

Your Ref:
Our Ref: 947

20 November 2023

Department of State Growth
GPO Box 536
HOBART TAS 7001
By email: youthjobsstrategy@jobstasmania.tas.gov.au

Dear Secretary

RE: YOUTH JOBS STRATEGY – RESPONSE TO DISCUSSION PAPER

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to the Government's *Youth Jobs Strategy – Discussion Paper* – June 2023 (the Discussion Paper)¹.

Gaining experience in the workforce can significantly contribute to a young person's sense of wellbeing and self-esteem, as well as assisting in the realisation of financial independence. I have a strong interest in the implementation of strategies to promote and improve opportunities for all Tasmanian young people to obtain experience of the workplace, as well as meaningful work and employment. The success of strategies that improve access to safe work experience and work opportunities for young people will make a real difference for generations of young people in Tasmania, now and into the future.

I am generally very supportive of the development of a Youth Jobs Strategy for Tasmania as it marks another mechanism through which our society can collectively commit to improving and sustaining positive wellbeing outcomes for all Tasmanian young people by addressing systemic gaps and improving supports, which in this case are to assist them in obtaining jobs to maximise their prospects of success in transitioning to independence. These initiatives should be targeted at both:

- (a) long term work, vocationally oriented towards developing fulfilling careers; and
- (b) casual/part time paid work that we know young people seek for both self-support and work experience.

Rights-based, wellbeing, and economic rationales for a Youth Jobs Strategy

The issue of youth employment generally arises and takes shape in the latter stages of the period when children and young people come under my legislative oversight and scrutiny as they transition to independence (between the ages of 13 – 17 years old).

¹ Tasmania Government, *Youth Jobs Strategy – Discussion Paper*, June 2023 [URL: <https://youthjobsstrategy.tas.gov.au/>]



Navigating the challenges posed during this transitional period and preparing for a role in the workforce is of critical importance in the trajectory of a young person's life story. This requires strategies and policies designed to prepare, educate, train and provide young people with the opportunities to transition into work that is both remunerative and meaningful, and which allows them to exist as independent citizens.

Data indicates that the Tasmanian population is ageing at a higher rate than elsewhere in the country. This will lead to a shrinking workforce. The Mandala report² that accompanies the Discussion Paper notes:

Labour market entry to exit (LMEE) projections, a ratio of the number of potential workforce entrants aged 15 to 24 against the 55 to 64 age group—show Tasmania has consistently seen and will continue to expect a shrinking workforce. Latest modelling in 2022 increased estimates of this deficit compared to the previous version in 2006. Policy actions such as migration or youth engagement can help support Tasmania's labour force through this workforce shrinkage.

Moreover, as is pointed out in the Mandala report, the costs of doing nothing at this time are potentially significant with projected costs to the community and individuals of (a) early school leavers and (b) disengaged youth in the region of (a) \$23,100 and (b) \$36,820, respectively.³ The Tasmanian Government's over-arching strategy to improve the wellbeing of Tasmanian children and young people, *It takes a Tasmanian village*⁴, is based around the now widely accepted domains of wellbeing for children and young people. The Strategy includes the principle that the Tasmanian Government commits to "*providing a range of education and training opportunities to ensure children and young people can participate in life-long learning and employment.*"⁵

Of particular relevance to the development of this Jobs Strategy, are the actions that have been defined by the Government within the domains of *Learning* and *Participating*⁶. In this context, *learning* means that children and young people are attending and engaging in education, training or employment⁷. *Participating* means that children and young people are an active participant in their own life; including being able to have a say and have their opinion heard and valued⁸. The third domain, which is often overlooked when considering the impact of a successful transition to work on the wellbeing of a young person is the domain of *Material Basics* which means that children and young people have access to housing, clothing and

² Mandala, 'Unlocking Tasmania's Youth Potential: A Focus on Engagement, Skills, and Economic Growth', September 2023, p 11 [URL: <https://hdp-au-prod-app-sgtas-engage-files.s3.ap-southeast-2.amazonaws.com/6416/9570/8471/230920 - Jobs Tasmania - Mandala Report.pdf>].

³ Ibid, p 14.

⁴ Tasmanian Government, *It takes a Tasmanian Village – Child and Youth Wellbeing Strategy*, 2021, p 15. [URL: <https://hdp-au-prod-app-tas-shapewellbeing-files.s3.ap-southeast-2.amazonaws.com/1716/7643/0269/210301 Child and Youth Wellbeing Strategy 2021 wcag.pdf>].

⁵ Ibid, p 12.

⁶ See Tasmanian Government, *Tasmanian Child and Youth Wellbeing Framework*, 2016, p 7. [URL: <https://publicdocumentcentre.education.tas.gov.au/library/Shared%20Documents/Tasmanian-Child-and-Youth-Wellbeing-Framework-Web.pdf>].

⁷ Tasmanian Government, *It takes a Tasmanian Village – Child and Youth Wellbeing Strategy*, 2021, p 15. [URL: <https://hdp-au-prod-app-tas-shapewellbeing-files.s3.ap-southeast-2.amazonaws.com/1716/7643/0269/210301 Child and Youth Wellbeing Strategy 2021 wcag.pdf>].

⁸ Ibid.



footwear, food, transport, education and training materials and outdoor and green spaces.⁹ For some young people, the reality of successfully transitioning to work includes that they are able to fund the material basics of life, and in some circumstances, are also able to provide the material basics for other members of their family or community. Given the rising costs of living currently being experienced in Tasmania, these factors should not be overlooked.

Governance structures regarding child and youth wellbeing and successful transition to work should ensure that accountability for the development of meaningful strategies and policies to promote youth employment and training can be better defined and measured and can inform further investment decisions. It may be that the development of the Tasmanian Government Jobs Strategy is the ideal vehicle to achieve this aim.

Role of the Commissioner for Children and Young People

The Commissioner for Children and Young People is an independent statutory office established under Tasmania's *Commissioner for Children and Young People Act 2016* (the CCYP Act). Under the Act, I have responsibility for advocating for all children and young people in Tasmania generally, and for monitoring and promoting their wellbeing. In responding to this Discussion Paper, I am exercising my function of researching, investigating and influencing policy development into matters relating to children and young people generally and promoting and empowering the participation of children and young people in the making of decisions, or the expressing of opinions on matters, that may affect their lives.

Critically, I am also required by the CCYP Act to assist in ensuring that Tasmania satisfies its national and international obligations with respect to children and young people generally. In performing a function or exercising a power under the CCYP Act, s.3(1) requires that I must do so according to the principle that the wellbeing and best interests of children and young people are paramount, and I must observe any relevant provisions of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (the UNCRC). Additionally, the CCYP Act, s.3(2) also requires that the Act be administered according to the following principles:

- (a) children are entitled to live in a caring and nurturing environment and to be protected from harm and exploitation;
- (b) the interests and needs of children and young people who are disadvantaged for any reason or vulnerable should be given special regard and serious consideration;
- (c) the contributions made by children to the community should be recognised for their value and merit;
- (d) the views of children on all matters affecting them should be given serious consideration and taken into account;
- (e) parents, families and communities have the primary role in safeguarding and promoting the wellbeing of children and should be supported in carrying out their role.

⁹ Ibid, p 12.



Concept of work in international human rights treaties ratified by Australia

In my opinion, work can be critically important to the wellbeing of young people. The value placed on work across all communities and cultures internationally is demonstrated by the fact that its various dimensions are deeply enshrined in a network of international conventions and treaties ratified by Australia. These include:

- the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC)*¹⁰;
- the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR)*¹¹;
- the *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR)*¹²;
- the *International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR)*¹³;
- the *Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women*¹⁴;
- the *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities*¹⁵; and
- the *International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination*¹⁶.

As noted above, in the exercise of my role as Commissioner, I have a specific statutory obligation under my governing Act to observe any relevant provisions of the UNCRC¹⁷. I discuss the pertinent Articles of the Convention below.

The paramountcy principle – best interests of the child

The UNCRC operates under the over-riding umbrella of the *best interests principle* in Article 3. This principle has been made a cornerstone of the *Commissioner for Children and Young People Act 2016* in that it requires that, when I or any other person performs a function or exercises a power under the Act, they must do so according to the principle that the wellbeing and best interests of children and young people are paramount. This provides the conceptual framework and legislative mandate for me to consistently advocate for more intensive and extensive efforts on the part of Government to promote education, training and employment for young people. Indeed, the Convention addresses the issue of work and its various dimensions by specifically emphasising children and young people's *right to education* (including vocational education) and what the optimal outcomes of education should be. Articles 28 and 29 of the Convention state:

Article 28

1. States Parties recognise the right of the child to education, and with a view to achieving this right progressively and on the basis of equal opportunity, they shall, in particular:

¹⁰ The UNCRC was ratified by Australia on 16 January 1991.

¹¹ The UDHR was adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1948 with Australia voting in favour. The UDHR affirms fundamental human rights but is not legally binding.

¹² The ICCPR was ratified by Australia on 13 November 1980 (save for Art 41 that came into force on 28 January 1993).

¹³ The ICESCR was ratified by Australia on 10 March 1976.

¹⁴ This Convention was ratified by Australia on 27 August 1983 (with a revised Australian reservation on 30 August 2000).

¹⁵ This Convention was ratified by Australia on 17 July 2008 and entered into force 16 August 2008.

¹⁶ This Convention was ratified by Australia on 30 October 1975 save for Art 14 that was ratified on 28 January 1993.

¹⁷ CCYP Act, s 3(1)(b).



- (a) Make primary education compulsory and available free to all;
 - (b) Encourage the development of different forms of secondary education, including general and vocational education, make them available and accessible to every child, and take appropriate measures, such as the introduction of free education and offering financial assistance in case of need;
 - (c) Make higher education accessible to all on the basis of capacity by every appropriate means;
 - (d) Make educational and vocational information and guidance available and accessible to all children;
 - (e) Take measures to encourage regular attendance at schools and the reduction of drop-out rates.
2. States Parties shall take all appropriate measures to ensure that school discipline is administered in a manner consistent with the child's human dignity and in conformity with the present Convention.
 3. States Parties shall promote and encourage international co-operation in matters relating to education, in particular with a view to contributing to the elimination of ignorance and illiteracy throughout the world and facilitating access to scientific and technical knowledge and modern teaching methods. In this regard, particular account shall be taken of the needs of developing countries.

Article 29

1. States Parties agree that the education of the child shall be directed to:
 - (a) The development of the child's personality, talents and mental and physical abilities to their fullest potential;
 - (b) The development of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, and for the principles enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations;
 - (c) The development of respect for the child's parents, his or her own cultural identity, language and values, for the national values of the country in which the child is living, the country from which he or she may originate, and for civilizations different from his or her own;
 - (d) The preparation of the child for responsible life in a free society, in the spirit of understanding, peace, tolerance, equality of sexes, and friendship among all peoples, ethnic, national and religious groups and persons of indigenous origin;
 - (e) The development of respect for the natural environment.
2. No part of the present article or article 28 shall be construed so as to interfere with the liberty of individuals and bodies to establish and direct educational institutions, subject always to the observance of the principle set forth in paragraph 1 of the present article and to the requirements that the education given in such institutions shall conform to such minimum standards as may be laid down by the State.



The concept of the *right to work*¹⁸ (or to join the workforce) in the Convention can be inferred through various motherhood-type statements concerning the *right to thrive* which finds perhaps its clearest iteration in Article 6. This provides:

“States Parties shall ensure to the maximum extent possible the survival and development of the child.”¹⁹

Participation – the right to have views and wishes taken into consideration

Additionally, I am also required to promote children and young people’s *rights to participation*. This principle is broadly captured in Articles 12, 13 and 14. In my view, it is by promoting and facilitating young people’s participation that we derive immediate benefits that come from their engagement. These include encouraging them to invest or ‘buy in’ to a project and obtaining their unique insights that arise from the fact that young people are experts in their own lives.²⁰

Creating a policy spotlight on youth jobs

I applaud the Tasmanian Government on its willingness to again direct a deliberate spotlight on the transitional stages of young people as they leave childhood and enter adulthood. Low rates of educational attainment and participation in education training and work, particularly for the 15-19 year old cohort, has been a long standing issue in Tasmania for generations, and one that I highlighted in my 2020 report, *Investing in the Wellbeing of Tasmania’s Children and Young people*²¹.

Despite well intentioned reforms, previous agendas aimed at addressing low educational attainment and participation, and the subsequent productivity impacts have failed on implementation, for example, the *Tasmania Tomorrow* reform agenda, or have been lost to budget savings measures, for example, the *Guaranteeing Futures Initiative*. The underlying reasons underpinning low educational attainment and participation have not shifted, and have arguably, as a result of the Covid-19 Pandemic, become more complex.

Solutions are also complex and will certainly require more intensively focussed and directed attention to the needs of 13–18-year-olds as they transition to independence. While the first 1000 days is and remains critical under an ecological and public health model for the long-term health and wellbeing of children, we must also place specific policy emphasis on the transitional period during which time a young person approaches emergent adulthood. This will enable us to assist young people to navigate their way through vocational education, training and employment.

¹⁸ I note that, commensurate with the overarching beneficial approach of the Convention, the most explicit reference to *work* in the UNCRC is framed in protective terms that emphasises the right of a child “to be protected from economic exploitation and from performing any work that is likely to be hazardous or to interfere with the child’s education, or to be harmful to the child’s health or physical, mental, spiritual, moral or social development” (Art 32).

¹⁹ The UNCRC contains similar statements of principle in relation to other categories of vulnerable young people (i.e. children with a disability, children who have had involvement with the child protection system, and children who have had involvement with the youth justice system). These are contained in UNCRC, Articles 23, 39 and 40. In relation to children in the child protection system, it should also be noted that there is a stand-alone, plain English, *Charter of Rights for Tasmanian Children and Young People in Out-of-Home Care*.

²⁰ See Articles 12, 13, and 14 of the UNCRC.

²¹ CCYP, *Investing in the Wellbeing of Tasmania’s Children and Young People*, 2020, Hobart [URL: <https://www.childcomm.tas.gov.au/wp-content/uploads/Investing-in-the-Wellbeing-of-Tasmanias-Children-and-Young-People.pdf>]



Role of a Youth Jobs Strategy within a General Sustainability Framework for Tasmania

I note the Tasmanian Government is also currently consulting on the development of Tasmania's first over-arching Sustainability Strategy. In my opinion, issues relating to youth training and employment arise within the over-arching context of what we mean when we talk about *sustainability*. Sustainability is about:

Ensuring that future generations have what they need to live well. It is about choices we make today and how we can ensure the wellbeing of future generations.²²

For my purposes, I adopt the definition of *sustainability* set out in the Discussion Paper, *Tasmanian Positive: Our state's sustainability strategy*:

Sustainability is understanding how individual and social wellbeing, the economy, and the environment are inseparable and inter-dependent. Social factors like poverty, food security, access to education, decent work, and safe and resilient communities, are all concerns for sustainability action.²³

Notably, the following important principles are set out in the Discussion Paper:

1. We can still meet our own needs today, we just do so in a way that protects and preserves environmental values as well as achieving economic prosperity and social wellbeing.
2. We have an obligation to future generations, to ensure they have what they need for economic prosperity and social wellbeing, which includes a healthy environment and availability of natural resources.²⁴

Co-designing the job strategy with young people

It is particularly pleasing to me to see the Government's intention to co-design the Youth Jobs Strategy with the involvement of the Youth Network of Tasmania (YNOT), and to publish a Summary of Youth Feedback on Employment in parallel with the Government's Discussion Paper and the consultancy report of Mandala. The issues and themes marshalled together by YNOT, from a number of different youth forums and consultations, provides real world authenticity to the shape of the problems as they are experienced by young people themselves. The feedback captured by YNOT aligns with the feedback provided to my office through my Ambassadors Program and a separate, stand-alone *Education Animations* project²⁵.

²² Tasmanian Government, *Short Discussion Paper: Advancing Tasmania's natural advantage for sustainability*, [URL: [7 https://www.sustainability.tas.gov.au/discussion-paper](https://www.sustainability.tas.gov.au/discussion-paper)] ; see also, United Nations Bruntland Commission, (1987), *Report of the World Commission on Environment and Development: Our Common Future*.

²³ Tasmanian Government, *Discussion Paper: Tasmania's sustainability vision and goals* [URL: <https://www.sustainability.tas.gov.au/discussion-paper>]

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ CCYP, *CCYP Ambassadors' thoughts on education 2022* [URL: <https://childcomm.tas.gov.au/young-people/young-peoples-thoughts-on-education/#link-poster>]



YNOT's Youth Transitions Action Plan, 2023

On 1 November 2023, YNOT released advice that it had received funding to develop a whole-of-government Action Plan aligned to the Tasmanian Government's *Tasmanian Child and Wellbeing Strategy* to respond to the needs of young people aged 18-25 years as they transition to adulthood and independence. YNOT also released a Discussion Paper titled *Becoming an Adult: the experience of young Tasmanians today: A Discussion Paper*²⁶ accompanied by a University of Tasmania literature review titled, *Emergent Adulthood: Review of Literature*.²⁷

The Discussion Paper helpfully crystallises the academic work of UTAS alongside YNOT's consultations with young people to isolate and identify *five key markers* of the experience of young people transitioning into what is now called *emergent adulthood*. Those key markers are:

- (a) Moving out of home and living independently
- (b) Moving into financial independence
- (c) Moving from school into the workforce
- (d) Moving into and accessing the adult service system
- (e) Moving about and within their communities²⁸

The third and fifth key markers (*moving from school into the workforce* and *moving about and within their communities*) are of special pertinence to the Youth Job Strategy. The Discussion Paper scopes out the dimensions of young people's transitional challenge in relation to entering the workforce (in terms of needs, influencing factors and consequential impacts) in detail as follows:

Young adults need to be able to ...

- actively participate in education, training and employment
- be work-ready when entering the workforce
- know and understand their workplace rights and responsibilities
- gain the knowledge, skills and confidence to apply for work
- find pathways into their chosen industry or field
- gain employability skills and work experience through both paid and unpaid opportunities

which is influenced by ...

- cost of study and availability of income support
- being work-ready, especially with 'soft' skills
- local networks for word-of-mouth opportunities

²⁶ YNOT, *Becoming an Adult: the experience of young Tasmanians today: A Discussion Paper*, 2023 [URL: https://www.ynot.org.au/sites/default/files/documents/2023-11/YNOT_Youth_Transitions_Discussion_Paper_November2023.pdf].

²⁷ Rudling, E, Shelley, B., Chuah S-H., Hoffman, R. & Lang, M. (2023). *Emergent Adulthood: Review of Literature*. Hobart: Tasmanian Behavioural Lab, University of Tasmania [URL: https://www.ynot.org.au/sites/default/files/documents/2023-06/YNOT_EmergentAdulthood_LiteratureReview_Final_3%20May%202023.pdf].

²⁸ YNOT, *Becoming an Adult: the experience of young Tasmanians today: A Discussion Paper*, 2023, p 9, [URL: https://www.ynot.org.au/sites/default/files/documents/2023-11/YNOT_Youth_Transitions_Discussion_Paper_November2023.pdf].



- support networks that build confidence and resilience
- skills in resume writing and interview performance
- employer perceptions

which impacts on ...

- ability to attend and engage in education, training or employment
- sense of empowerment and agency
- taking other steps to independence
- ability to access health and social services
- ability to participate in the community²⁹

The Discussion Paper performs a similar analytical dissection of the related key marker of *transport (or moving about and within their communities)* and teases out the dimensions of need, influencing factors and consequential impacts as follows:

Young adults need to be able to ...

- move freely about their communities without relying on others
- have affordable, reliable and safe transport options that meet their needs
- travel between home, school, work, and essential services when they need to
- obtain a licence and access a personal vehicle

which is influenced by ...

- access to driver mentors and personal vehicle while learning
- costs associated with private vehicle ownership, maintenance and use
- public transport availability, including routes, timing and service areas
- costs to use public transport

which impacts on ...

- ability to attend and engage in education, training or employment
- sense of empowerment and agency
- taking other steps to independence
- ability to access health and social services
- ability to participate in the community³⁰

I will refer to these markers in the discussion below.

Principles of the Youth Jobs Strategy (Discussion Paper, page 9)

The Government's Youth Jobs Strategy Discussion Paper identifies specific guiding and organising principles and poses the questions for discussion as to whether this is the optimum approach. I will deal with these in turn.

²⁹ Ibid, p 12.

³⁰ Ibid, p 14.



Youth-centred and informed design – young Tasmanians are provided the opportunity and mechanisms to have a voice about the policies and actions affecting their lives and their futures.

I agree.

As mentioned in my introductory comments, children have a right to participate in the decisions which impact them enshrined in Article 12, of the UNCRC. Further, Initiatives targeting young people must be co-designed with the involvement of young people to maximise the extent to which they engage and ‘buy in’ to the programs. As noted above, in my experience, young people are experts in their own lives, both in respect of the issues and problems they experience and their proposed solutions. The collected survey results published by YNOT³¹ from four separate youth consultations between 2020-22 and in their consultations as part of the Transitions project³² demonstrate the accuracy and perceptiveness that young people have in relation to the issue of employment.

Wellbeing and safety of the young person – support is flexible and contextualised to individual needs and circumstances.

I agree.

As is detailed in my 2020 report, *Investing in the Wellbeing of Tasmania’s Children and Young People*³³, the provision of supports, including supports to access education and work, should be both universal and proportionate to need. This will ensure that support mechanisms are readily available to every child, and can be specifically adapted to meeting the diverse needs of young people in a meaningful way and can be scalable and fit-for-purpose across Tasmania. It is my very strong view that a relational model which includes the ability to provide an intensive case management approach will optimise the chances of success.

This would require dedicated case workers, each managing a caseload of young people with whom they work on a one-to-one basis, proportionate to the needs of the young person. Connecting with young people can provide opportunities to model behaviours, teach and fine-tune skill sets, monitor engagement in school and VET programs and generally encourage, guide and mentor young people through the process of training for, obtaining and retaining a job. These case workers could also be tasked with case working young people who have disengaged and need assistance to reconnect with the world of employment, as well as young people who have cycled in and out of shorter-term employment. I note several Government-delivered and funded programs are already adopting this approach, for example the *Back on Track* program delivered through the Department for Education, Children and Young People; and the Youth Navigators Program and Youth Connectors Pilot, both funded through the first Action Plan of the Tasmanian Government’s Child and Youth Wellbeing Strategy – *It takes a Tasmanian Village*.

³¹ See YNOT, *Summary of Youth Feedback on Employment*, 2023.

³² See YNOT, *Becoming an Adult: the experience of young Tasmanians today: A Discussion Paper*, 2023 [URL: https://www.ynot.org.au/sites/default/files/documents/2023-11/YNOT_Youth_Transitions_Discussion_Paper_November2023.pdf].

³³ CCYP, *Investing in the Wellbeing of Tasmania’s Children and Young People*, 2020, Hobart [URL: <https://www.childcomm.tas.gov.au/wp-content/uploads/Investing-in-the-Wellbeing-of-Tasmanias-Children-and-Young-People.pdf>]



Now may be an opportune time to evaluate the effectiveness and impact of case management programs such as these with a view to highlighting common positive elements for future implementation.

Young people are supported and encouraged to become lifelong learners

I agree.

The speed at which contemporary social and economic change has occurred in the 21st century means that the best possible strategy for young people to adopt will be one which gives them the agility to keep their skill sets current and be able to readily pivot into new directions in response to change when this is required. But this also requires that Government collects and publishes information containing forecasts about future growth industries so that both young people and those supporting them in their career explorations can make the necessary changes in direction to take advantage of the emergent opportunities.

Young people can be at the centre of meeting the economy's productivity challenges if they are supported in the right way.

I agree.

As noted in both the Discussion Paper and the consultancy report by Mandala, the *labour market entry to exit* (LMEE) projections show Tasmania has consistently seen and will continue to see a shrinking workforce.³⁴ As such, the reality in Tasmania is that young people will necessarily be at the heart of the solution to the problem. Therefore, appropriate resources and supports, as detailed in this submission, need to be developed, fine-tuned and evaluated over time to ensure that the role young people play is recognised, built upon and celebrated.

Informed best-practice and strengths-based approach – focussing on value rather than the deficits, encompassing all areas but with a focus on working with young people.

A best practice, strengths-based approach to the formation and administration of policy is undoubtedly useful, for example, the implementation of a relational model that is universal, and proportionate to need and inclusive of intensive case management methodology aligns with this concept. However, assessing the alignment or misalignment of current educational efforts in high school, and the resultant skill sets of young people in relation to various career pathways is also required. This requires a special type of *gap analysis*, which is arguably a deficit-based approach where the skills and knowledge of children and young people is measured against the performance requirements of employers. The *gap analysis* should be designed to measure not only the deficits that employers, vocational trainers and post-secondary educators see in their contact with young people, but also the deficits in educational provision that young people themselves perceive as hampering their competitiveness in attempting to enter the workforce. Some of these deficits have been

³⁴ Tasmanian Government, *Youth Jobs Strategy: Discussion Paper*, September 2023, p 14 [URL: https://www.youthjobsstrategy.tas.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0004/486661/Youth-Jobs-Paper_Pages-HighResWeb_1.pdf] and Mandala, 'Unlocking Tasmania's Youth Potential: A Focus on Engagement, Skills, and Economic Growth', September 2023, p 11 [URL: https://hdp-au-prod-app-sqtas-engage-files.s3.ap-southeast-2.amazonaws.com/6416/9570/8471/230920_-_Jobs_Tasmania_-_Mandala_Report.pdf].



highlighted by children I engage with through my CCYP Ambassador program through their animation series on education in Tasmania.³⁵

Build on and invest in what's already in place and working well.

I agree.

However, I urge the government to also consider the innovative benefits that some historical initiatives delivered. For example, the current policy dilemma is not dissimilar to that experienced in 2003 when the *Guaranteeing Futures Initiative* was rolled out. This strategy aimed to:

*improve participation in education and training; enable second chance learning; build a skilled workforce; create communities that value lifelong learning; and strengthen relationships between learners, education and training providers and government, business and industry.*³⁶

Of the four key elements of the strategy (Guaranteeing Futures, Ensuring Essential Literacies, Enhancing Adult Learning and Building Learning Communities), the first initiative called *Guaranteeing Futures* identified the following target outcomes:

- Individual pathway planning and transition support.
- Multiple and flexible learning opportunities.
- Co-ordinated provision of education, training, employment.
- Partnerships between young people and their parents and education, training, youth service providers, business and industry and the community.
- Improved personal, social and economic outcomes.
- A skills base that meets economic need.³⁷

This strategy involved establishing pathway planning and transition teams in each of the state's six educational districts comprising staff variously styled as *Pathways Planning Officers* and *Youth Learning Officers* who worked on an intensive case work, one-on-one relational model from as early as Year 8.

Although I am advocating that consideration be given to the re-introduction of previous initiatives, there is scope to review the current utility of certain systems and processes currently in place or those previously in place. For example, across numerous forums and consultations over the last several years, young people have shared with me and others that the organisation of the current high school system is not equipping them with the skills that they can see that they need. Young people have clearly expressed that they would like more of a say in what they learn, how they learn it and the supports they need to learn. In my

³⁵ CCYP, *CCYP Ambassadors' thoughts on education 2022* [URL: <https://childcomm.tas.gov.au/young-people/young-peoples-thoughts-on-education/#link-poster>]

³⁶ Department of Education, *Tasmania – A State of Learning: A Strategy for Post-Year 10 Education and Training*, 2003, p 2. [URL: <https://scpp.esrc.unimelb.edu.au/objects/reports/Tas-2005-StateofLearning2003.pdf>]

³⁷ *Ibid*, p 3.



wellbeing consultation report, *We Call It Happy*,³⁸ I noted that children and young people involved in my consultation “consistently expressed a desire for an education system that is more responsive to the needs of children and young people.” Relevantly, this included:

- That “the curriculum needs to be more flexible, relevant and reflective of the interests and aspirations;”
- That attention needed to be given to the “perceived constant repetition of components in the curriculum.”³⁹

Leverage our place-based initiatives by encouraging young people to explore the opportunities available in their local community.

I agree.

This approach would deal with both substantive issues (getting and holding a job) as well as overcome some significant present-day barriers to engagement which arise as procedural/logistical issues (principal among which is transport, for which see below). At the same time, I would encourage initiatives that allow young people, if they choose, to take advantage of opportunities outside their local communities. Young people’s enjoyment of their rights should not be limited by geographic location.

Vocational Education and Training is valued as a great first option for many young people.

See below.

Connected and seamless – no wrong door, multiple access points and pathways to fit individual experience and need.

I agree.

From my point of view, a single Registered Training Organisation, with multiple access points (e.g. schools, colleges and TasTAFE) and pathways to fit individual experience and need is a policy aspiration that ought to be explored actively. In particular, young people, who may have disengaged from school prior to completing year 10, can find it difficult to re-engage in high school-equivalent education, which is often a pre-condition for further education and training opportunities.

Evidenced, evaluated, accountable – continual improvement.

I agree.

Unless young people’s participation in training and job-creation schemes is made visible and captured in accurate records, it will not be measurable. If this participation is not made

³⁸ CCYP, *We call it happy...CCYP Wellbeing Consultations with 0 to 18 Year Old Tasmanians*, 2021, p 23. [URL: <https://childcomm.tas.gov.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/Wellbeing-Consultation-Report-We-Call-it-Happy.pdf>]

³⁹ Ibid, p 23.



measurable, Government will not have the ability to capture, assess or identify problems as they arise or the policy initiatives that work.

My advice to government, in relation to the development of a whole of government Strategy to improve the wellbeing of Tasmanian children and young people, included that the Strategy should *include*:

...benchmarks, baselines, outcomes and indicators that are agreed to by government, non-government partners and communities, inclusive of Aboriginal communities, and which can clearly demonstrate that what we are doing is working and inform future action⁴⁰;

To date, the government has released measures associated with the first 1000 days of children's lives, however considerable further work is required to measure the types of wellbeing outcomes associated with a successful transition to work.

Success judged on outcomes for young people, not just on activity.

I agree.

The government should also consider the co-design of targets to guide the performance of the strategy over specified timeframes.

Effective Youth Pathways Practice

Under the Discussion Paper's heading, 'Effective Youth Pathways Practice', four key phases of youth pathways practice are identified, as well as 10 key elements of effective pathways practice:

- Phase 1 – Guidance and Exploration
- Phase 2 – Work Preparation
- Phase 3 – Workplace Opportunities
- Phase 4 – Post-placement support

The Discussion Paper then poses a series of questions. I will address each in turn.

Do the common elements and phases in the table make sense? Are any one or two more important than others? How can government, community, business, schools and industry support better connection and continuity of support across these elements?

As a general comment, this table accurately seeks to represent and characterise the different chronological phases that most young people will navigate when transitioning into employment, with possibly some variation being apparent for some young people. The presence or absence of post-placement support is one highly variable feature.

⁴⁰ CCYP, *Investing in the Wellbeing of Tasmania's Children and Young People*, 2020, Hobart, p 5 [URL: <https://www.childcomm.tas.gov.au/wp-content/uploads/Investing-in-the-Wellbeing-of-Tasmanias-Children-and-Young-People.pdf>]



Additionally, each of the 10 key sub-elements make collective sense as stepping-stones along the identified pathway. While each of the sub-elements are constitutive of the path to employment, some of them are noteworthy to the extent that they require concrete instituted mechanisms to put them in place. I believe that these need to be articulated.

Phase 1 – Guidance and Exploration

In order to meaningfully realise the elements in Phase 1, it is necessary in my view for each young person to have a trusting connection or relationship with a person or people who, working on a one-on-one relational model, can work with the unique characteristics of the young person in order to identify their motivations, provide or help them to access reliable information concerning available pathways, provide a safe environment for the person to deal with mental health, transport or other issues and perform this role over the duration of the young person's journey, proportionate to the needs of the young person.

Phase 2 – Work Preparation

A sustained plan for and investment in VET organisations is essential, in order that they can run programs to equip young people with the skill sets that employers say that their industries and workplaces require. In my view, it is crucial that employers contribute to a *gap analysis* (as referenced above) by identifying those skills and attributes, and that VET organisations respond to this by creating programs that can meaningfully provide young people with the required expertise to commence their journeys to obtaining work in identified growth areas.

Phase 3 – Workplace Opportunities

I endorse an approach to work-based learning encompassing the identified features in Item 8 under the heading of Phase 3 – Workplace Opportunities (Discussion Paper, p. 17). The necessary underlying foundation will require highly co-operative partnerships and networks between industry and government and VET organisations. This gives rise to questions about who or what agency will provide that key co-ordinating role to ensure that these partnerships work in practice and that the system is easy for young people to navigate.

Phase 4 – Post-placement support

The question of post-placement support again requires consideration of the mechanism by which this can be most optimally delivered and by who or what agency. Noting the significant and important role of an intensive case worker model in other youth pathways practice phases, it would make sense to provide a similar level of support following placement.

The answer to the question as to how government, community, business, schools and industry support better connection and continuity of support across the identified elements in each of the phases, seems to point once again to a strong co-ordinating role for intensive caseworkers. The cultivation of co-ordinated partnerships and networks that deliver these opportunities for young people relies critically on the two-way relationships that caseworkers can create and maintain with both young people and government and industry.



What we've heard already (Discussion Paper pp 18 – 22)

The Discussion Paper collects and presents a range of upper-level themes that have already emerged from the Government's consultations to date. These are captured in italics in the text boxes below, with corresponding questions.

The pathway from school to 'whatever comes next' looks different for everyone – we need a system that recognises and supports diverse experience and need.

What is the one thing that you believe could have the most positive impact on a young person's transition pathway from school to further study, training or employment?

See my comments above.

Young people in our regions don't always have access to the same support, services and options as their metropolitan peers.

How can we improve access to services and support for young people in our regions? What type of support do our young people outside larger metro areas need to succeed?

Young people have informed me repeatedly and strongly that in order to fully engage in education, apprenticeships, employment opportunities and extra-curricular activities they need to have more transport services, particularly in rural areas. In my view, very serious consideration should be given to implementing a scheme providing more transport options for young people and to making public transportation free for young people to allow them to participate, including in VET commitments or workplaces. As has been noted on numerous occasions by my office and other stakeholders involved with children and young people, transport is a critical policy issue in assisting children and young people to navigate the transition period to "emergent adulthood". As noted in the UTAS literature review on emergent adulthood:

Adulthood is characterised by being able to choose when and how to use transportation, whether for work, personal responsibilities, or play. Access to reliable commuter transport such as a personal car, bicycle, or public transport is essential to securing reliable income. Further, ability to travel to and from health and service provider appointments, or to travel for leisure, are expressions of adult decision-making capabilities. However, how emergent adults access transport depends on their living context (urban, regional) and the public transport available, as well as financial capacity to purchase and maintain, or hire, a private vehicle.⁴¹

I would urge the Government to give serious consideration to making transport free for children and young people, whether for all up to the age of 18 (or beyond) or for a smaller cohort.

⁴¹ Rudling, E, Shelley, B., Chuah S-H., Hoffman, R. & Lang, M. *Emergent Adulthood: Review of Literature*. Hobart: Tasmanian Behavioural Lab, University of Tasmania, 2023, p 23.



The barriers for young people are complex and can't be resolved in isolation.

How can the service systems better connect and respond to the complex needs of young people?

Barriers for young people involving, for example, mental health illness, homelessness, or substance misuse (to name a few) require the co-ordinated input of many government services. Importantly, assessing, identifying and measuring the existence of these (and other) barriers requires appropriately trained and skilled staff. A grassroots caseworker ought to be enabled to respond to the complex needs of young people (as alluded to above) by referring the young person to relevant specialists who are able to co-ordinate the engagement of appropriate services to address the underlying barriers to employment. I discussed these barriers in detail in my wellbeing consultation report, *We Call It Happy*⁴² and in my responses to the Government's Youth Justice Blueprint.⁴³

Some young people, such as those with disability or with caring responsibilities, need additional, targeted support to participate in the workforce.

What would unlock the ability for young Tasmanians with different needs to participate in work, education and training?

Young people with a disability or with caring responsibilities ought to be readily referred to agencies with the skills and funding to provide additional supports. The proposed caseworkers, mentioned previously would be equipped with the skills to make these referrals, as indicated above.

How do young people get into work or training if they can't get to work or training?

What are some innovative approaches to address transport issues for young people that keep safety as the highest priority?

See my comments above.

Young people don't know what they don't know or what they should know.

Where do young people currently get information from to support them to make decisions or connect to employment and training opportunities?

What does it take to be 'job-ready'?

What can employers do to help build those work-readiness skills? Can you share any examples of best practice?

⁴² CCYP, *We call it happy...CCYP Wellbeing Consultations with 0 to 18 Year Old Tasmanians*, 2021, passim. [URL: <https://childcomm.tas.gov.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/Wellbeing-Consultation-Report-We-Call-it-Happy.pdf>]

⁴³ CCYP, *Reforming Tasmania's Youth Justice System Discussion Paper 21 March 2022* [URL: <https://childcomm.tas.gov.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/2022-03-21-FINAL-Reforming-Youth-Justice-submission.pdf>] and CCYP, *Final Draft Youth Justice System Blueprint 2022*, 23 December 2022 [URL: <https://childcomm.tas.gov.au/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/2022-12-23-FINAL-CCYP-response-to-Nov-22-YJ-Blueprint.pdf>]



As I have previously said, young people are experts in their own lives. I am therefore of the view that comprehensive engagement with young people would provide the most impactful innovations to deal with this issue.

Young people have clearly articulated to me through my CCYP Ambassadors Program and a separate, stand-alone *Education Animations* project⁴⁴ that in their view, there are gaps in the current education system, including in the breadth and scope of curriculum on offer to them. There is a consistent theme that emerges regarding young people not gaining the skills for the navigation of the world after high school.

I support the role of dedicated information agencies that can act as both a repository of pathway information and opportunities, as well as a source of skilled staff able to match young people's skills sets and their aspirations to available training and/or employment opportunities. However, the connection between these repositories and young people, either through our existing education system or other mechanisms, is critical to ensuring young people have greater access to the information they require throughout their transition through high school and on to further education and work. In particular, the role of mentors and role models (both through peers and/or through adult leadership positions, such as the teaching workforce) who can engage with young people, road test vocational aspirations, identify the 'right door' and crystallise young people's orientation is worthy of further investigation.

Try before you buy.

What do (or should) quality work exposure activities look like for young people? What are some examples of this being done well?

Again, I reiterate that young people are best placed to provide feedback on this issue.

Workplace exposure should be the action that occurs after a period of discussion between a young person and a person in their life who is helping them who can help to identify the skills, aspirations, strengths and interest of a young person, and a suitable opportunity to "test" a workplace can be arranged, which matches the young person's interests and needs.

Most importantly, subjective feedback from young people pre- and post- workplace experience will be powerful in continuous improvement of workplace experiences.

Further, there may be merit in an expansion of the definition of 'workplace experiences' beyond a traditional work placement/experience model to include recognition of volunteering opportunities within local communities, through already established programs, or newly established programs which contain mutual benefit.

A first job might only be the first step – young people need ongoing support and opportunities for continuous learning and development to maintain decent, meaningful work.

How do we balance and support work and learning for young people?

⁴⁴ CCYP, *CCYP Ambassadors' thoughts on education 2022* [URL: <https://childcomm.tas.gov.au/young-people/young-peoples-thoughts-on-education/#link-poster>]



A child centred approach should be adopted, which includes programs that are subsidised by public monies that contain work placements with a VET component ought to be required (via funding agreements or similar) to be co-designed and monitored in ways that accommodate a young person's various working, learning and support needs.

Industry and employers want young people to be part of their workforce – but they need help to make the connection.

How could your business or industry be better supported to provide opportunities for young people?

What information or resources are needed to make Tasmania's training system more accessible and streamlined?

This raises not only the issue of how to incentivise employers and private industry to recruit young people but also how to remove barriers to this end or even looking at ways to ensure that other Government policies do not act as disincentives to this. For example, one of my concerns relates to a possible unintended effect of the Child and Youth Safe Organisations Framework including the Reportable Conduct Scheme on the training and working lives of children and young people. If the rollout of this regulatory framework (from January 2024) imposes what is perceived to impose an excessive burden on those employers and on-the-job trainers to whom the scheme applies in terms of implementation costs or onerous red tape, or if employers perceive that certain interactions with young trainees or apprentices may expose them to allegations that the employer has engaged in *reportable conduct* (namely, 'emotional or psychological harm' as defined in the *Child and Youth Safe Organisations Act 2023*, s.7), then there is a risk that some employers in the private sector may simply be dissuaded from taking on young people. It is therefore important for the Framework to be implemented in a child centred and supportive way, which ameliorates any potential unintended consequences in the training system's accessibility.

Conclusion

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on this Discussion Paper. I am available to discuss the comments made in this correspondence if that would be of assistance.

Yours sincerely

Leanne McLean
Commissioner for Children and Young People

cc The Hon Roger Jaensch, Minister for Education, Children and Youth
cc The Hon Felix Ellis, Minister for Skills, Training and Workforce Growth