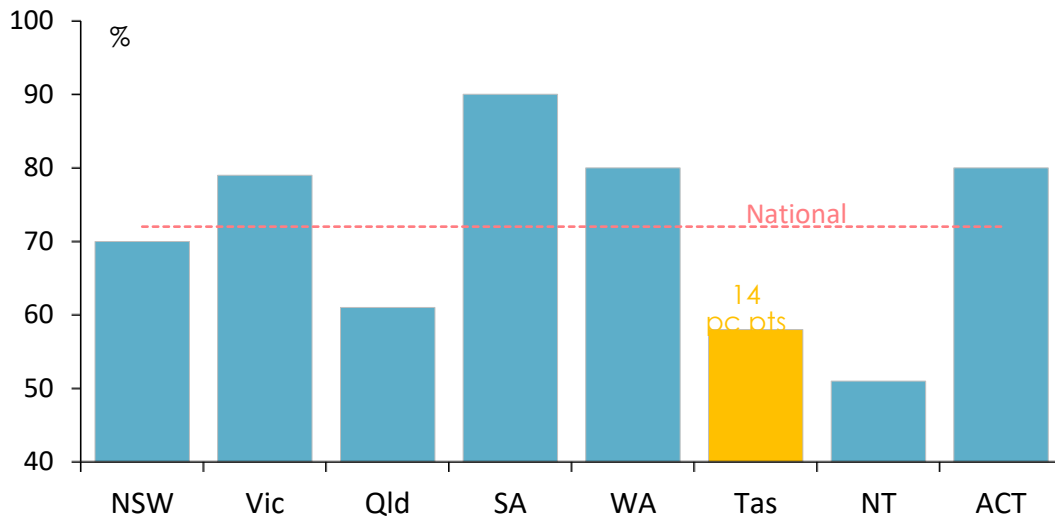
---

<sup>14</sup> Successive TCCI Tasmania Reports authored by Saul Eslake explain this underperformance in detail

equivalent qualification. A student from a 'remote' area of Tasmania is less likely to attain a TCE than one from a 'remote' area of any other state to attain the equivalent qualification.

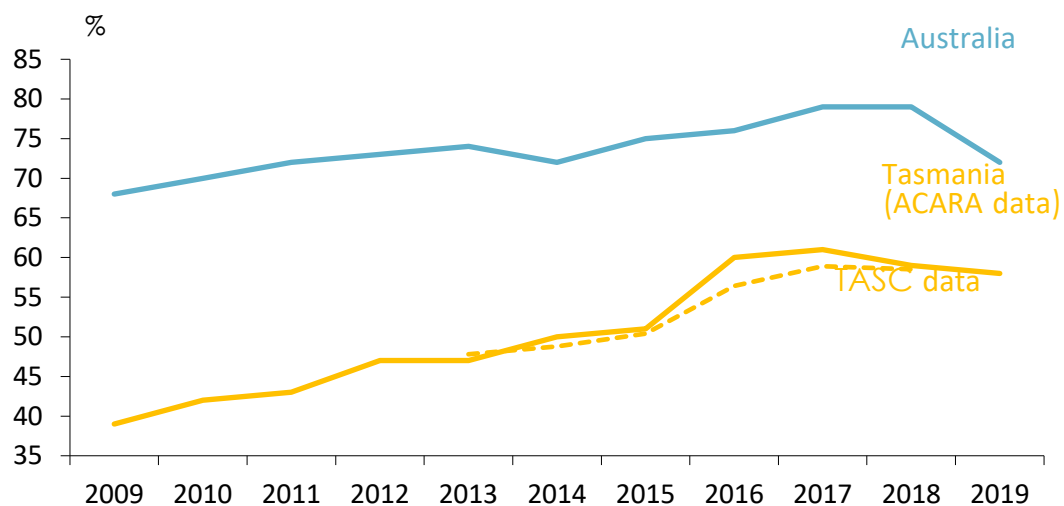
Young people's successful transition from compulsory schooling to education, training and employment is particularly important for fulfilling life opportunities, with a positive relationship between completion of year 12 and subsequent engagement. This poor educational attainment and engagement in further education or training and employment can be further linked to poor language and literacy achievement in Tasmania, from as young as early childhood.

**Figure 3. Year 12 Attainment Rates – Tasmania and other states and territories, 2019**



Source: Eslake, S. Tasmania's economy and education system in the time of covid-19 (and afterwards), presentation to the University of Tasmania strategic forum, February 2021

**Figure 4. Year 12 Attainment Rates – Tasmania and Australia, 2009 to 2019**



Source: Eslake, S. Tasmania's economy and education system in the time of covid-19 (and afterwards), presentation to the University of Tasmania strategic forum, February 2021

## Structured Literacy: the evidence-base for best practice reading instruction

The ‘best’ way to teach reading, writing and spelling has been contentious for decades and is debated in what is commonly referred to as the ‘reading wars’. Current methods, as taught at universities in the initial teacher education program for the past four decades is based on the ‘whole language’ method or its successor, the ‘balanced literacy’ approach<sup>15</sup>. However, the evidence-base suggests that the best way to teach *all* children how to read and write and to become literate is by using a structured literacy approach, based on ‘the simple view of reading’; the product of decoding and language comprehension<sup>16</sup>.

The capacity to read and write fluently – for function and lifelong learning, as well as for art and beauty – consists of many subskills. Structured teaching of literacy refers to a process for ensuring the development and integration of these subskills into an automatised, fluent whole. The process governs the way in which the component skills of reading and writing are taught and practised, under explicit instruction. Importantly, explicit instruction does not make assumptions about skills and knowledge that children will acquire on their own. This includes:

- Which skills should be taught. Researched consensus is that these big six are<sup>17</sup>:
  1. Oral Language
  2. Phonemic Awareness
  3. Phonics
  4. Vocabulary
  5. Fluency
  6. Comprehension
- The order in which these skills should be taught and prioritised at the many different levels of base-line skill
- Process for measuring and monitoring students’ acquisition of these skills
- Process for responding dynamically and therapeutically to the information yielded by the data about skill acquisition

Practitioners need strong theoretical knowledge in the science of learning and reading<sup>18</sup> in how the above features of evidence-based process combine and influence each other. When strong practitioner knowledge meets fidelity to structured literacy process, the result is clear, powerful, satisfying, efficacious progress in any individual’s capacity toward their fullest potential (#100PercentLiteracy) to read and write fluently and functionally.

---

<sup>15</sup> See Moats, L. (2007) “Whole-Language High Jinks: How to tell when ‘scientifically-based reading instruction’ isn’t”, Thomas B. Fordham Institute, US for a detailed explanation of whole language, balanced literacy and evidence-based reading instruction <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED498005.pdf>

<sup>16</sup> Farrell, L, Hunter, M., Davidson, M., and Osenga, T. (2019) The Simple View of Reading, Reading Rockets, <https://www.readingrockets.org/article/simple-view-reading>

<sup>17</sup> Konza, D (2014), Teaching Reading: Why the “Fab Five” should be the “Big Six”, Australian Journal of Teacher Education, Vol 39. Issue 12.

<sup>18</sup> The Science of Reading is a vast, interdisciplinary body of scientifically-based research about reading and issues related to reading and writing. Read more at [www.whatisthescienceofreading.org](http://www.whatisthescienceofreading.org)

## Road map to #100PercentLiteracy: a Literate Tasmania

The aspirational target for #100PercentLiteracy for Tasmania was set by a collective group of resolute Tasmanians in 2018 following the inaugural Communicating: the Heart of Literacy Symposium hosted at Government House by Her Excellency Professor the Honourable Kate Warner AC, Governor of Tasmania.

The Tasmanian #100PercentLiteracy Alliance was subsequently established in 2020 with three objectives:

- 1) to tell it like it is: widely sharing stories of the everyday experiences for people with literacy challenges, young and old. The aim is to remove the stigma of illiteracy, celebrate successes, and communicate the journeys of educators and others aspiring to make change and impact;
- 2) to chart the evidence-based pathway required to change the way in which literacy skills are learned and taught; and
- 3) to communicate the scientific basis for reading instruction and policy change through direct advocacy with key decision-makers and influencers.

### Develop and implement a plan for a Literate Tasmania

Tasmanians deserve a whole of state, community-wide approach to achieving a Literate Tasmania. Such an approach should be mindfully integrated across the developmental stages of life and into adulthood. A comprehensive and contemporary plan for a Literate Tasmania should be developed in collaboration with the breadth of stakeholders working to improve the literacy skills of Tasmanians. Key stakeholders should represent the education and training systems (public and private), the justice system, disability sector and business and community sectors. It is crucial in both the development and implementation of the plan for a Literate Tasmania that there is shared meaning, responsibility and accountability between the stakeholders and extending across the lifetime of individuals at-risk of low literacy. At the same time, evidence-aligned literacy instruction in Tasmania needs to be scaled with a sense of urgency in a comprehensive and systematic way by multiple stakeholders and in collaboration.

The current Tasmanian Department of Education [Literacy Framework](#) and [Plan for Action](#)<sup>19</sup>, released in May 2019, is due for renewal in 2022. At its launch, Minister for Education, Jeremy Rockliff, stated that “The Literacy Plan for Action provides a clear way to work towards our aspirational target of 100 per cent functional literacy for all learners”<sup>20</sup>. The Plan is also informed by other strategies, such as *Tasmania’s Strategy for Children – Pregnancy to Eight (2018-2021)*, and 26TEN Tasmania: Strategy for Adult Literacy. The State Government provided resources for the Peter Underwood Centre to review and report on Literacy Teaching in Tasmania: Teaching Practice and Teacher Learning. It provides key insights into areas of opportunity and future focus within schools.

In relation to teaching quality, the Minister formed an *Education Workforce Roundtable* in 2018 with representatives from the Department of Education, University of Tasmania, Teachers Registration Board of Tasmania, Tasmanian Principals Association, the Australia Education Union and the Peter Underwood Centre. The Roundtable developed the More Teachers, Quality Teaching Action Plan. In January 2021 a consultation process was launched by the Premier to inform a wellbeing strategy for Tasmanian children from birth to 25 years.

---

<sup>19</sup> <https://www.education.tas.gov.au/about-us/projects/literacy-framework-plan-action/>

<sup>20</sup> Rockliff, J (2019), Moving towards 100% Literacy in Tasmania, Media Release, Tasmanian Government, 31 May 2019 [http://www.premier.tas.gov.au/releases/taking\\_literacy\\_to\\_the\\_next\\_level\\_in\\_tasmania](http://www.premier.tas.gov.au/releases/taking_literacy_to_the_next_level_in_tasmania)

It is therefore timely that the scope of the current approach to literacy improvement in Tasmania is expanded to a whole of government, whole-of-state, community-wide approach. For any plan to be assessed and evaluated as to its effectiveness, key performance indicators and quantifiable measures are crucial. The plan for a Literate Tasmania must have short- and medium-term measurable targets aligned with the longer-term goal for #100PercentLiteracy in Tasmania.

Tasmania's current functional literacy rate is drawn from the OECD Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies in 2011-12. However, as Australia has only agreed to a minimum data collection sample for the next assessment in 2024, a representative sample of Tasmanians' functional literacy will not be possible. This denies the state a comparable measure of Tasmania's future functional literacy rate.

As such, new measures of literacy will need to be determined for all developmental stages of life and also adulthood.

While the current Tasmanian Department of Education Literacy Framework and Plan for Action contains no targets or measurable outcomes, it does include the intent to develop 'valid and reliable measures of impact and learner growth in literacy'.

To achieve the long-term goal of 100 percent (functional) literacy for Tasmanians, as stated often by Minister for Education, Jeremy Rockliff, the plan for a Literate Tasmania must include progressive short- and medium-term targets aligned with each developmental stage alongside a measure for functional literacy of the working population.

It will also be crucial that these targets are integrated within the strategic planning processes of the breadth stakeholders working to improve literacy outcomes in Tasmania. These measurable targets should be included in, and reported against, documents such as strategic plans, school improvement plans and likewise.

### [Commit to achieving the Primary Reading Pledge by 2031](#)

The Primary Reading Pledge commits to *close to zero* children starting grade 7 at or below the National Minimum Standard (NMS) for reading. Lifelong literacy skills – the ability to proficiently read, write, spell and comprehend language – should be developed first in primary school. By signing the Primary Reading Pledge and implementing appropriate, evidence-based reading instruction, supported by intervention when required, the potential for poor senior school and early adulthood years educational outcomes should be significantly reduced. This will ensure that Tasmania's functional literacy rate for the working age population will improve every year.

Successful achievement of the Primary Reading Pledge involves supporting literacy development from early childhood development until the start of grade 7.

This objective is an achievable 10-year target, so that for every child aged 3.5 years in 2022 starts grade 7 in 2030 above the National Minimum Standard for Reading.

## Proactively support literacy improvement throughout the wider community

It is critical that any plan for a Literate Tasmanian proactively supports literacy improvement in the wider community according to the science of reading instruction and incorporating other relevant evidences related to specific cohorts. This will include secondary schooling, adult education, the justice system, and other vulnerable Tasmanians.

Research over the past 15 years is clear that children and youths in contact with the criminal justice system have significantly higher rates of severe language impairment. Severe language impairment is present in only 1-2 per cent of the general population, but is over-represented at 50-60 per cent in the youth justice population.<sup>21</sup> This has direct flow-on to low literacy. Moreover, 54 per cent of prisoners exit prison into homelessness, and 78 per cent will be unemployed.<sup>22</sup> 58.3 per cent of youth involved in the justice system will be under supervision again within 12 months.<sup>23</sup>

A high percentage of Tasmanian youth involved with the justice system are also likely to have complex needs, be living in out of home care, experiencing mental illness or addiction.<sup>24</sup> Young offenders currently have high likelihood of continuing involvement with the justice system as an adult<sup>25</sup>. This continual cycle of people returning to prison entrenches disadvantage for families and increases harm within communities. Literacy skills are a protective factor against these disadvantages.

The Department of Justice offers programs through Libraries Tasmania and TAFE. These programs, intended to support literacy for individuals in contact with the justice system, are not available to all who would benefit from them and who could be supported to undertake them. Moreover, the evidence-based methods to most successfully bring literacy to this multiply-disadvantaged cohort are not consistently present within the programs.<sup>26</sup> Those in contact with the justice system are a particularly vulnerable cohort whose needs must be included in equitable state-wide planning for literacy action.

## Operationalisation

While the #100percentliteracy target is achievable, it requires a swift, immediate operational and strategic response which engages with expertise across the public, private and community sectors.

The Table below sets out the steps to operationalise the 10 Year Plan to achieve a 100% literate Tasmania.

---

<sup>21</sup> Caire, L., (2013) *Back on Track: Speech Pathology in Youth (Justice) Custodial Education Project Report*. [http://www.speechpathologyaustralia.org.au/library/SPyce\\_Report\\_FINAL\\_lores.pdf](http://www.speechpathologyaustralia.org.au/library/SPyce_Report_FINAL_lores.pdf) Accessed Feb 14, 2021.

Snow, P. C. (2016) 'Elizabeth Usher Memorial Lecture: Language is literacy is language - Positioning speech-language pathology in education policy, practice, paradigms and polemics'. *International Journal of Speech-Language Pathology* 18 (3): 216-222.

Snow, P.C. & Powell, M.B. (2011) 'Youth (In)justice: Oral language competence in early life and risk for engagement in antisocial behaviour in adolescence'. *Trends & Issues in Crime and Criminal Justice* 435, 1-6.

<sup>22</sup> [17 Youth justice services - Report on Government Services Productivity Commission \(pc.gov.au\)](#)

<sup>23</sup> [17 Youth justice services - Report on Government Services Productivity Commission \(pc.gov.au\)](#)

<sup>24</sup> Note trends from the national study by Eileen Baldry, Damon B. Briggs, Barry Goldson & Sophie Russell (2018) 'Cruel and unusual punishment': an inter-jurisdictional study of the criminalisation of young people with complex support needs, *Journal of Youth Studies*, 21:5, 636-652, DOI: 10.1080/13676261.2017.1406072 . The Anglicare Social Action Research Centre (SARC) Report also evidences the complex needs of young Tasmanians see further <https://www.anglicare-tas.org.au/research/too-hard/>

<sup>25</sup> [8 Corrective services - Report on Government Services Productivity Commission \(pc.gov.au\)](#)

<sup>26</sup> [Sound Systems – A phonemically-based approach to adult literacy tutoring at the LINC](#)





4. Ten-year plan to achieve the Primary Reading Pledge objective ‘close to zero children start grade 7 at or below the national minimum standard for reading’											
4.1	<b>Kinder/Pre-school:</b> Introduce grammar and phonology screener (GAPS) from 3.5 years of age. Instruction and intervention based on SoR structured literacy - oral language, vocabulary, comprehension.										
4.2	<b>Prep students:</b> PIP assessments. Instruction and intervention based on SoR, including oral language, phonological and phonemic awareness.										
4.3	<b>Grade 1:</b> Phonics Check, PAT assessment, Standardised assessment of language - phonological processing, word retrieval and letter-sound knowledge. Instruction and intervention based on SoR structured literacy.										
4.4	<b>Grade 2:</b> G1 Phonics screener follow up, PAT, Standardised assessment of language as required - language, phonological processing, word retrieval, letter-sound knowledge, reading comprehension and fluency. Instruction and intervention based on SoR structured literacy, systematic synthetic phonics.										
4.5	<b>Grade 3:</b> NAPLAN/PAT, Standardised assessments as required - language, phonological processing, word retrieval, letter-sound knowledge, reading comprehension and fluency. Instruction based on SoR structured literacy, Tier 2 and 3 intervention (as per Primary Reading Pledge) as required.										
4.6	<b>Grade 4:</b> PAT, Standardised assessments as required - language, phonological processing, word retrieval, letter-sound knowledge, reading comprehension and fluency. Instruction based on SoR structured literacy, Tier 2 and 3 intervention as required.										
4.7	<b>Grade 5:</b> NAPLAN, PAT. Standardised assessments as required (as per G4). Instruction based on SoR structured literacy, Tier 2 and 3 intervention as per Primary Reading Pledge as required.										
4.8	<b>Grade 6:</b> PAT. Standardised assessment as required (as per G5). Tier 2 and Tier 3 intervention as required.										
4.9	<b>Grade 7:</b> NAPLAN, PAT. Standardised assessments as required (as per G6). Tier 2 and Tier 3 intervention as required.										
4.10	<b>Grade 8:</b> Standardised assessments as required (as per G7). Tier 2 and Tier 3 intervention as required.										
4.11	Mandate adoption of phonics screener by all primary schools by 2022										
4.12	All schools resourced with decodeable readers appropriate for stages of reading										
5. Four-year plan to achieve at or near zero children leaving Secondary School in Grades 10 below the national minimum standard (NMS) for reading											
5.1	All Grade 7s screened* for oral language and literacy to identify children at-risk.										
5.2	Targeted and whole-class SoR structured literacy intervention		G7	G7-8	G7-9	G7-10					



8.8	Professional learning for Libraries Tasmania Literacy Coordinators in Justice settings as per adult literacy plan											
8.9	Professional learning for Ashley School teams in SoR structured literacy intervention*											
<b>9. All strategies: continuous improvement according to data-driven evidence</b>												

## Appendix A

### What is literacy?

The definition, and understanding, of literacy is continually evolving.

UNESCO defines literacy<sup>27</sup> as *the ability to identify, understand, interpret, create, communicate and compute, using printed and written materials associated with varying contexts.*

*Literacy involves a continuum of learning in enabling individuals to achieve their goals, to develop their knowledge and potential, and to participate fully in their community and wider society.*

The Australian Curriculum<sup>28</sup> describes literacy as *the knowledge and skills students need to access, understand, analyse and evaluate information, make meaning, express thoughts and emotions, present ideas and opinions, interact with others and participate in activities at school and in their lives beyond school.*

The Australian Literacy Educators Association<sup>29</sup> describes being literate as *able to use a set of capabilities to*

- *access, record, develop, and communicate ideas*
- *comprehend and build knowledge*
- *respond creatively to produce works of social, cultural, aesthetic, historical and economic importance*
- *pose, explore, and respond to local, national and global issues, problems and challenges*
- *understand and interact with bureaucracies,*
- *and maintain personal records, and*
- *enjoy spending time with and sharing a wide range of entertaining texts.*

However, in order to make meaning of all literate practices, an individual needs to be *functionally literate* first. That is, the ability to read and write with understanding a simple statement related to one's daily life. It involves a continuum of reading and writing skills, and often includes basic arithmetic skills (numeracy)<sup>30</sup>.

UNESCO<sup>31</sup> defines a functional literate person as someone who can engage in all those activities in which literacy is required for effective function of his or her group and community and also for enabling him or her to continue to use reading, writing and calculation for his or her own and the community's development.

### Current literacy policies

Policies for education and literacy development are developed at federal and state levels of government, however, policy is primarily implemented at the state and/or territory level.

---

<sup>28</sup> <https://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/f-10-curriculum/general-capabilities/literacy/>

<sup>29</sup> <https://www.alea.edu.au/documents/item/1197>

<sup>30</sup> <http://uis.unesco.org/en/glossary>

<sup>31</sup> <http://uis.unesco.org/en/glossary-term/functional-literacy>

### Federal education policies

The Federal Government has carriage of the national architecture for education including the Australian Curriculum and NAPLAN as well as the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL)<sup>32</sup>.

In December 2019<sup>33</sup>, the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) Education Council released the Alice Springs (Mparntwe) Education Declaration which recognises that early childhood education is critical in giving every child the best possible start in life. The Declaration reinforces the importance of literacy and numeracy mastery in the early years of school as foundations for future learning.

The Council also acknowledged that the results of the 2018 Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) demonstrate that much progress needs to be made in educating our young people and ensuring they are prepared for a competitive and fast-changing world.

In the same communique, the Education Council endorsed a number of amendments to the current Accreditation of initial teacher education programs in Australia: Standards and Procedures, including explicit reference to reading instruction, including phonics and an increase in the time component allocated to English and literacy within primary initial teacher education programs.

The Education Council instructed AITSL to develop guidance materials to support high quality teaching of reading instruction in initial teacher education by mid-2020.

These guidelines are now available<sup>34</sup>.

The Australian Government has also launched a free, voluntary phonics [check](#) for year 1 students and has developed the [Literacy Hub](#) which provides free resources and information for teachers and parents.

### Tasmanian government education policies

The Department of Education released a [Literacy Framework](#) and [Plan for Action](#)<sup>35</sup> in May 2019. The Plan for action claims that it will “provide evidence-based and endorsed resources to support effective teaching for literacy learning across the curriculum” and to do this they will “review and refine current DoE documents and resources to support the use of department endorsed practices for the teaching of English for literacy learning.”

The Plan for Action states that it will “provide quality and targeted professional learning to build the capacity of educators to improve their teaching of English for literacy learning.”

In August 2020, the Minister for Education and Training, Jeremy Rockliff, announced that “a Year One Phonics check pilot will begin at 35 Tasmanian schools in September to support improved educational outcomes across the state and give students the best possible start at learning”<sup>36</sup>. The process will also provide professional learning support to schools participating in the Pilot to support the administration of the check and to build knowledge and practice in the teaching of phonics. The

---

<sup>32</sup> <https://www.aitsl.edu.au/>

<sup>33</sup> [http://www.educationcouncil.edu.au/site/DefaultSite/filesystem/documents/EC per cent20Communiqes per cent20and per cent20media per cent20releases/Education per cent20Council per cent20Communique per cent20- per cent2012 per cent20December per cent202019.pdf](http://www.educationcouncil.edu.au/site/DefaultSite/filesystem/documents/EC%20Communicues%20and%20media%20releases/Education%20Council%20Communique%20-%20per%2012%20per%20December%202019.pdf)

<sup>34</sup> [https://www.aitsl.edu.au/docs/default-source/initial-teacher-education-resources/reading-instruction/reading-instruction-evidence-guide.pdf?sfvrsn=5465d73c\\_2](https://www.aitsl.edu.au/docs/default-source/initial-teacher-education-resources/reading-instruction/reading-instruction-evidence-guide.pdf?sfvrsn=5465d73c_2)

<sup>35</sup> <https://www.education.tas.gov.au/about-us/projects/literacy-framework-plan-action/>

<sup>36</sup> [http://www.premier.tas.gov.au/releases/year\\_one\\_phonics\\_check\\_pilot](http://www.premier.tas.gov.au/releases/year_one_phonics_check_pilot)

PSC is now accessible by any Tasmanian primary school, but is not mandated and may not be consistently implemented or supported by appropriate training.

The Department of Education commissioned the Peter Underwood Centre for Educational Attainment at the University of Tasmania to undertake a [Review of Literacy Teaching, Training and Practice in Government Schools](#). The project was completed in August 2020 and the five reports and 11 fact sheets were released and launched by the Minister for Education and Training on International Literacy Day, 8 September 2020. The review identified current literacy practices used in schools and in pre-service teacher education in Tasmania. Findings informed the development of the 2019-2022 Department of Education Literacy Framework and Action Plan.

Other education and literacy advocates

[26ten](#) is a collaborative venture between the government, community and industry to improve adult literacy and numeracy. 26ten works with people, businesses, community groups, governments who want to live in a state where all adults have the reading, writing, numeracy and communication skills they need.

The [Beacon Foundation](#) supports young people to successfully transition from education to meaningful employment. They work with schools to build connections between industry, education and the community to create real world education in schools that is relevant and engaging for young people in the 21st century.

Through their [CollectiveEd](#) program the Beacon Foundation is working with 6 Tasmanian secondary schools with the aim of supporting young people in those schools to finish year 12 by testing new ideas and new ways of helping young people.

[The Primary Reading Pledge](#) is a collaborative initiative by [Learning Difficulties Australia](#), [fivefromfive](#) and [AUSPELD](#), launched in August 2020. It includes the objective to reduce to nearly zero the number of students starting grade 7 at or below the National Minimum Standard for reading. It is a plan to have all students reading by the end of primary school. The collaborative effort is currently advocating nationally for all Education Ministers to commit to this Pledge. It sets out the approach which should be taken in schools to achieve at least the National Minimum Standard in reading by the time a student starts grade 7 and includes assessment and diagnostic tools as well as great references to resources.

[Think Forward Educators](#) has been established with the aim to build literacy for social equity and is made up of a community of teachers, school leaders, specialists, parents, and researchers. They advocate for education that allows every child to succeed: promoting social equity and using the science of learning through webinars and other engagement activities.

[Speech Pathology Tasmania](#) has commenced offering Yoshimoto Orton-Gillingham multisensory structured language and literacy programs.