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PARLIAMENT OF TASMANIA

**AUDITOR-GENERAL
SPECIAL REPORT No. 89**

Post-Year 10 enrolments

June 2010

Presented to both Houses of Parliament in accordance with the provisions of Audit Act 2008

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22 June 2010

President
Legislative Council
HOBART

Speaker
House of Assembly
HOBART

Dear Madam President
Dear Mr Speaker

SPECIAL REPORT NO. 89
Post-Year 10 enrolments

This Report, relating to my investigation of the accuracy of Post-Year 10 enrolments and attainment data, and the validity of the Premier's claims on enrolments, has been prepared consequent to examinations conducted under Section 23 of the *Audit Act 2008*.

Yours sincerely

H M Blake
AUDITOR-GENERAL

Contents

Foreword	i
List of acronyms and abbreviations	ii
Executive summary	2
Background.....	2
Detailed audit conclusions.....	3
Recommendations.....	3
<i>Audit Act 2008</i> section 30 — Submissions and comments received	6
Introduction	8
Audit objective.....	11
Audit scope	11
Audit criteria.....	11
Audit approach.....	12
Timing.....	12
Resources	12
1 Enrolment data	14
1.1 Background	14
1.2 August census enrolment data: accuracy	14
1.3 August census enrolment data: results	15
1.4 August census enrolment data: usefulness.....	17
1.5 Enrolment data supplied to the Premier.....	18
1.6 Conclusion	19
2 Attainment data	22
2.1 Background.....	22
2.2 TQA attainment data: accuracy	22
2.3 TQA attainment data: results	23
2.4 TQA attainment data: usefulness	24

2.5 Conclusion	25
Independent auditor’s conclusion	28
Recent reports	32
Current projects.....	34
List of figures	
Figure 1: Comparison of the old and new structure.....	11
Figure 2: Changes in enrolments between 2008 and 2009	16
List of tables	
Table 1: August census enrolments 2008 and 2009 (full-time equivalents).....	15
Table 2: NSSC students with at least one unit of credit	23
Table 3: Students at PY10 institutions.....	23
Table 4: Students 15 to 19 years old in PY10 education	24

Foreword

Introduction of the Tasmania *Tomorrow* reforms has resulted in significant public debate. The reforms are government policy about which I make no comment. However, the Introduction to this Report details my understanding of some of the changes brought about.

The investigation which is the subject of this Report examined only a small component of the reforms — enrolment and attainment data. While my work ultimately enabled me to form a conclusion about the reliability and usefulness of this data, obtaining and testing the data was made difficult by the reforms themselves and by the fact that comparative information rested in more than one data collection and reporting system. Another difficulty was data ownership.

To an extent, some of these difficulties were resolved and my work enabled me to conclude regarding retention and attainment performance in 2009. In this regard, I confirm the preliminary view expressed in my February 2010 *Statement in the public interest*, that enrolment data is less useful than attainment data since an increase in enrolments may not necessarily correspond to more students completing courses or achieving qualifications.

This investigation also led me to conclude that, in the event the Tasmania *Tomorrow* reforms are reversed in some way, in the interests of both students and potential employers, early consideration needs to be given to how success of any reforms will be measured, and responsibility for, and ownership of, all enrolment and attainment data.

H M Blake

Auditor-General

22 June 2010

List of acronyms and abbreviations

ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
Academy	Tasmanian Academy
DoE	Department of Education
FTE	Full time equivalent
NSSC	National Schools Statistics Collection
Polytechnic	Tasmanian Polytechnic
PY10	Post-Year 10
Skills Institute	Tasmanian Skills Institute
TAFE	Technical and Further Education
TQA	Tasmanian Qualifications Authority
VET	Vocational Education Training

Executive summary

Executive summary

Background

The Tasmania *Tomorrow* initiatives were announced in mid-2007, in response to low and falling retention rates and to address skills shortages in the workforce. The 2010 *Report on Government Services* showed Tasmania's apparent retention rate from Year 10 to Year 12 was 65 percent (Australia 76 percent)¹.

The initiatives called for the creation of three new educational institutions, to replace senior-secondary colleges and technical and further education (TAFE) institutions:

- Tasmanian Academy (Academy): for students aiming to go to university
- Tasmanian Polytechnic (Polytechnic): for students requiring practical and applied learning (providing certificate and diploma courses and an avenue to higher education)
- Tasmanian Skills Institute (Skills Institute): for students employed as apprentices or trainees.

In early 2009, TAFE Tasmania was replaced by the Skills Institute and the Polytechnic. Four of the eight government senior-secondary colleges became campuses for the new Academy and Polytechnic. Additional colleges were to join the new system in 2010, with the view that by 2011 all government colleges would have joined.

In September 2009 the Premier reported a 12 percent increase in enrolments at the Academy and Polytechnic campuses. He also claimed there had been a 95 percent retention rate into third term. The Premier claimed retention rates in the colleges had never before been this high². However, these claims drew immediate criticism and scepticism from teachers, the media and Opposition parties.

In mid-October 2009, the Auditor-General received correspondence from the Premier and both leaders of the opposition parties requesting he review the processes by which Academy, Polytechnic and Skills Institute enrolment figures were prepared and managed. The Leaders of the Opposition also sought an audit of Post-Year 10 (PY10) 'active enrolments'.

¹ Productivity Commission *Report on Government Services 2010*, Section 4.30

² Tasmania, House of Assembly 2009, *Debates*, Part 1, 29 September 2009, pp 1–20.

Following advice that final enrolment and attainment figures for 2008 and 2009 would not be available prior to the March election the Auditor-General issued a public statement summarising audit work up to February 2010. The statement included findings that the Premier's claims were based on internal management data provided by the Academy, and that the August census of Academy and Polytechnic enrolments showed a 12 percent increase from 2008 to 2009. This increase was identified as predominantly due to enrolments at Hellyer.

Detailed audit conclusions

As to whether the Department of Education's enrolment data was accurate and useful and able to validate the Premier's claims.

Enrolment data supports the Premier's contention of a 12 percent increase in PY10 enrolment. The data used for input to National Schools Statistics Collection (NSSC) was found to be accurate and the processes used to compile that data reliable. On the other hand, the nationally agreed NSSC counting rules excluded some students at former TAFE campuses. Enrolment data has limited value for measuring student engagement in PY10 education since an enrolment does not necessarily translate to successful completion of a course.

As to whether attainment data held by the Tasmanian Qualifications Authority (TQA) was accurate and useful.

TQA's attainment data is accurate and provides a useful measure of student engagement in PY10 study. The attainment data showed a smaller increase in student numbers, compared to enrolments, but a decline in total units of credit attained.

Recommendations

We made no recommendations.

Audit Act 2008 section 30 — Submissions and comments received

Audit Act 2008 section 30 — Submissions and comments received

Introduction

In accordance with section 30(2) of the *Audit Act 2008*, a copy of this Report was provided to Department of Education and Tasmanian Qualifications Authority with a request for comment. A summary of findings was also provided to the Premier, Treasurer and Minister for Education with a request for comment or submissions.

The comments and submissions provided are not subject to the audit nor the evidentiary standards required in reaching an audit conclusion. Responsibility for the accuracy, fairness and balance of those comments rests solely with those who provided a response or comment.

Submissions and comments received

Department of Education

It would be premature to draw a qualitative relationship between the enrolment and attainment data and the 10 reforms, as students have only had one year of their two-year program in the new model. An objective comparison would only be possible after two years, and realistically only after the model was fully established.

While there has been a decrease in adult VET enrolments and activity in 2009, the 2009 data is comparable with 2007. In 2008, TAFE Tasmania undertook to complete qualifications for as many students as possible and this significantly increased 2008 activity. Consequently, comparisons between 2008 and 2009 VET data as presented in Table 4, needs to be made with caution, as 2009 activity was likely brought forward into 2008, thus inflating one year and decreasing the other.

To be included in the NSSC count as 'school' students, students needed to be undertaking a program that would enable them to achieve the full demands of the Tasmanian Certificate of Education. Prior to 2008, TAFE Tasmania students were not included in the count; therefore, for consistency, VET only students on former TAFE Tasmania sites were not counted in 2009.

Tasmanian Qualifications Authority

The Report covers the complex issues as clearly as possible.

Introduction

Introduction

Background

Prior to the 2007 Tasmania *Tomorrow* reforms, there had been little change to the Post-Year 10 (PY10) public education sector since the formation of TAFE Tasmania in the late 1990s³. Senior-secondary colleges had largely remained unchanged in structure since their formation in the late 1960s.

The Tasmania *Tomorrow* education initiative was first announced by the government in mid-2007, in response to concerns at low and falling retention rates from Year 10 to Year 12 and to address skills shortages in the workforce. The 2010 *Report on Government Services* showed that Tasmania's apparent retention rate from Year 10 to Year 12 was 65 percent (Australia 76 percent)⁴.

The initiative called for the creation of three new educational institutions, which would in time replace existing senior-secondary colleges and technical and further education (TAFE) institutions. The new institutions, to be fully set up by 2011, were:

- Tasmanian Academy (Academy): for students aiming to go to university
- Tasmanian Polytechnic (Polytechnic): for students requiring practical and applied learning (providing certificate and diploma courses and an avenue to higher education)
- Tasmanian Skills Institute (Skills Institute): for students employed as apprentices or trainees.

Collectively, these three new institutions are referred to as the Tasmania *Tomorrow* institutions throughout this Report.

In early 2009, TAFE Tasmania was replaced by the Skills Institute and the Polytechnic. Four of the eight government senior-secondary colleges became campuses for the new Academy and Polytechnic. Additional colleges were to join the new system in 2010, with the view that by 2011 all government colleges would have joined the new system. However, only Elizabeth College migrated to the new

³ Throughout this Report we will use PY10 to refer to students of government senior-secondary colleges and TAFE for 2008 and the Academy, the Polytechnic, non-transitioned colleges and the Skills Institute for 2009. Also included are students doing senior-secondary subjects at district high schools. The district high school students will not be separately referred to in this Report, but are included in student numbers where relevant.

⁴ Productivity Commission *Report on Government Services 2010*, Section 4.30

Academy/Polytechnic system in 2010. Rosny College chose to remain within the existing college system for an extra year. This cast uncertainty as to whether all colleges would migrate to the new system by 2011.

In mid-2009, there was significant public comment regarding the accuracy of enrolment figures quoted in Parliament by the Premier⁵. The Premier confirmed the publically reported figures in Budget Estimates hearings in June 2009, and that there had been a 12 percent increase in enrolments at the Academy and Polytechnic campuses – previously senior-secondary colleges – from 2008 to 2009⁶. The Premier then reported to Parliament in September 2009 that there had been a 95 percent student retention rate into third term at the Academy and Polytechnic campuses, drawing on figures supplied by the CEOs of the Academy and the Polytechnic. The Premier claimed retention rates in the colleges had never before been this high⁷. However, these claims drew immediate criticism and scepticism from teachers, the media and Opposition parties.

In mid-October 2009, the Auditor-General received correspondence from the Premier and both leaders of the Opposition parties requesting he review the processes by which the 2009 enrolments for the Academy, Polytechnic and Skills Institute were prepared and managed. The Leaders of the Opposition parties also sought an audit of PY10 ‘active enrolments’.

What actually changed?

The following subsections summarise changes introduced with the Tasmania *Tomorrow* reforms.

(i) Changes: structure

- Senior-secondary colleges became shared campuses of the Academy and the Polytechnic⁸.
- TAFE Tasmania locations became shared campuses, with trainees or apprentices absorbed into the new Skills Institute and other students being incorporated into the Polytechnic.

⁵ Also the Minister for Education

⁶ Tasmania, House of Assembly 2009, *Estimates Committee A*, Part 2, 22 June 2009.

⁷ Tasmania, House of Assembly 2009, *Debates*, Part 1, 29 September 2009, pp 1–20.

⁸ At the time of publishing this Report only five of the eight government senior-secondary colleges had joined the new structure.

- Separate college and TAFE administrative operations were replaced by the Shared Services Unit to provide administrative functions for the three Tasmania *Tomorrow* institutions.

(ii) *Changes: staff and teachers*

- Little has changed for Academy staff that used to teach in senior-secondary schools; they still teach primarily the same subjects, in the same classrooms.
- Introduction of the Polytechnic meant some trade-qualified instructors and registered trainers were required to deliver what had formerly been college subjects, for the first time. Some TAFE instructors also had to relocate to the Polytechnic campuses.
- Teachers in the Tasmanian Polytechnic are required to be registered with the Tasmanian Teachers Registration Board from the start of 2011.
- The move to the Polytechnic led to some former TAFE instructors having to provide pastoral care including course and career planning for the first time. While posing a new challenge for the instructors, the extra guidance was one of the expected benefits of the Tasmania *Tomorrow* reforms.
- Administrative changes caused some disruption with matters previously dealt with at a personal level by Assistant Principals now being handled by the Shared Services Unit. This involved physical relocation of some staff. Introduction of online administrative systems also caused disruption.
- The Shared Services Unit initially had ‘teething’ problems with student records databases, leading to difficulties with recording of attendances and scheduling of resources.

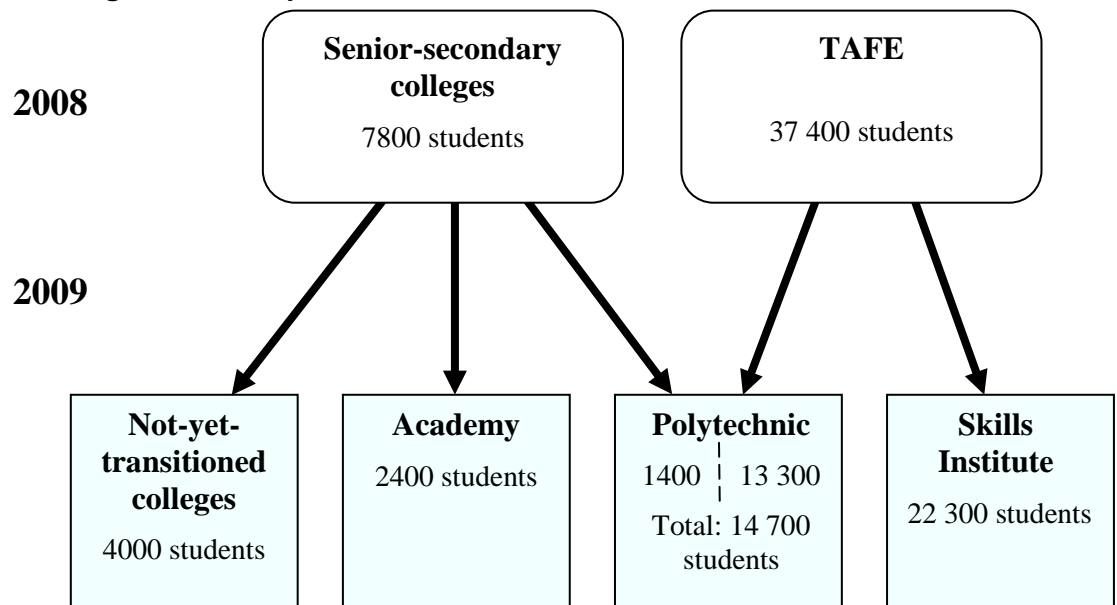
(iii) *Changes: students*

- Little has changed for students attending the Academy who still enrol in the same subjects, in the same classrooms.
- In 2008, PY10 students enrolling in Vocational Education Training (VET) subjects at government senior-secondary schools were limited to Certificates I and II. Since 2009, the Polytechnic has enabled students to enrol in an

expanded range of VET courses while continuing to study in a school or college-style environment.

- Polytechnic students also receive pastoral care including career and course guidance.
- Attending classes at more than one campus has been streamlined, with most students not required to travel between campuses during the day.

Figure 1: Comparison of the old and new structure



The values used in Figure 1 are indicative only and are intended to give the user a sense of the flows between the old and new systems.

Audit objective

The audit objective was to examine enrolment and attainment numbers and to form an opinion as to the reliability of the process used to produce that information. We also wanted to verify the validity of the Premier's claims.

Audit scope

The scope of this audit was limited to 2008 and 2009 enrolment and attainment data for:

- Government senior-secondary colleges
- Academy
- Polytechnic.

Audit criteria

Criteria for this audit were:

- accuracy and usefulness of DoE's enrolment data
- validity of the claims by the Premier
- accuracy and usefulness of attainment data held by the Tasmanian Qualifications Authority (TQA).

Audit approach

To conduct the audit, we:

- examined documentation
- performed sampling
- analysed enrolment and attainment data
- conducted interviews.

Timing

Planning for this audit began in November 2009. Fieldwork was completed in April 2010 and the Report was finalised in May 2010.

Resources

The total cost of the audit excluding production costs was \$82 000.

1 Enrolment data

1 Enrolment data

1.1 *Background*

DoE and the three Tasmania *Tomorrow* institutions collect enrolment data for both internal and external uses.

In August of previous years, DoE provided college enrolment data to the Commonwealth Government for funding and statistical purposes, known as the August census. In August 2009 DoE provided the Commonwealth with Academy and Polytechnic enrolment figures for the first time.

DoE also conducts an internal census in February using the same methodology as the August census. The Department uses the February census to determine resourcing requirements for all government schools and colleges. However, in 2009 this information was not produced for the Academy and Polytechnic, because of implementation difficulties with enrolment databases. A February enrolment census was successfully undertaken for 2010.

This Chapter examines August 2009 census data to ensure the underlying records and collation processes were accurate. We also looked at the usefulness of this data and compared it to the information released by the Premier in September 2009.

1.2 *August census enrolment data: accuracy*

Whilst numerous different enrolment figures have been publicly released and commented on, we decided the most reliable enrolment data was contained within the August census, which is used by DoE to report to the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS).

These statistics are used by the ABS in a nationwide collection exercise called the National Schools Statistics Collection (NSSC), which collects enrolment numbers for all primary and secondary schools. In addition to counting numbers of enrolments, students are counted on a full-time equivalent basis (FTE) to ensure that part-time students are not given the same weight as full-time students.

To ensure the accuracy of the August census we:

- examined the methodology used to collate the information
- sample tested the underlying student databases
- followed up exceptions from our testing
- interviewed staff from DoE, the Shared Services Unit, the Academy, the Polytechnic and TQA.

We were satisfied that the underlying student records were accurate and that DoE's compilation of the census figures followed detailed national counting rules, including, for example, removal of duplicate records.

We also found that DoE was able to supervise the August census in much the same way it had done in previous years. DoE controlled the overall census process, but worked closely with the Shared Services Unit to ensure that the enrolment data provided was accurate.

1.3 *August census enrolment data: results*

After deciding that the most reliable enrolment data was contained in the August Census, we looked at the actual enrolment figures produced. Table 1 compares 2008 and 2009 enrolments, at those campuses that were either still senior-secondary colleges or had previously been senior-secondary colleges.

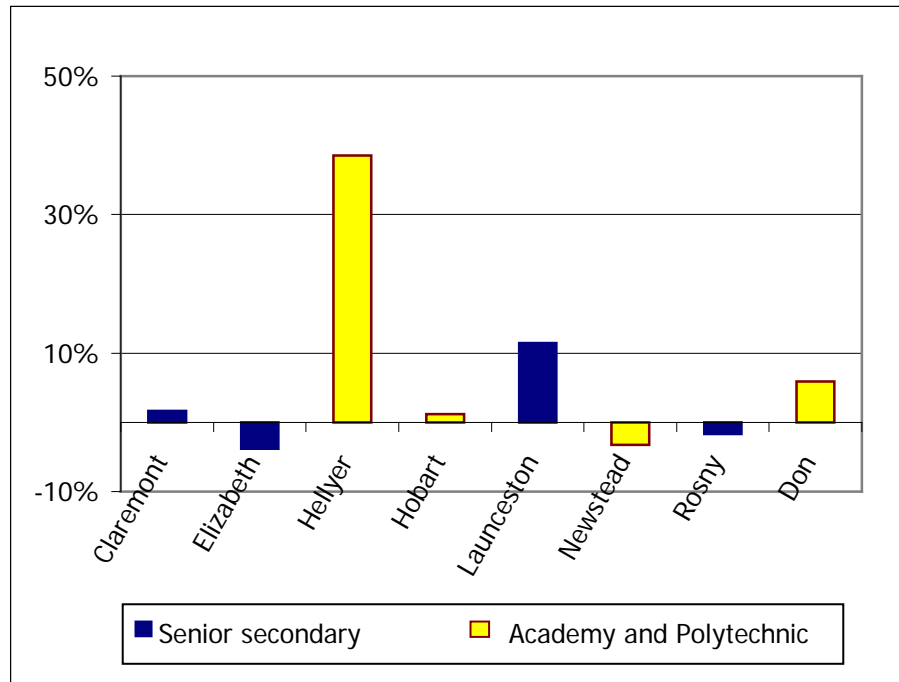
Table 1: August census enrolments 2008 and 2009 (full-time equivalents)

	2008*	2009	Change
Academy and Polytechnic campuses formerly colleges	3037	3416	12%
Senior-secondary colleges	3630	3672	1%
High Schools/District High Schools	460	417	-9%
Total	7127	7505	5%

* All figures rounded and 2008 enrolment figures not audited by TAO.

As previously reported in our *Statement in the public interest*, released in early February 2010, the data supported the Premier's contention of a 12 percent increase in enrolments at the Academy and Polytechnic campuses from 2008 to 2009.

Whilst Table 1 gives an overall enrolment figure, we also examined NSSC enrolment figures at each of the campuses for 2008 and 2009. Figure 2 shows the fluctuations in enrolment numbers at each campus.

Figure 2: Changes in enrolments between 2008 and 2009

For individual colleges other than Hellyer, changes in enrolment numbers were relatively small although the increase at Launceston (11 percent) and Don (7 percent) were also significant. On the other hand, Hellyer College's enrolment figures increased by 39 percent from 2008 to 2009, accounting for most of the 12 percent increase in enrolments at the Academy and Polytechnic campuses.

1.3.1 Enrolments at Hellyer

Hellyer campus is unique in that it has all three of the Tasmania *Tomorrow* institutions present on one site. Because of this feature, the Hellyer site is particularly well suited to the Tasmania *Tomorrow* reforms since student access to the greater range of subjects offered is not discouraged by geographic difficulties.

Nonetheless, we were concerned that the Hellyer enrolment numbers might represent errors in either the database or in the application of the NSSC counting rules. With that in mind, we substantially increased our test sample for Hellyer and reviewed the collation process. In addition we checked whether attainment data mirrored the enrolment data in showing a steep increase at Hellyer. We also verified that the increased student numbers in 2009 had caused difficulties for those charged with accommodating the higher student numbers.

In order to identify reasons for the increase, we sought explanations from the CEO of the Academy as well as responsible staff in the Shared Services Unit and DoE. The additional sampling conducted

at Hellyer provided reassurance that student enrolment records were correct.

Factors contributing to the increase may have included:

- community support for certificated outcomes from compulsory education in a predominantly trade-based area
- greater number of students entering from Year 10 with a reduction in PY10 students continuing at district high schools
- improved retention of students from Year 11
- increased number of students enrolling from the non-government sector⁹
- reduced employment opportunities for young people due to the economic climate (i.e. fewer PY10 students entering regionally-based employment such as local farms)
- enhanced range of options available to PY10 students with the convenience of ex-TAFE workshops at the same geographical location.

1.4 *August census enrolment data: usefulness*

The August census data has the benefit that it already has to be produced for the ABS. As a measure of enrolment it is also intuitive and readily comparable with other states in the form of retention rates from Year 10 to Year 12. However, there are a number of problems associated with the measure:

- Census data, as defined by the NSSC counting rules, only includes students based at the traditional colleges. Students now in the Polytechnic, but based at the old TAFE sites are generally not included¹⁰. We would have liked to compare 2008 and 2009 enrolments for the full college, Academy and Polytechnic cohort.

Ultimately, we determined that no meaningful comparison was possible since the type of enrolment at

⁹ Australian Technical Colleges in Burnie and Launceston closed in 2009

¹⁰ A small number of students based at old TAFE sites who are enrolled in senior-secondary subjects are also included in census data.

the former TAFE varied too widely to provide a useful measure¹¹.

- The measure can overstate the level of genuine involvement in PY10 education, by including any person that enrolls unless they formally withdraw¹². As such, it does not account for some students who cease attending lessons.
- An important measure of the success of an education system is the qualifications and skills obtained, rather than enrolments.

Accordingly, we believe that attainment is a more useful measure than enrolment. This will be further discussed in Chapter 2.

1.5 *Enrolment data supplied to the Premier*

We set out to determine whether the Premier's claims of a 12 percent increase in enrolment numbers and a 95 percent retention rate were accurate. We found that the Premier's claims were based on internal management data provided by the Academy. We did not attempt to reconcile the Academy and Polytechnic's internal management data to the official student dataset. Such an exercise would have proved difficult because of the way enrolment data was captured. It would also have been difficult to undertake such a task retrospectively. However, as stated in Section 1.3, the August census data showed a 12 percent increase at the Academy and the Polytechnic campuses from 2008 to 2009, predominantly due to increased enrolments at Hellyer.

One difficulty with the 95 percent retention rate claim is that the rate may be overstated by not taking account of some students who had ceased attending, but not formally withdrawn. It should also be noted that in using the term 'retention rate', the Premier was referring to students continuing their courses into third term rather than the more customary usage, which refers to students continuing from one year to another. When the term is used with the more customary meaning, the retention rate from Year 10 to Year 12 for full-time Tasmanian secondary students is approximately 65 percent. As noted in the Introduction to this Report, the unfavourable comparison with the Australian retention rate (76

¹¹ Enrolments vary widely, for example; some students would enrol for an afternoon course and some for a full-time enrolment over the full year.

¹² There are processes in place to ensure this is minimalised.

percent) was one of the motivations for the Tasmania *Tomorrow* reforms.

1.6 *Conclusion*

Enrolment data supports the Premier's contention of a 12 percent increase in PY10 enrolment. The data used for input to NSSC was found to be accurate and the processes used to compile that data reliable. On the other hand, the nationally agreed NSSC counting rules excluded some students at former TAFE campuses. Enrolment data has limited value for measuring student engagement in PY10 education since an enrolment does not necessarily translate to successful completion of a course.

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2 Attainment data

2 Attainment data

2.1 *Background*

In this Section we review attainment data from TQA and whether the information produced is reliable, useful and accurate.

2.2 *TQA attainment data: accuracy*

TQA was established under the *Tasmanian Qualifications Authority Act 2003* and has the responsibility of issuing consolidated statements of qualifications. It is responsible for assessment and certification in senior-secondary syllabuses and TQA-accredited courses. It also recognises some other awards and courses including VET qualifications and competencies.

Prior to 2009, TQA attainment profiles did not include courses undertaken at TAFE. However, since the *Tasmania Tomorrow* reforms, the TQA database has included courses delivered by the Polytechnic and Skills Institute. The usefulness of that data has been subsequently increased by the addition of 2008 TAFE attainment data.

A PY10 student first appears in TQA's database through pathway planning information collected during Year 10. Enrolment information is also collected from databases managed by the Department and the Shared Services Unit. A student's enrolment and attainment record is not removed from the database when he or she leaves school.

The TQA database of attainment profiles is a live record collection; units of credit are continuously added to the records as courses are completed and results are awarded. Profiles are regularly updated. Following successful completion of a course, students are sent a record of the units of credit they have attained, which triggers prompt correction of any data errors.

We were able to match a sample of student records from TQA to DoE records. We also noted a joint review, undertaken by independent consultants and personnel from TQA's counterparts in South Australia, identified a high level of commitment to quality and accuracy of results at TQA.

We were satisfied that the processes by which student attainment data were added and maintained were reliable.

2.3 TQA attainment data: results

In Section 1.3, we identified the number of students enrolled in the Academy, the Polytechnic and the not-yet-transitioned colleges using August census data provided to the NSSC.

TQA provided us with information for an equivalent set of students who had attained at least one unit of credit¹³. The data is summarised in Table 2.

Table 2: NSSC students¹⁴ with at least one unit of credit

	2008	2009	Increase
Academy and Polytechnic	2932	3102	5.8%
Senior-secondary¹⁵	3474	3604	3.7%

From 2008 to 2009 there was an increase in the number of students obtaining at least one unit of credit, at both the Academy and Polytechnic, and at the remaining senior-secondary colleges. The Academy and Polytechnic increase was smaller than the 12 percent increase in enrolments, discussed in Section 1.3, but still greater than the increase at the not-yet-transitioned colleges.

However, the above information only describes students based at college campuses, with some Polytechnic students based at the old TAFE sites excluded. In order to include the TAFE sites, we then compared the total number of students at government PY10 institutions, including adult VET students, recorded by TQA for 2008 and 2009.

Table 3: Students at PY10 institutions

	2008	2009	Change
Students	37 232	34 524	-7.3%

Whilst total student numbers have declined, the usefulness of this measure is impaired by the inclusion of people already in employment undertaking professional development courses with the Skills Institute and a significant number of part-time students. We considered there is little value in comparing total numbers of students as the figures give equal values to a full-year, full-time,

¹³ A 'unit of credit' is a point score allocated for successful completion of a course, which can range from a pre-tertiary full-year course of study (15 units) to half-day industry course (1 unit).

¹⁴ The description 'NSSC students' is used to describe those students included in DoE's enrolment data compiled using NSSC rules, as discussed in Section 1.3. It includes students enrolled at campuses that were senior-secondary colleges or had previously been senior-secondary colleges. 'Students' are counted on a headcount basis.

¹⁵ Includes high school and district high school students studying senior-secondary subjects.

pre-tertiary course, a short duration full-time course or a one-off three-hour course.

We wanted to capture a subset of students that corresponded with the total PY10 student population. We considered a reasonable approximation by limiting the data to 15 to 19-year-olds who had obtained at least one unit of credit.

Table 4: Students 15 to 19 years old in PY10 education

	2008	2009	Change
Students	9212	9671	5.0%
Units of credit	445 494	430 548	-3.4%
FTE¹⁶	6457	6431	-0.4%

Table 4 shows an increase in student numbers and a reduction in the amount of credit being attained. This could be attributed to more students undertaking courses that result in less units of credit.

We were advised that data provided to TQA relating to students enrolled at TAFE in 2008 did not separate units of credit attained in 2008 from units of credit they attained in previous years. Therefore, the units of credit listed in Table 4 for 2008 are overstated. To reduce the impact of the extra units of credit on our analysis, we also considered student numbers by FTE. The decrease in FTEs between 2008 and 2009 was only marginal. The information in Table 4 is consistent with an increase in participation by students who otherwise would not have been engaged in PY10 education and training.

2.4 *TQA attainment data: usefulness*

Attainment data shares one of the problems of the enrolment data, in that we could not find a measure of students that took reasonable account of the wide disparity in courses undertaken. On the other hand, ‘units of credit’ are a reasonably useful measure of qualifications and skills obtained.

¹⁶ To represent FTE in TQA attainment data the number of students who had attained 60 or more units of credit were counted as 1 FTE, the remainder were counted pro-rata, for example a student attaining 30 units of credit was counted as 0.5 FTE.

2.5 Conclusion

TQA's attainment data is accurate and provides a useful measure of student engagement in PY10 study. The attainment data showed a smaller increase in student numbers, compared to enrolments, but a decline in total units of credit attained.

Independent auditor's conclusion

Independent auditor's conclusion

This independent conclusion is addressed to the President of the Legislative Council and to the Speaker of the House of Assembly. It relates to my investigation of the number of enrolments and attainments by Academy and Polytechnic students, recorded by the Department of Education (DoE) and the Tasmanian Qualifications Authority (TQA) and the validity of the Premier's claims relating to that information. My investigation was based on the audit objective and audit scope detailed in the Introduction to this Report.

In developing the scope of this investigation and completing my work, the parties interviewed provided me with all of the information that I requested. There was no effort by any party to the audit to limit the scope of my work. This Report is a public document and its use is not restricted in any way by me or by any other person or party.

Responsibility of the Secretary of the Department of Education

The Secretary is responsible for the accuracy of enrolment data and the reliability of the process used to produce that information.

Responsibility of the Chief Executive Officer of the Tasmanian Qualifications Authority

The Chief Executive Officer is responsible for the accuracy of attainment data and the reliability of the process used to produce that information.

Auditor-General's responsibility

In the context of this investigation, my responsibility was to examine enrolment and attainment numbers and to form an opinion as to the reliability of the process used to produce that information. I also wanted to verify the validity of the Premier's claims.

I conducted my audit in accordance with Australian Auditing Standard ASAE 3100 *Compliance Engagements* which required me to comply with relevant ethical requirements relating to audit engagements. I planned and performed this assignment to obtain reasonable assurance of whether the processes followed were reasonable.

My work involved obtaining evidence of the processes followed by DoE, the Shared Services Unit and TQA to ensure enrolment data was accurate, complied with established counting rules and the processes used to collect that data were reliable. My procedures, based on the objectives and scope outlined in the Introduction to this

Report were established by me without influence. The procedures depended on my judgement, based on the objectives and scope and on my assessment of the risks of material misstatement of the information obtained by me as part of this investigation.

I believe that the evidence I have obtained was sufficient and appropriate to provide a basis for my conclusion.

Auditor-General's conclusion

Based on my objectives and scope and for reasons outlined in the remainder of this Report, it is my conclusion that DoE and TQA student records were, in all material respects, accurate and the processes used to compile them reliable. Enrolment data supports the Premier's contention of a 12 percent increase in PY10 enrolment.

H M Blake

Auditor-General

22 June 2010

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Recent reports

Recent reports

Date tabled	Special Report No.	Title
Apr 2007	65	Management of an award breach Selected allowances and nurses' overtime
Jun 2007	66	Follow-up audits
Jun 2007	67	Corporate credit cards
Jun 2007	68	Risdon Prison: Business case
Oct 2007	69	Public building security
Nov 2007	70	Procurement in government departments Payment of accounts by government departments
Nov 2007	71	Property in police possession Control of assets: Portable and attractive items
Apr 2008	72	Public sector performance information
Jun 2008	73	Timeliness in the Magistrates Court
Jun 2008	74	Follow up of performance audits April–October 2005
Sep 2008	75	Executive termination payments
Nov 2008	76	Complaint handling in local government
Nov 2008	77	Food safety: safe as eggs?
Mar 2009	78	Management of threatened species
May 2009	79	Follow up of performance audits April–August 2006
May 2009	80	Hydro hedges
Jun 2009	81	Contract management
Aug 2009	82	Head of Agency contract renewal
Oct 2009	83	Communications by Government and The Tasmanian Brand project
Oct 2009	84	Funding the Tasmanian Education Foundation
Nov 2009	85	Speed-detection devices
Nov 2009	86	Major works procurement: Nation Building projects, Treasurer's Instructions 1299 and 1214
Jun 2010	87	Employment of staff to support MPs
Jun 2010	88	Public Trustee: management of deceased estates

Current projects

Current projects

Performance and compliance audits that the Auditor-General is currently conducting:

Title	Subject
Profitability, and economic benefits to Tasmania, of Forestry Tasmania	Evaluates Forestry Tasmania's long-term financial and economic performance.
Public service productivity	The audit will express an opinion on productivity in the Tasmanian State Service in relation to the number of employees over a ten-year period. It will examine changes in efficiency of public sector outputs and whether core services have increased in quantity, quality or range.
Fraud control	Assesses the effectiveness of fraud controls in government entities.
Follow up of performance audits	Ascertains the extent to which recommendations from previous audits (namely four reports tabled from November 2006 to April 2007) have been implemented.