



Tasmanian
Audit Office

Improving outcomes for Tasmanian senior secondary students

Report No.1 of 2022-23





Audit objective

The objective of the audit was to express a reasonable assurance opinion on the effectiveness of the Department of Education's implementation of education reforms, including extending State secondary schools to Years 11 and 12, the Years 9 to 12 Project and implementing changes resulting from the *Education Act 2016*.



Audit scope

In scope agency:	Department of Education (DoE)
Period covered:	From early 2014 to end of fieldwork 2022
Projects covered:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Years 11 and 12 Extension Program• Years 9 to 12 Project• Youth Participation Database.
Out of scope:	Activities that were the responsibility of non-government schools.



Audit criteria

1. Did DoE plan effectively to implement the Projects?
2. Did DoE implement the Projects efficiently and effectively?
3. Was reporting on the progress of implementation and impact of the Projects sufficient and appropriate?

Audit conclusion

DoE's implementation of the education reforms encompassing the extension of State secondary schools to Years 11 and 12, the Years 9 to 12 Project and the Youth Participation Database did not perform, in terms of efficiency and effectiveness, with respect to the identified criteria of the performance audit.

This is because DoE only partially performed against the following criteria:

- 1.1 Did DoE develop plans and related strategies based on evidence in the planning of the Projects?
- 2.1 Did DoE efficiently and effectively allocate resources to support implementation of the Projects?

Recommendations

The Department of Education (or its succeeding agency):

1. Ensures project initiation planning is undertaken as a first step in the implementation of reforms.
2. Undertakes communication planning to define key terminology, develop key messages and support a shared understanding of the project and its intended outputs and outcomes.
3. Supports the resourcing of project teams, including people with project management experience and/or expertise.

Recommendations continued

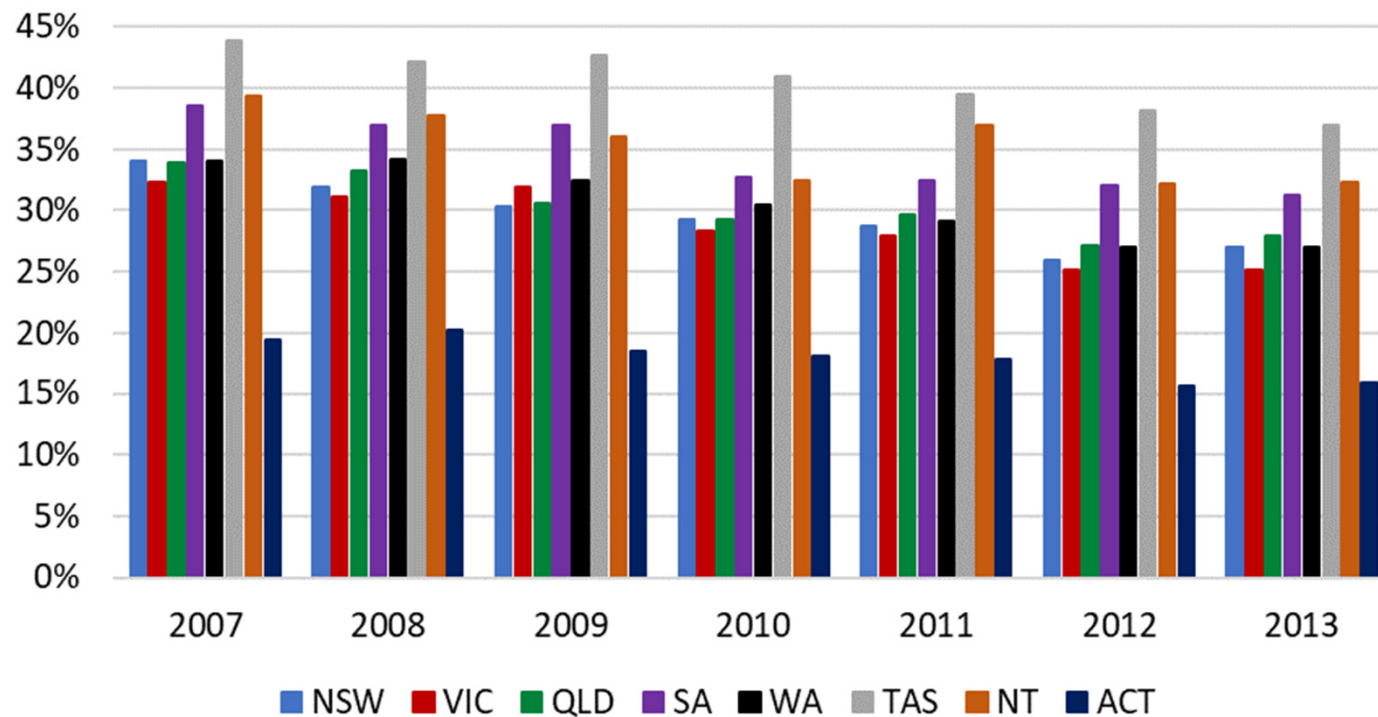
4. Ensures its project management approach includes clear responsibilities and accountabilities down to the project task level.
5. Regularly reports implementation progress towards benefits to be realised from projects to the appropriate oversight body against performance measures established from project commencement.

Recommendations continued

6. Continues to work with stakeholders, to ensure shared use of and access to relevant data, to drive evidence-based:
 - policy development and project management
 - course design and delivery
 - student engagement.
7. Develops data literacy initiatives, focussed on Years 9-12, to support system, project and school level insights to inform ongoing policy and project implementation.

The path to reform

Proportion of Tasmanians that had not completed Year 12 or its equivalent



The projects covered in the audit

- Extension of State secondary schools to Year 12, referred to as the **Extension Program**, commenced 2014
- Implementation of the Government's response to the 2016 Australian Council for Educational Research review, referred to as the **Years 9 to 12 Project**, commenced 2018
- Implementation of the **Youth Participation Database**, which monitors compliance with the approved learning program requirements of the *Education Act*, commenced 2018.

Findings – criteria 1

- Planning for the Projects varied and would have benefited from using consistent project management processes
- When implementing government policy, project planning should include consideration of options available for implementation. For the Extension Program, DoE moved straight to implementing the policy reforms laid out by the newly elected Liberal Government in 2014 without full consideration of implementation options.
- The project plan for the Extension Program was not comprehensive or complete.

Findings – criteria 1

- The project plan for the Years 9 to 12 Project did not sufficiently detail the complex nature of the reform
- A standalone project plan was not established for the Youth Participation Database, although DoE had developed a number of planning documents
- Respective project Steering Committees did not map the responsibilities and accountabilities for project tasks of individual projects. This meant that there was no structured process to consider the interrelationships between the multiple projects affecting Years 9 to 12 when allocating DoE's resources to the Projects.

Findings – criteria 2

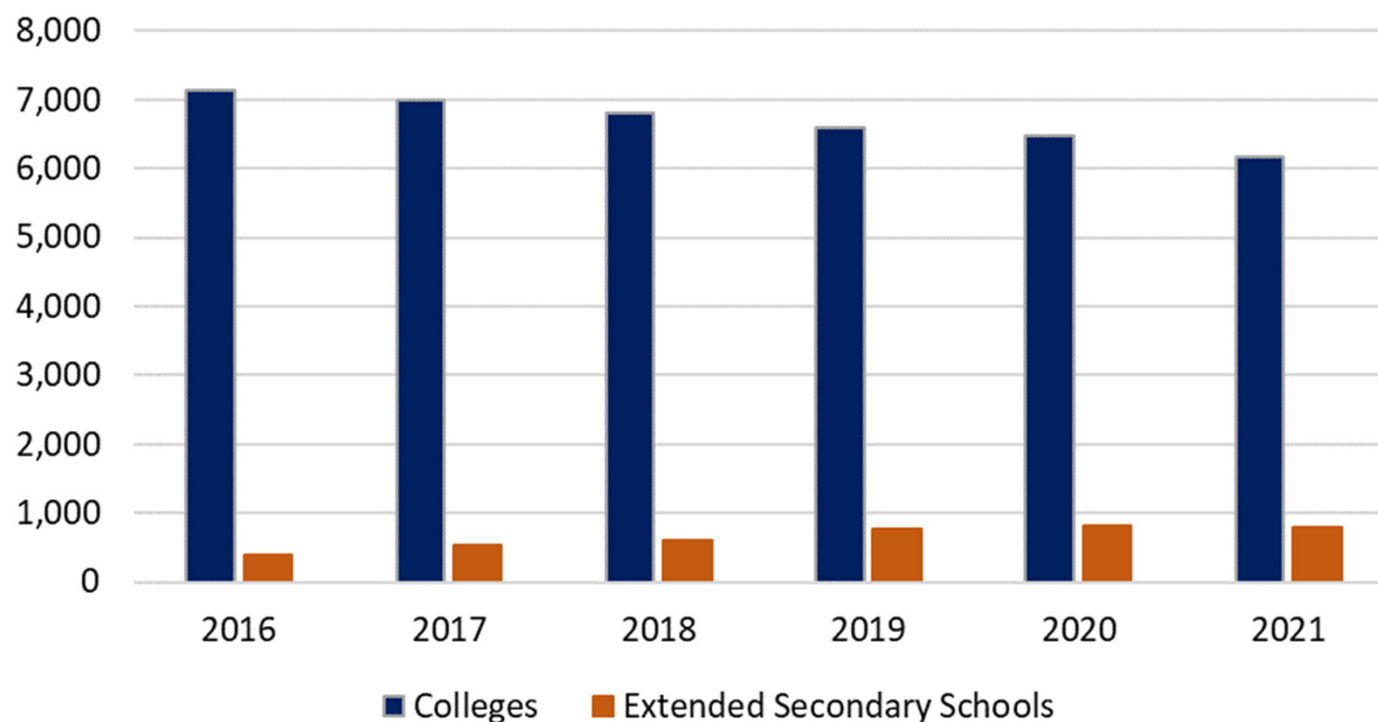
- There were a number of factors that impeded the success of the projects:
 - absence of a structured process to consider the interrelationships between multiple projects affecting Years 9 to 12
 - failure to embed periodic project risk reviews during project implementation
 - limited availability of project management expertise
 - key person dependencies

Findings – criteria 2

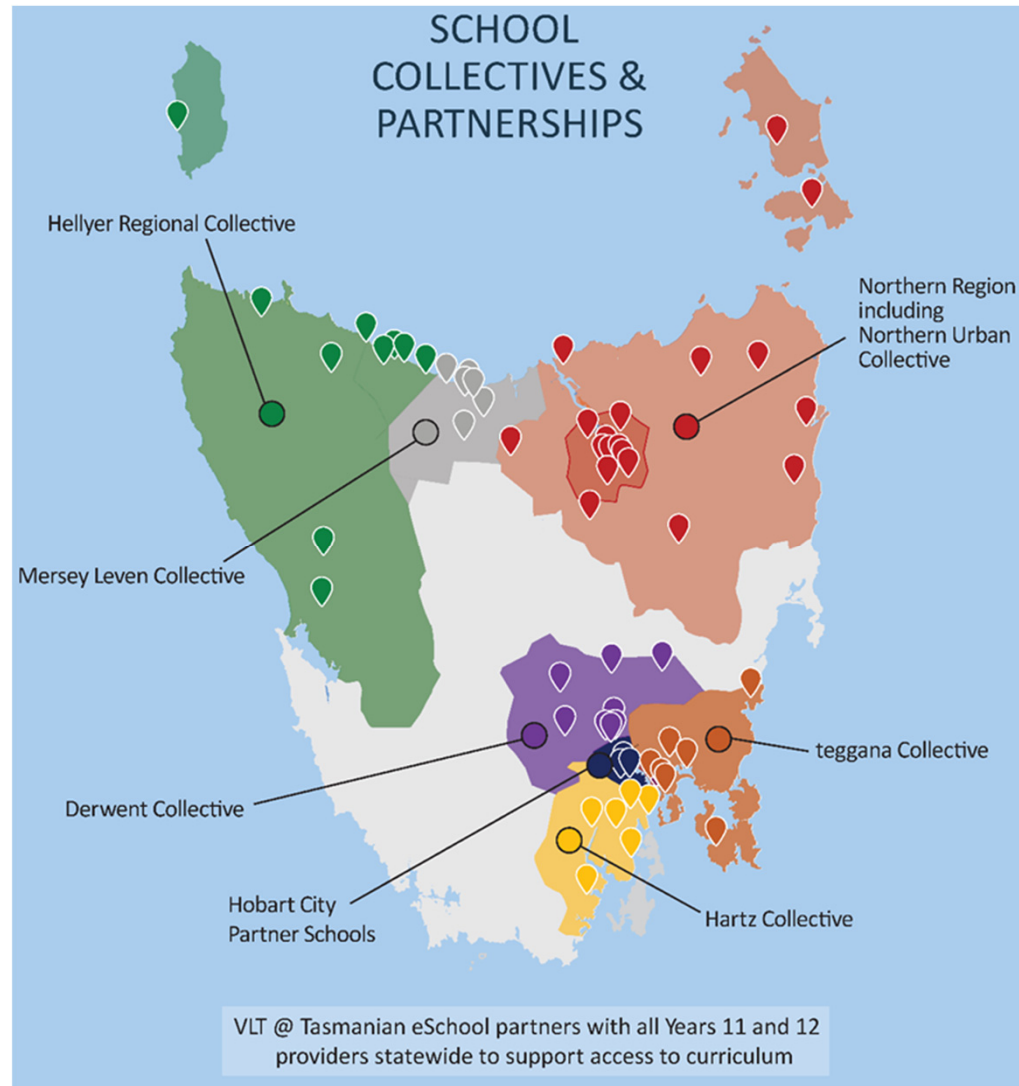
- inconsistent record keeping
- under-estimation of the time needed to implement the projects.
- On a positive note, once communication frameworks were in place, communication with, and input from, stakeholders was generally effective across the projects.

Findings – criteria 2

FTE enrolment numbers by State secondary school type, 2016 to 2021

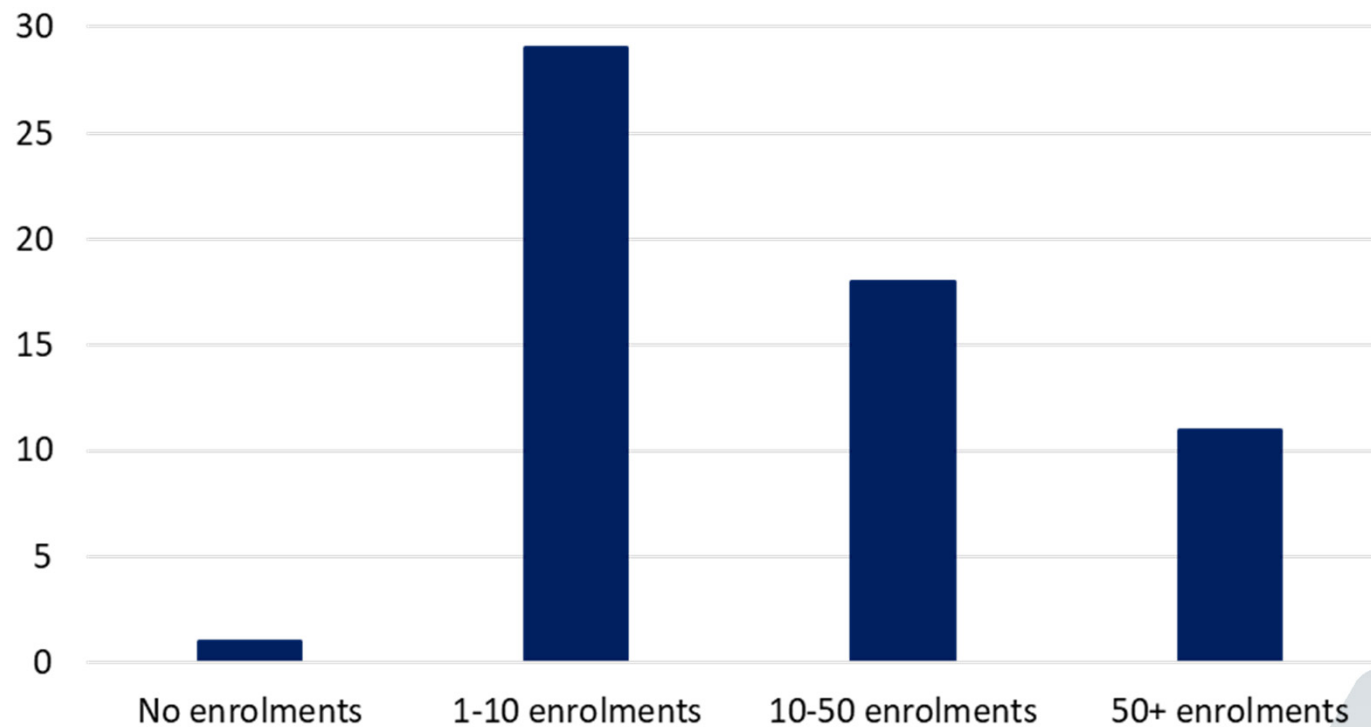


Findings – criteria 2



Findings – criteria 2

Enrolments numbers for State secondary schools in 2021



Findings – criteria 3

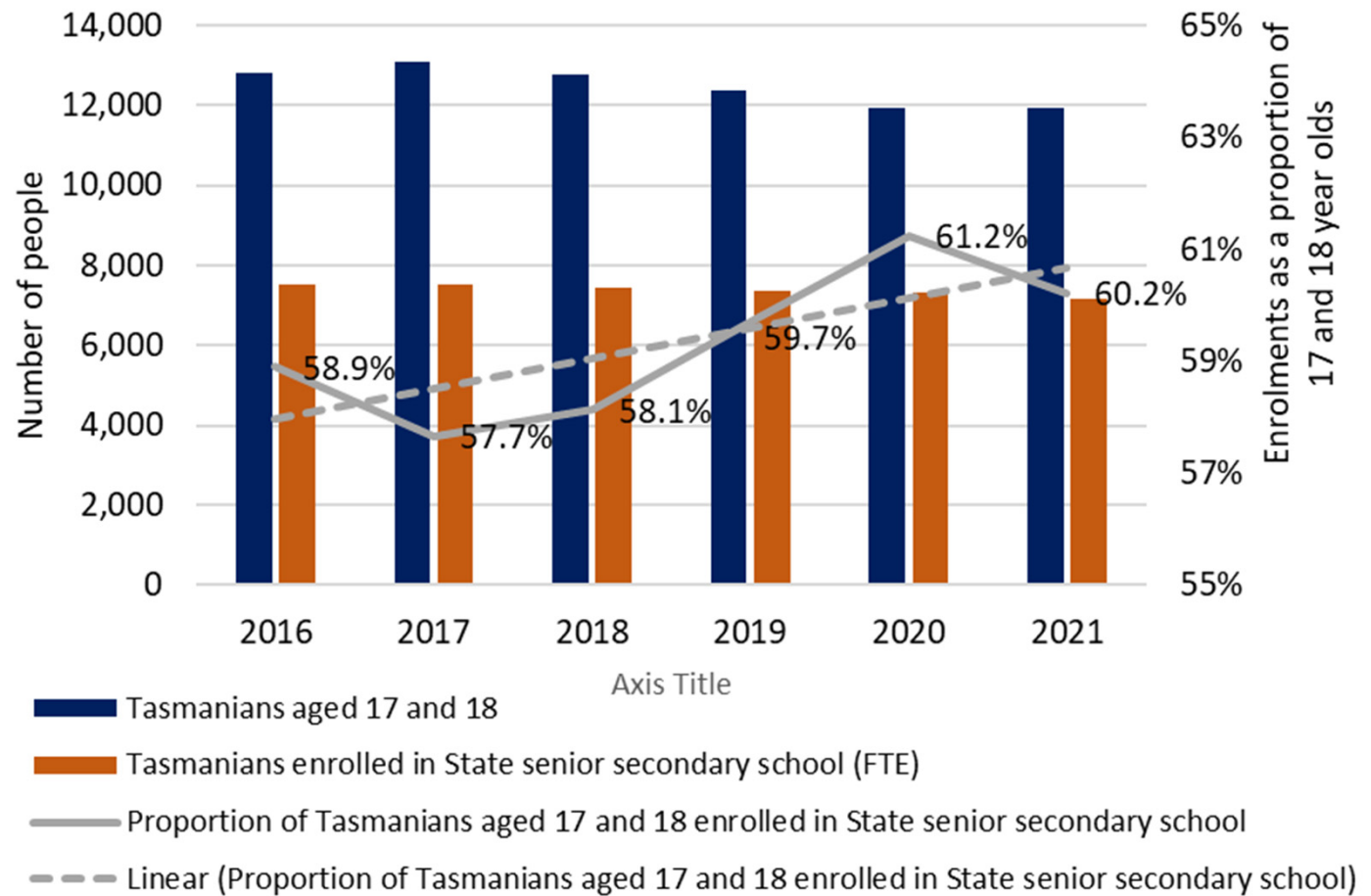
- The Projects would have benefited from the development and use of a set of measures to evaluate progress and impact.
- A set of measures to evaluate progress and impact were established but not reported on for the Years 9 to 12 Project.
- Similar measures were not initially established for the Extension Program or Youth Participation Database.
- Internal reporting on the Extension Program improved over time.
- Shared use of data held by data custodians could have supported the Years 9 to 12 Project to drive better outcomes.

Findings – criteria 3

- The range of education reforms implemented since 2014 makes it difficult to attribute the improvement in senior secondary student education outcomes to any individual reform initiative.
- Broadly, performance is heading in the right direction.

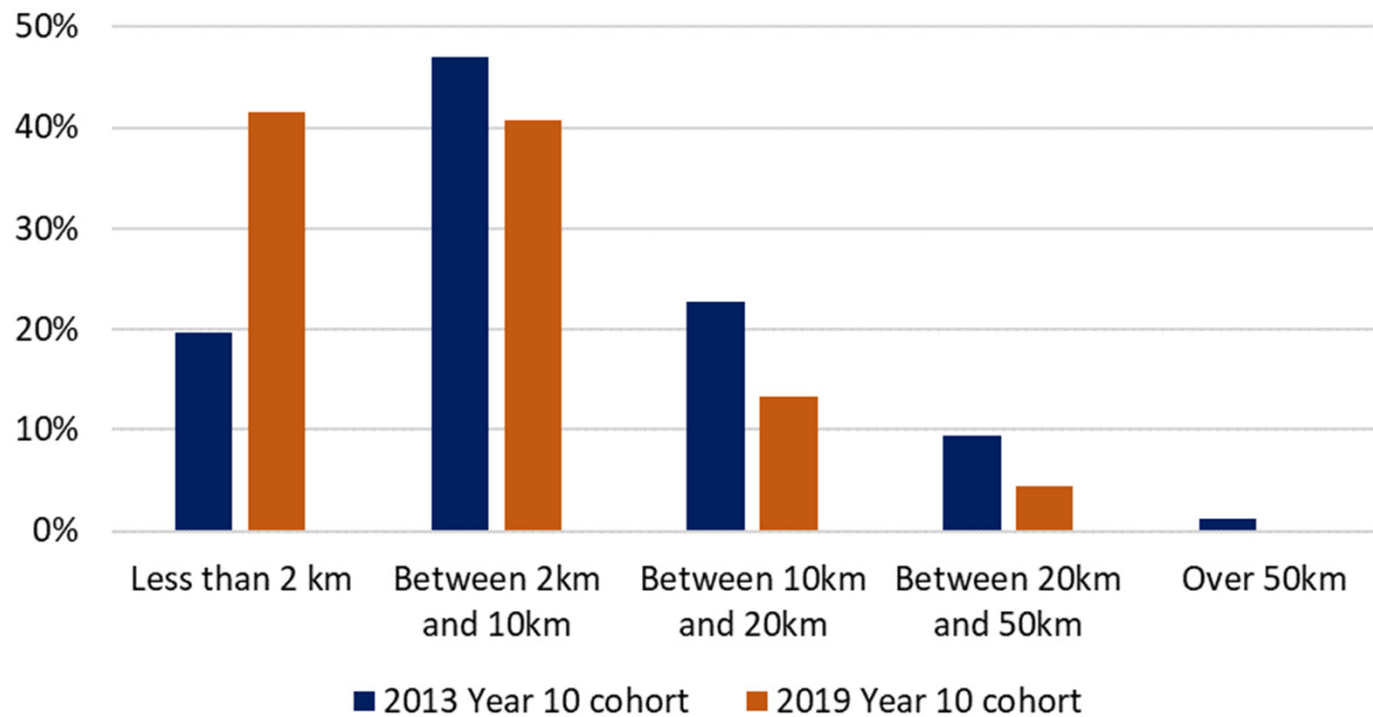
Findings – criteria 3

Enrolments in State senior secondary schools as a proportion of Tasmanians aged between 17-18 is increasing



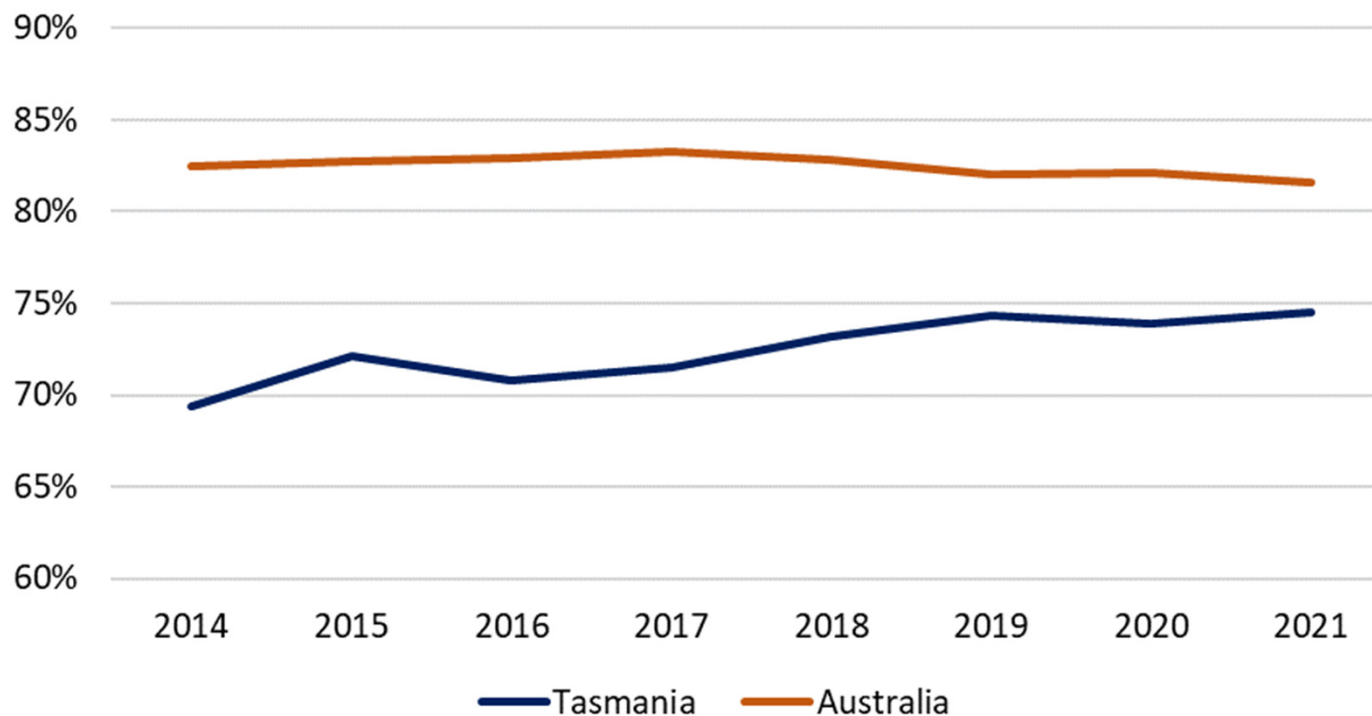
Findings – criteria 3

Access to senior secondary courses since 2014



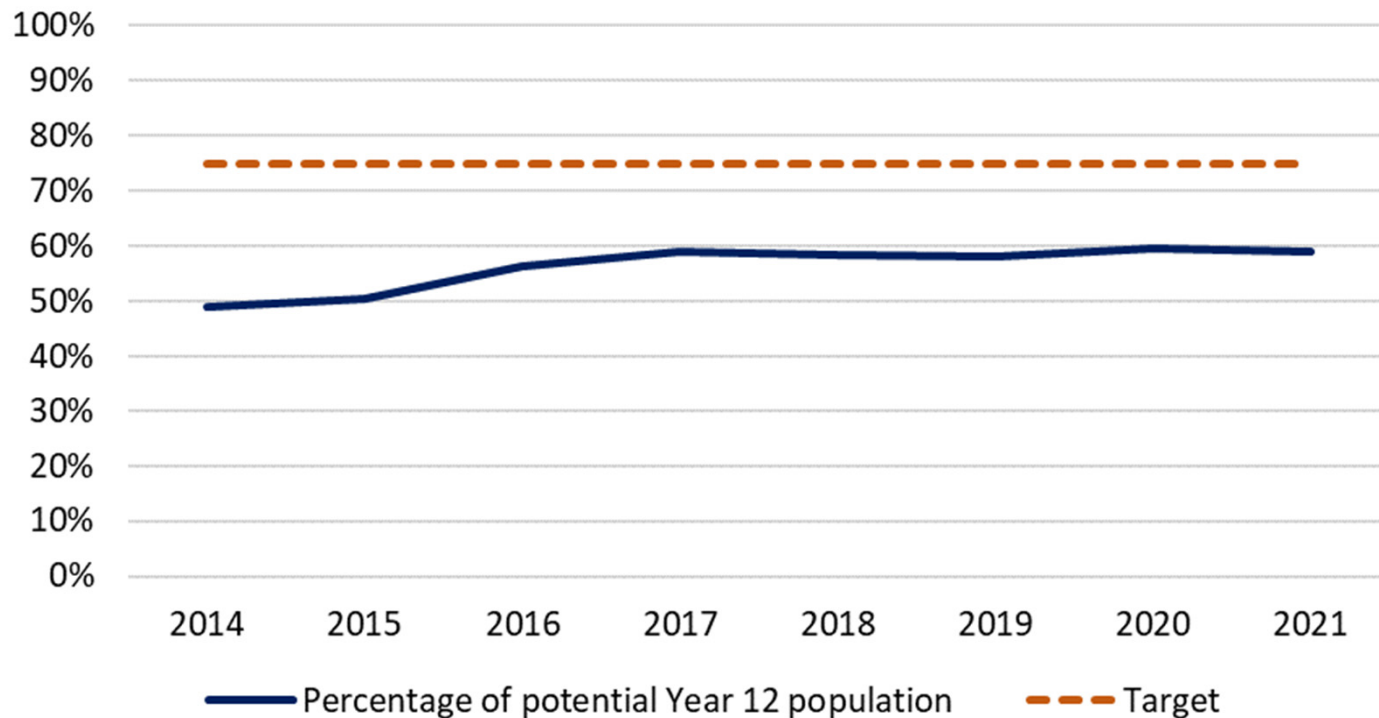
Findings – criteria 3

State-level apparent retention rates, which increased from 69.4 per cent in 2014 to 74.5 per cent in 2021



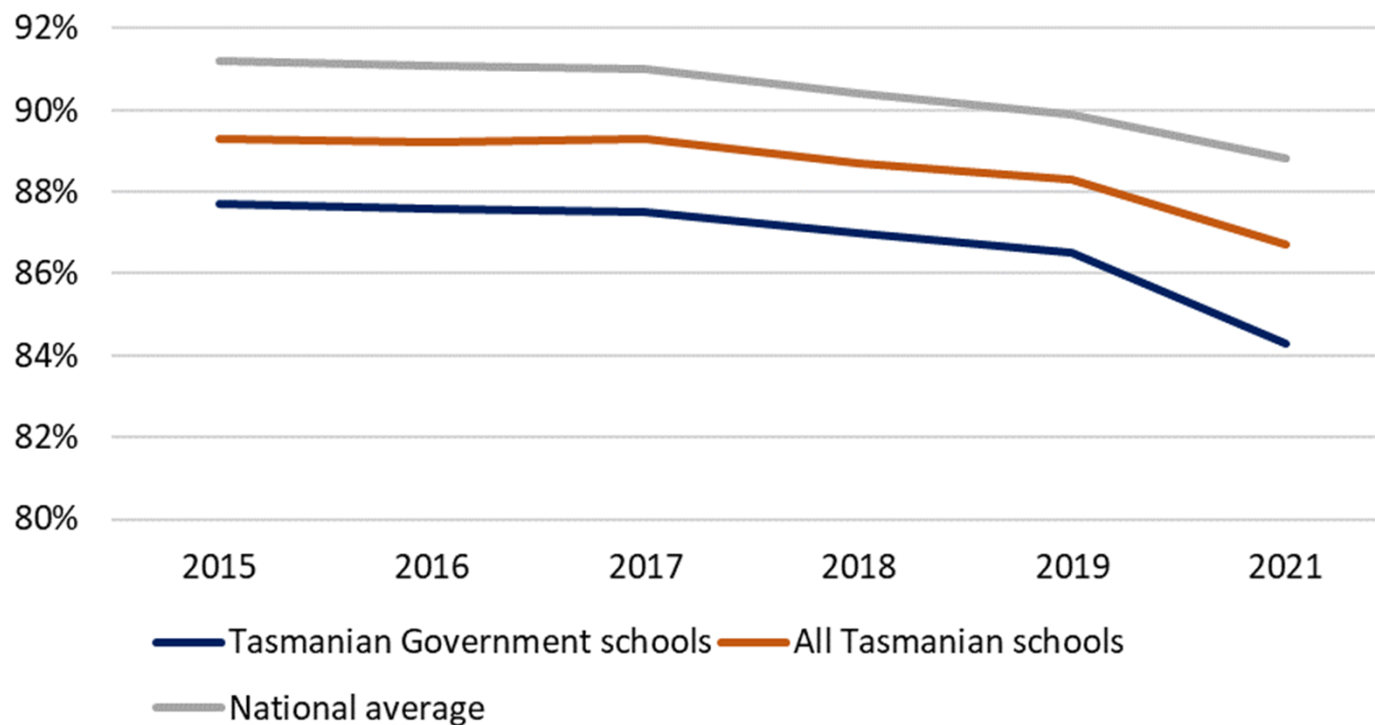
Findings – criteria 3

State-level attainment rates increased from 48.8% in 2014 to 59.0% in 2021 (although well below the 2022 goal of 75%).



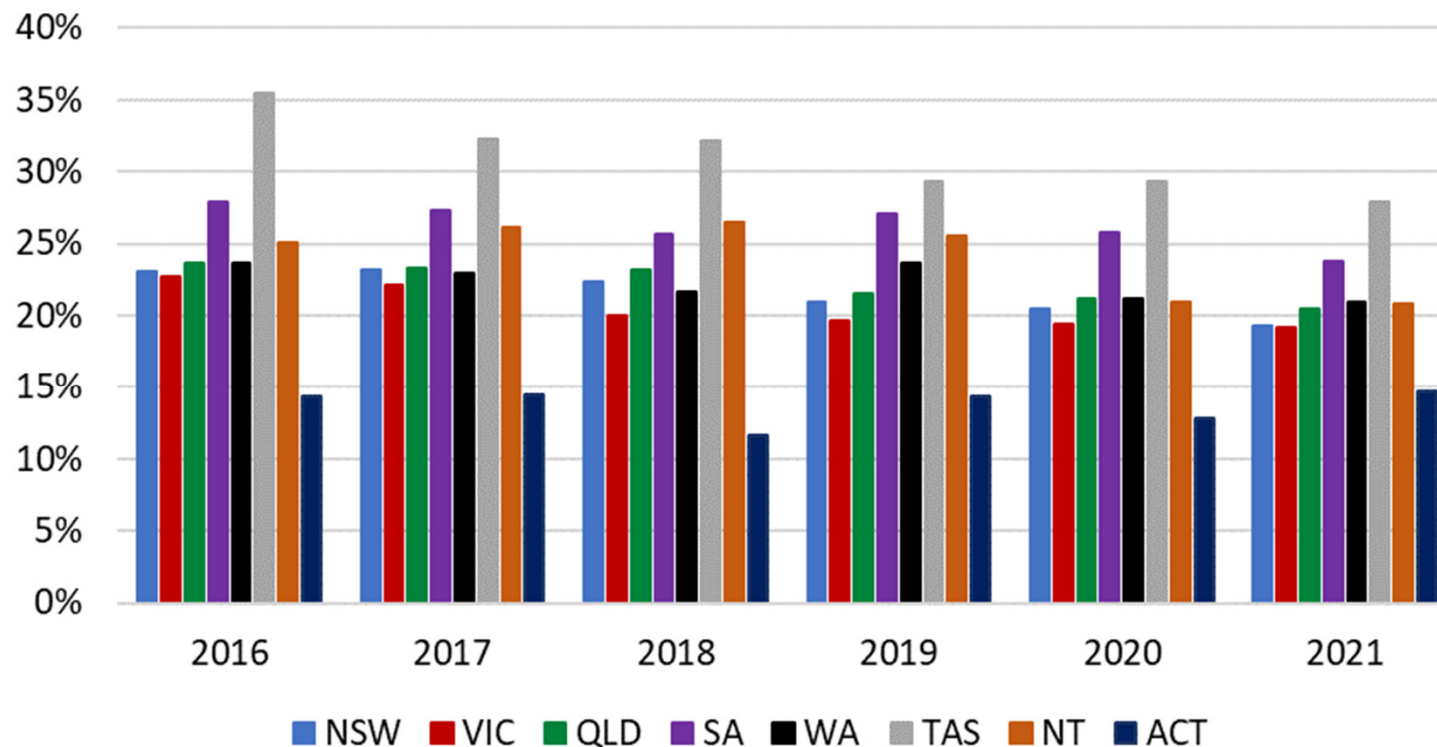
Findings – criteria 3

Attendance rates fell slightly from 2016 to 2021, consistent with the trend in attendance rates across Australia, which may in part be due to the effect of the COVID-19 pandemic.



Improving trend

Proportion of Tasmanians that had not completed Year 12 or its equivalent



Source: ABS – Proportion of 15-64 year olds



Responses

Received from:

- Minister for Education, Children and Young People
- Secretary, Department of Education

Questions?

