

Media Release:

The Tasmanian #100percentliteracy Alliance releases a Road Map for a Literate Tasmania

On Friday 26th of February 2021, the Tasmanian #100percentliteracy Alliance will release a **Road Map to a Literate Tasmania** that calls on the Tasmanian Government to lead and prioritise the development and implementation of a plan to improve literacy for ALL Tasmanians.

The Alliance presented their **Road Map to a Literate Tasmania** to Minister for Education, Jeremy Rockliff, on Tuesday 23rd of February 2021.

The aim to achieve #100percentliteracy in Tasmania was the aspirational goal set at the inaugural Communicating: The Heart of Literacy event in November 2018 hosted at Government House by Governor Kate Warner.

The alliance was subsequently formed in 2020 and is committed to advocating for evidence-aligned literacy instruction in Tasmania to be scaled with a sense of urgency in a comprehensive and systematic way by multiple stakeholders, collaboratively.

The Tasmanian #100percentliteracy Alliance **Road Map to a Literate Tasmania** outlines three overarching strategies:

- 1) Develop a strategic, whole-of-government, community-wide framework to achieve a **Literate Tasmania**, including implementation.
 - 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:
 - map existing organisations and resources to develop an integrated framework for a **Literate Tasmania** that links and leverages these strategies and resources;
 - undertake a peer review of existing policies and programmes to identify any evidence of practice gaps, and programme or skills gaps as well as opportunities to redirect resources to more effective, impactful strategies; and
 - establish short- and medium-term measurable targets, aligned with the long-term goal for #100PercentLiteracy in Tasmania.
- 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. This is in addition to strategies that target primary-school-aged children, because #100PercentLiteracy is wider than schools alone.

“Following this roadmap, will lead to measurable improvement in Tasmania’s poor literacy and educational outcomes, improving not only the lives of Tasmanians, but also boosting Tasmania’s economy,” said the Alliance.

The Alliance asserts that it is no longer acceptable to use our proportionately lower socio-economic status as an excuse for poor literacy and poor educational attainment.

In fact, while social inequalities have a profound effect on 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.

The current statistics tell us that:

- 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 continue their schooling to year 12 (retention)
- 3 in 5 Tasmanians who undertake year 12 successfully complete it (attainment)
- 1 in 2 Tasmanians of working age are functionally illiterate

The **Road Map to a Literate Tasmania** advocates for a whole of state, community-wide approach, engaging the full breadth of stakeholders to achieve a **Literate Tasmania**. 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 evidence, is warranted for Tasmania's poor educational outcomes stemming from poor literacy skills.

The #100percentliteracy Alliance

The Alliance is made up of individuals who have advocated for improved educational outcomes in Tasmania for many years from different perspectives and have now joined forces as a collective voice to advocate for improved educational attainment in Tasmania, by improving the foundations of educational outcomes – literacy. They are solutions oriented.

***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*

***Becky Shelley**, Deputy Director, Peter Underwood Centre for Educational Attainment, University of Tasmania*

Contacts:

Lisa Denny **0400 190 964**

Rosie Martin **0418 390 449**

Amelia Jones **0400 848 661**

Website:

<https://www.tasmanianliteracyalliance.org/>

Background:

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, Kate Warner.

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 being to remove the stigma of illiteracy, celebrate successes, communicate the journeys of educators and others aspiring to make change and an 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.

Almost one in two Tasmanians of working age are functionally illiterate. 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. This 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.

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

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

In 2019, one in five of our grade 7 students started the year at or below the NAPLAN National Minimum Standard (NMS) for reading. 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.

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 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 report also found that Tasmanians fare worse than the national average in all but 7 of the 23 indicators for all four stages of learning and development. Of the total 23 indicators, Tasmania ranks 7th or 8th (out of 8) in 12.

Of the 5 successful lifelong learner indicators which include literacy skills, Tasmania ranks 7th or 8th in four. See table below.

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