

‘Half-pregnant with Bartlett’s baby’: contested policies in Tasmanian Post-secondary Education: 2007-2010: Through the Lens of Kingdon’s *Agendas*

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Tasmania Tomorrow was highly politicised, and Tasmanian post-secondary education policy became a central issue in the 2010 state elections. The purpose of this paper was to analyse the dynamics of Tasmanian post-secondary education policy, and determine what education policy analysts can learn from this episode in Tasmanian education history. Tasmania Tomorrow was positioned in relation to United Kingdom research into a similar event of contested education policy. The veracity of a number of elements of John Kingdon’s theory of public policy evolution was then examined as a lens through which to analyse contested Tasmanian post-secondary education policy.

Introduction

With 20 March 2010 the declared date for the Tasmanian state election, for Matthew Denholm, the Labor Government’s ‘bungled’ post-secondary education policy – labelled *Tasmania Tomorrow* – was one of two key issues facing Tasmanians as they went to the polls.ⁱ Indeed, with only two days to run to the election, Tasmanians were told, ‘Fleetwood Mac might want to get their copyright lawyers onto the state election. Voters have repeatedly been told, “don’t stop thinking about *Tasmania Tomorrow*” – Labor’s somewhat controversial reconstruction of the secondary college and TAFE system’.ⁱⁱ

Denholm’s observations at the beginning of the Tasmanian election campaign predicting post-secondary education policy

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being a major issue proved to be correct. Post-secondary education policy was, 'the major point of difference between the three political parties, who have each used education as a chance to score some political points'.ⁱⁱⁱ

Premier David Bartlett wants to keep the system, and has repeatedly staked his political future on voters' reaction to it.

The Liberals want to keep aspects of it, but return the Tasmanian Polytechnic and Academy to the old college system.

The Greens have promised to roll it back completely.^{iv}

What was the foundation of this policy and just how 'bungled' was it, what was the actual level of discontent with it, and what was the detail of the alternative policy being advanced by the Liberal Party and the Greens? How does this contested policy inform researchers on the nature of contested education policy?

Ending in the March 2010 state election, the last eighteen to twenty months of the Tasmanian Labor Government was marked by public controversy regarding the Government's changes to post-secondary education. The Minister for Education, David Bartlett, had come to the office soon after the March 2006 state election. In May 2008, amidst considerable public controversy regarding the performance of Premier Paul Lennon in respect to the Gunn's pulp mill in Northern Tasmania, and the sacking of two ministers, Bartlett took over the office of Premier. He inherited an education system with the nation's lowest performance in post-secondary retention rates. Clearly, here was an area of his new portfolio wherein he could make a difference.

Tasmania, the Australian Capital Territory (ACT) and the Northern Territory (NT) are the only Australian educational jurisdictions with a system-wide secondary college system, in which children leave school after year 10 and proceed to their final two years of schooling at separate secondary colleges. But, in terms of population distribution, Tasmania is very different from the ACT or the NT. There are many more regional centres and small towns, with potential post-secondary students, located a considerable

distance from the closest secondary college. Many students do not proceed to these secondary colleges after graduating from their comprehensive high school. Instead of obtaining a post-secondary qualification, they invariably move into low-skilled work, or drift into a welfare culture.

According to government figures cited below, less than 47 per cent of Tasmanians complete a post-year 10 qualification. Consequently, Tasmania languishes at the bottom of the class nationally, hampering economic productivity and failing generations of youth.

Bartlett's solution, branded *Tasmania Tomorrow*, abolished the college system and the system of technical and further education (TAFE). In their place are three new institutions: the Academy, for students focused on university entry; the polytechnics, for students and adults seeking para-professional or trade careers, and a skills institute to boost the skills of people already in work. The architect of the program was the Department of Education head, John Smyth.^v

By the end of 2008, four of the state's eight secondary colleges folded into the new system: Hobart, Don and Hellyer (in Tasmania's northwest) and Newstead (Launceston). Bartlett's plan was for another two – Elizabeth and Rosny (both in Hobart) – to switch over at the beginning of 2010, and the last two – Claremont (Hobart) and Launceston – to follow in 2011. But, the timetable was revised amid a growing revolt from teachers and parents. Teachers at Rosny and Elizabeth colleges voted against joining the new regime before 2011. The opposition to *Tasmania Tomorrow* also came from some parent groups and a section of post-secondary teachers, all of whom sought a return to the old system of secondary colleges and TAFE colleges. While only a systematic empirical survey would show the level of discontent amongst Tasmanian post-secondary teachers, apparently much of it was located in the old TAFE sector. The cause of the discontent, also requires systematic empirical research. However, an anonymous, but highly authoritative source, suggested much of it was

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associated with perceived affects of *Tasmania Tomorrow* on careers and working conditions.^{vi}

The Livingston 17 March 2010 citation above briefly outlined the policies of the three major Tasmanian political parties. Which of these contested policies materialised into practice, and how can we analyse this?

The purpose of the paper

The purpose of this paper is to attempt to analyse the dynamics of Tasmanian post-secondary education policy. Clearly, *Tasmania Tomorrow* was highly politicised, and Tasmanian post-secondary education policy became a central issue in the 2010 state elections. It was berated, praised and exalted; mass demonstrations were held against it, and it occupied much space and time in media commentaries. Eventually, the policy fell victim to political compromise. What can education policy analysts learn from this episode in Tasmanian education history?

First, *Tasmania Tomorrow* needs to be positioned in relation to some United Kingdom research into a similar event of contested education policy. Then the veracity of a number of elements of John Kingdon's theory of public policy evolution will be examined as a possible lens through which to analyse contested Tasmanian post-secondary education policy.

The Campaigns Against Academies in England

In a number of recent research papers, Richard Hatcher and Richard Hatcher and Ken Jones provide a very sound comparison for the campaigns against *Tasmania Tomorrow*. The subject-matter of their research is the campaigns against the English academies. These academies are different in kind and purpose to those instituted by Tasmanian Labor. Although sharing much in common, the nature of the opposition to them, too, has been considerably different to that in Tasmania. In order to study the social opposition to the academies – the contested policy –

Hatcher and Jones,^{vii} and Hatcher in two separate articles used social movement theory. Hatcher explained, ‘education policy research doesn’t provide a vocabulary to study popular dissent’.^{viii}

While sharing many similarities, the Tasmanian campaigns against *Tasmania Tomorrow*, however, provide another dimension to the United Kingdom campaigns against Academies: in Tasmania it was contested policy at a statewide political level. On 20 March 2010, Tasmanians voted on the issue, as the various political parties presented it in their policies at the state election. The authors of this paper, therefore, looked to John Kingdon’s public policy theory to explain the contesting of Tasmanian post-secondary education policy.

John Kingdon’s Public Policy Theory

In his Foreword to John Kingdon’s *Agendas, Alternative and Public Policy* (2nd ed.) James A. Thurber writes:

Students often think policy making is random behaviour and that chaos theory best describes what happens in the agenda-setting process. Kingdon’s model plays well into these initial biases, but introduces the reader to ‘organised anarchy’ as an explanation of how the policy process works. He focuses more on ‘organised’ than on ‘anarchy’ and characterizes the process by identifying three major policy streams in the [United States] federal government. They are problem, recognition – the formulation and refining of policy proposals – and politics. They operate independently of each other, participation is fluid, and they can be best understood by patterned events that are not dominated by one set of actors at any phase of the agenda-setting process.^{ix}

Thurber’s last sentence in his Foreword to the second edition of *Agendas* underscores the presence of contestation of the politics of policy development and implementation. The fate of *Tasmania Tomorrow* was settled soon after the 20 March 2010 Tasmanian state election.

Kingdon asks, ‘how are governmental problems set?’^x His chapter nine in *Agendas* is devoted to analysing this question in terms of

problems, politics, and visible participants. In later sections to this paper, each of these three explanations will provide a lens for contesting policy development in Tasmanian post-secondary education during the years 2007-10.

There is one central problem with using Kingdon's *Agendas* as a lens to analyse an educational policy in Tasmania, and that is it was written addressing issues in *federal* politics in the United States. What is its value at a *state* level in another country? Certainly, Brendan Kelly found it to be a useful lens in analysing educational policy development in two states in the United States.^{xi}

The first element of Kingdon's theory, that of problem recognition, is associated with Tasmania's dismal performance in national comparisons with retention rates of post-year 10 students, and which will be described in the following section of this paper. Then the elements of politics, and visible participation will be addressed.

***Tasmania Tomorrow* in brief: Kingdon's theory of 'problem recognition'**

Critically, for this paper, Kingdon poses the question: 'why do some problems come to occupy the attention of governmental officials more than other problems?' For Kingdon, 'the answer lies both in the means by which those officials learn about conditions and in the way in which conditions defined as problems'.^{xii} He then draws attention to the role of indicators in this scenario; they certainly had a prominent role in the development of *Tasmania Tomorrow*.

Bartlett tabled *Tasmania Tomorrow* in the Tasmanian Parliament in June 2007. The policy statement began by graphically comparing Tasmanian post-year 10 retention rates with the mainland states and territories. For the 'apparent retention rate' – the number of students in year 12, compared with the number in year 10 two years before – in 2006, Tasmania scored 65 per cent,

against 76 per cent nationally. Thus, nationally, one in every four year 10 student did not stay until year 12. Tasmania was 10 per cent below the national average. In respect to ‘direct retention’ of Tasmanian government school students from year 10 to year 12 in 2006 scored 41.1 per cent. There was no comparable data nationally or for other sectors. In Tasmania, one in every two students did not stay in college for year 12. For students completing a year 12 qualification, Tasmania scored 52 per cent, compared to 67 per cent nationally – 15 per cent lower.^{xiii}

Tasmania Tomorrow entailed a three-year rollout, with three new organisations being created from the existing colleges and TAFE Tasmania, each focusing on a specific role, using these working titles:

- an ‘academy’ focused on academic learning, with a curriculum and academic pathway for year 11 and 12 students seeking university entrance;
- a ‘polytechnic’ focused on practical learning, with a vocational pathway, supported by academic courses as well, for both year 11/12 and mature-age students seeking employment outcomes or university articulation; and
- a training enterprise focused on skills development for employees in enterprises, in line with their enterprise’s skills needs.^{xiv}

The academies would be for students aiming to go to university.

It will have a pre-tertiary focus, and students will be able to develop their capacity for thinking, enterprise, communication, IT, and life skills. They will understand current and emerging careers, and will have a clear sense of where they are going and how they will get there. It will be connected to future careers, particularly in a Tasmanian context.^{xv}

The academy would be governed with representation from professional bodies, university, the arts, business, industry and parents. It planned to ‘attract industry and business sponsorship’. Scholarship programs would help students, ‘particularly those from rural or remote areas’.^{xvi}

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The polytechnic was for non-academic students, 'who learn best through practical and applied experience and with a high-level use of information and communication technology'. Integrating, 'education with work to provide students with qualifications that are meaningful to employers', it would have courses from certificate to diploma and provide pathways from school with current and future workplaces, and if so desired, to higher education. The polytechnic would be governed with 'representation from business, industry and the community, and will attract industry and business sponsorship, and scholarship programs to assist students, particularly those from rural or remote areas'.^{xvii}

Skills centres were less problematic, making use of existing infrastructure. They would be established at district high schools, TAFE centres, and Huon Linc could also offer applied courses, with delivery and assessment quality assured by the 'polytechnic'.^{xviii}

In some detail, *Qualifications and Skills for Tasmania Tomorrow* addressed the vexed issue for Tasmania of the high school model, as being used in most other Australian states. The document conceded, 'transferring senior classes to high schools would, most likely, improve Tasmania's low retention rate, it is unlikely to fully resolve the issue'. But it argued this, 'would not give all students an opportunity for high quality, engaging, applied and practical learning'. Moreover, 'Australia's retention rates of less than 80% are disappointing by international standards when compared with those around 90% in many countries, including Canada, Germany, Korea, and Singapore'. Therefore, it contended, 'the high school model would not "lift the bar" enough to enable us to meet the skills demands ahead'.^{xix}

Qualifications and Skills for Tasmania Tomorrow recognised, 'the value of an "applied learning" educational approach to meet the learning style of many students has strong recognition'. The existing district high schools and high schools recognised this, and it was, 'evidenced by the strong growth in vocational education

and training in schools. The polytechnic sought to build on this approach. It contended, ‘an “applied learning” model can best be achieved through the integration of college education with TAFE vocational expertise’. But for Bartlett, the existing high schools and district high schools simply did not have the infrastructure nor the staff with the necessary expertise to extend this model ahead’.^{xx}

The University of Tasmania (UTAS), the only university in the state, and the government’s partner in post-secondary education, supported *Tasmania Tomorrow*. In a policy statement from UTAS, linking *Tasmania Tomorrow* with its own policy of a UTAS College for post-secondary students, Vice Chancellor Professor David Rich, the author of the policy statement declared, ‘the University of Tasmania ... welcomes the opportunity to link the next stage of its strategic development with the reforms of the state education system outlined in the *Tasmania Tomorrow* proposal’. Rich agreed with Bartlett’s statement, ‘post year-10 education reform has the potential to dramatically enhance Tasmania’s long-term social and economic future’.^{xxi} However, perhaps mindful of UTAS throwing its support behind the failed Labor Government’s Essential Learnings Curriculum (ELs), Rich, qualified the university’s support for *Tasmania Tomorrow*: ‘while there are close links and real possibilities of creative synergies, the UTAS College model is not necessarily tied to the proposed *Tasmania Tomorrow* reforms’.^{xxii}

The reasons underpinning the *Tasmania Tomorrow* development fits with Kingdon’s element of problem recognition as a foundation for policy development. Before analyzing other elements of Kingdon’s theory of policy development and implementation, a brief examination is necessary of the historical background of *Tasmania Tomorrow*. This will shed more light on the problems facing Tasmanian post-secondary education.

A historical background of Tasmanian post-secondary education: Kingdon's theory of 'problem recognition'

Kingdon observes, 'problems not only rise in on governmental agendas, but they also fade from view'.^{xxiii} He contends governments lose interests in a particular problem, but the problem continues to exist, only to reappear on [subsequent] governmental agendas. Consequently, many policy problems usually have a history, sometimes extending back several decades.

With the boom in post-war public education, by the mid-1950s the Tasmanian system of selective secondary education was passing into a system of comprehensive high schools and junior technical schools. But by the late 1950s, junior technical schools were being integrated into a system of comprehensive schools. Compulsory education existed for children aged five years to sixteen years. Most of these schools had matriculation, or years 11 and 12 classes, or years of post-compulsory education. By the end of the 1950s, enrolments in post-secondary education were vastly increasing. Alongside these high schools, was a system of technical colleges catering for students entering the various trades. In rural districts, the system of area school initiated in the 1930s continued to expand, catering for students from grades K-10.^{xxiv}

The demand for matriculation, or years 11 and 12 classes, in the various comprehensive high schools continued to grow during the late 1950s and into the 1960s. However, with enrolments of only five or six students in some classes in schools such as Queenstown High School and Smithton High School, the government was forced through financial imperatives to consider another system of post-secondary education. This was a system of post-secondary colleges in Tasmania's four major population centres – Burnie, Devonport, Launceston and Hobart. With considerable public opposition, but with support from the Tasmanian Teachers' Federation, beginning in 1962, Tasmania's system of matriculation colleges began using existing resources and infrastructure. By the early 1970s, new colleges were being built at Rosny on Hobart's Eastern Shore, at Newstead in Launceston,

in Devonport and in Burnie, and now offering wide-ranging subjects, many of which were non-academic in meeting a wide range of community needs. Now there was a change in emphasis from matriculation to community colleges. These developments paralleled the changeover of the state-funded system of technical colleges to a more elaborate system of colleges of Technical and Further Education (TAFE), with increasing federal funding.^{xxv}

Phillips comments on these developments in Tasmanian post-secondary education:

The matriculation colleges in the sixties had been successful in meeting a need to provide an academic education in a new environment. They were created on the assumption that only a minority of students would take their education past the compulsory age of attendance. Yet even before large numbers of young people were made to face up to the prospect of unemployment and chose to stay on at school instead of joining the dole queues, enrolments increased rapidly by the addition of large numbers of students who did not want to take their formal education past the age of seventeen or eighteen.^{xxvi}

Indeed, as Phillips observes, the transition from matriculation college to community college prompted considerable angst amongst some teachers in the old technical colleges who perceived this as a negative development on their career. Phillips alerts readers to a sample of an advertisement from the Tasmanian Technical College Staff Society published in *The Mercury* on 13 May 1980 campaigning against community colleges.^{xxvii} This body of teachers, thus, had a history of opposing change to post-secondary education in Tasmania. Some of the members in 1980 may well have been the same people who opposed *Tasmania Tomorrow*.

The development of the system of Tasmanian matriculation-cum-community colleges had other critics. Michael Middleton wrote on the imbroglio surrounding the changes in Tasmanian post-secondary education during the late 1970s and early 1980s, at the same time criticising the general administrative separation of

secondary and post-secondary education. Middleton highlighted the, 'petty politics and power struggles' and the often blind eye to the increasing needs of young Tasmanians in the transition from school to work, in particular the separation of 'pre-16' and 'post-16' education, a move that, 'may prove to be Tasmania's worst blunder yet'.^{xxviii}

The historical precedents of *Tasmania Tomorrow* assist in understanding some of the public opposition to the policy. In examining the opposition to the Labor Party's post-secondary policy, further light will be shed on how the second element of Kingdon's theory of agenda setting is evident in the *Tasmania Tomorrow* saga.

The opposition to *Tasmania Tomorrow*: Kingdon's theory of 'politics'

Hatcher writes of the critical importance of leadership in campaigns of any kind:

It is dependent partly on position (e.g., union officers), which may command certain material resources, but mainly on personal resources: knowledge, experience, confidence, energy and the ability to propose frames, strategies and organisational forms which allow participants to construct a collective identity and participate in effective action (drawing sometimes on previous experiences of activism in trade unions, political parties or community organisations).

Campaign structures typically combine a formal core – a planning committee – and a more informal network, reaching into and colonising existing social and community network.^{xxix}

Greg Brown, the president of the post-secondary section of the Australian Education Union – Tasmanian Branch (AEU), the body that succeeded the old Tasmanian Teachers' Federation. Brown was spokesperson for the campaign against *Tasmania Tomorrow*, and reflected Hatcher's activist/leader. He was experienced in the AEU as an organiser, and with various networks across the state. But most significantly for his cause, in the lead-up to the 20 March 2010 state election he was able to harness the Liberal Party and

the Tasmanian Greens to his cause, and have the scrapping of *Tasmania Tomorrow* advanced as an electoral policy.

Kingdon's theory of successful policy legislature confirms the Tasmanian post-secondary college experience. He writes, 'independently of problem recognition of the development of policy proposals, political events flow along according to their own dynamics and their own rules'.^{xxx} Clearly, some time before the state election, Tasmanian opposition parties sensed some mileage in the Tasmanian post-secondary education imbroglio, in much the same way they did with the ELs debacle during the previous state election campaign, and which is described in greater detail below.

By the end of 2009, it was generally conceded that while the campuses of the Academy seemed to be working well, there were severe problems in the polytechnic sector. This was, according to Denholm writing in *The Weekend Australian* in October 2009, 'the institution designed for the target of the reforms, teenagers dropping out of college'. According to Denholm, the polytechnic was, 'a disaster'.^{xxx}

Some of the complaints stemmed from former college teachers, 'forced, as they see it, to downgrade their position and teach in a "glorified TAFE" and had become 'second-class teachers'. It was claimed many of their old colleagues in the academy sector who had been accepted to teach in the new Academy were 'whooping with joy'. According to Denholm, 'college teachers [were] having none of [these reforms]. A series of stop-work meetings and a campaign of industrial action were planned, 'right up to March 20 [the election date]'.^{xxxii}

Then, there were issues of pastoral care in the polytechnic. Denholm claimed, 'teachers and opposition parties say teenagers fresh from year 10 are being dumped in a TAFE-like adult culture lacking the pastoral care of the old colleges'. And that is where the Liberal Opposition looked for 'mileage' out of the growing imbroglio.^{xxxiii} Denholm reported Liberal Education spokesperson,

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Sue Napier, as claiming, 'it'd be like throwing kids in the deep end of the swimming pool'. 'There has been a total lack of change management.' According to Denholm, Napier claimed, 'the situation has been made worse by the decision to axe courses seen as not sufficiently pathway-focused'. 'They didn't realise that a lot of these kids aren't focused. They don't know what they want to do.' 'The colleges used to run courses that at least kept these kids engaged'. Instead, Denholm reported Napier stating, 'they are dropping out faster than before'. She signalled she would, 'wind back the reforms should the Liberals form government' following the March 20 election the following year.^{xxxiv}

According to Denholm, another complaint was of a lack of leadership on polytechnic campuses. 'Academy campuses have a head of campus, but the polytechnics don't,' Napier explained. 'If a kid is playing up at a Polytechnic, they have to tell the head office. A kid may get disciplined that day in an academy but at a polytechnic it will fester to weeks or months'.^{xxxv}

Denholm sought to position the AEU as a unified body in supporting the opposition to *Tasmania Tomorrow*:

AEU secondary college president and college teacher Greg Brown says timetable and other barriers mean students cannot pick and choose courses from the Polytechnic and Academy as promised. 'The only kids going into Polytechnics are those at the bottom academically and those kids are being stigmatised,' Brown says.^{xxxvi}

In response to this alleged mounting opposition, Bartlett gave Elizabeth and Rosny colleges the option of keeping out of the new system for another year while operational problems are ironed out. However, he insisted all four remaining colleges must convert by 2011. Denholm proposed, 'the compromise has left a school system that is half-pregnant with Bartlett's baby'.^{xxxvii}

By the end of 2009, Tasmanians were being reminded of the systems of post-secondary education existing in most mainland states. Denholm reported Bartlett as denying reports that his first preference was, 'to shift Tasmania to a mainland-style years 7-12

matriculation system. The model he says, was never an option because Tasmania lacked, ‘the critical mass of students, resources and skilled teachers required for every high school to be able to offer years 11 and 12’.^{xxxviii}

But the opponents of *Tasmania Tomorrow* were not starting with a blank slate. The previous Tasmanian state election had provided them with ample examples of how to succeed with a political campaign to sink a Tasmanian Labor Government education policy. This element in the *Tasmania Tomorrow* saga furnishes further light on the symmetry between that saga and Kingdon’s theory of agenda setting in public policy – particularly that of politics.

***Tasmania Tomorrow’s* opponents harness lessons learnt from an earlier campaign in state education: Kingdon’s theory of ‘politics’**

Kingdon advances the argument for policy to be transformed into legislation, participants need to perceive swings in national mood.^{xxxix} Certainly, in the case of *Tasmania Tomorrow*, politics, arguably, was the principal determinant of policy. So much hinged on the Tasmanian electoral system, and for the opponents of *Tasmania Tomorrow* in reminding voting Tasmanians of the political nature of the policy.

In a four-year election cycle, Tasmanian Labor was returned to power in March 2006. The election was marked by the near-failure of incumbent Minister for Education, Paula Wriedt, to be re-elected in her seat of Franklin, allegedly over issues of her handling of the ELs Curriculum. For a two-year period leading up to the March 2006 election, opponents to ELs launched sustained campaigns on many fronts. Wriedt was subsequently given another portfolio, and Bartlett, the new minister and soon to become Premier, abandoned ELs.^{xl} Much of the political strategies and public discourse of the opponents of *Tasmania Tomorrow* were duplicated from the campaign against ELs. This came in the form of the political strategies employed by some parents, sections

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of the AEU, and in particular the rhetoric of their public discourse and the way in which they used the media.

The Tasmanian electoral system has a peculiar structure. With a population of a little over a half million, Tasmania has a system of five multiple-member electorates, with five members per electorate. Since the passing of the *Parliamentary Reform Act 1998 (Tas.)*, which reduced the size of parliament, the lower house from 35 to 25 members and the upper house from 19 to 15 members, there has been much public debate about the wisdom of the change. The work pressure on ministers has been a central plank of the argument. This was highlighted during the controversy surrounding ELs during then years 2006-07, when the role of minister's minders on public policy was often questioned.^{xli} Indeed, it was claimed by one political scientist and reported in *The Mercury* by Michael Stedman, 'it is very hard to live in a fishbowl and there is no fishbowl in Australian politics as small as the Tasmanian one'.^{xlii}

For the opponents of *Tasmania Tomorrow*, the eighteen or so months leading up to the March 2010 state election was important in maintaining public discourse on what they perceived to be the severe faults of the policy. The development of this discourse can be traced back to late 2007, only months after the implementation of *Tasmania Tomorrow*.

At the end of Jean Walker's term as president of the AEU, she was reported in December 2007 and again in February 2008 as speaking out on perceived problem associated with the establishment of polytechnics, academies and training schools in the state.^{xliii} This was the subject for an ABC *Stateline* program on 3 October 2008. In this program, hosted by Arlie Ward, Simon Cullen, an ABC *Stateline* reporter, suggested the Government's new arrangements for the polytechnics, 'academies and training schools in the state, prompted some comparisons with the failed implementation of the Essential Learnings framework two years ago. Parents are concerned it's the same children being used as the guinea pigs for these changes'.^{xliv}

On the same program, a parent of a year 10 student due to enrol in post-secondary education in 2009, complained now it was the same students who were suffering from the Government's proposed scheme for secondary colleges who had suffered under ELs: 'it's all changing again. It's the same group. It's the same year of children'.^{xlv}

Cullen then contended, despite the growing opposition to the scheme, the Government was pushing ahead with it, 'when David Bartlett took over the education portfolio from Paula Wriedt, he said he had learned the lessons of the past. He conceded problems with putting in place the Essential Learnings curriculum led to public opposition to the changes.' For Cullen, 'now there is a similar feeling towards these reforms. At the very at least there's a push to delay the implementation'.^{xlvi}

Indeed, in the lead-up to the state election, the rhetoric of 'pushing ahead', 'experimenting with our children' was often used by politicians from the Liberal Opposition in opposing *Tasmania Tomorrow* in news grabs. For example, the Liberal's website stated: 'Tasmanians have had enough of imposed top-down experimentation with our children's education. ... Mr Bartlett's education experiment has divided Tasmania's community ... Tasmanians have had enough of noisy and glossy reform announcements such as Essential Learnings, and *Tasmania Tomorrow*'.^{xlvii}

Other language in the ELs discourse and *Tasmania Tomorrow* discourse, too, was remarkably similar. Heather Low Choy from *The Mercury* had headlined ELs as 'Education Minister, Paula Wriedt's "baby"'.^{xlviii} Denholm had levelled the charge that *Tasmania Tomorrow* was 'Half pregnant with Bartlett's baby'.^{xlix} Rodwell has demonstrated how language as presented in the media was a powerful force in bringing down ELs.¹

During the weeks leading up to the 20 March 2010 Tasmanian state election, the issues and politics associated with *Tasmania Tomorrow* were constantly brought to public view. This is in

accord with what Kingdon states about the political drivers of policy agendas. As Kingdon argues, 'the opposition of a powerful phalanx of interest groups makes it difficult – not impossible, but difficult – to contemplate some initiatives'.^{li} Kingdon maintains consensus is the binding force of disparate opposing forces, and it, 'is built in the political stream by bargaining more than by persuasion'.^{lii} How effective would consensus prove to be in the *Tasmania Tomorrow* saga? Before readers learn more of that, another important element of Kingdon's thesis needs explaining.

Post-secondary education policy initiatives and controversies leading up to the March 2010 elections: Kingdon's theory of 'visible participants'

According to Kingdon, high public visibility of key policy advocates enhances the prospects of success for the policy being enacted into legislation: the greater the public visibility of the key actors supporting the policy, the greater its chances of success.^{liii}

Not surprisingly, in the lead-up period to the March 20 state election, the two major political parties responded with various policy initiatives, and the opponents of *Tasmania Tomorrow* found various strategies to keep the imbroglio in the media. With Labor in power at the federal and state levels, it held the advantage. First, came federal support for *Tasmania Tomorrow*.

On 6 January 2010, the federal Minister for Education and Deputy Prime Minister, Julia Gillard, was in Hobart, announcing \$90 million federal funding for disadvantaged Tasmanian students. She also urged Tasmanians to support *Tasmania Tomorrow*. Despite a teacher backlash, she believed, 'the *Tasmania Tomorrow* reforms would lift the state's education outcomes'. 'These are tough reforms,' Ms Gillard said. 'Premier Bartlett I think has been very courageous in driving these reforms'. However, AEU President, Leanne Wright, warned, 'many teachers still believe *Tasmania Tomorrow* could be rolled back, and warned of industrial action'.^{liv}

The Liberal Opposition was able to attack the Government on its claims *Tasmania Tomorrow* was increasing enrolments and retention rates. When Bartlett made public claims about this, he came under attack from the Opposition and the AEU. They disputed Bartlett's claims of a 95 per cent retention rate and a 12 per cent increase in enrolments. They claimed the data Bartlett was referring to was 'shonky', and that he had not released the full set of data he had previously promised.^{lv} The following week, the Tasmanian media revealed, 'Auditor-General Mike Blake said he could find no evidence for the 95 per cent retention rate cited by the State Government'. However, the 'but data did show a 12 per cent increase in enrolments at polytechnic and academy campuses from 2008 to 2009'.^{lvi}

Buoyed by a much-higher-than-expected Treasury surplus, but dogged by criticism from the Greens and Liberals,^{lvii} by the beginning of 2010, Bartlett was 'on the front foot' in allocating funds to *Tasmania Tomorrow* initiatives. For example, there was a regional rollout at a cost of \$16 million setting up new polytechnics at Scottsdale, George Town, Bridgewater, St Helens, Smithton and Huonville over the following two years. The Commonwealth provided about \$6.5 million to build the centres. Additionally, there was an \$11 million funding boost for adult literacy programs in the skills centre sector of the *Tasmania Tomorrow* program.^{lviii}

On 7 February 2010, the Liberal Leader, Will Hodgman, announced the party's education policy for the forthcoming election: the controversial polytechnic and academy system would be abolished, if they won. And the Liberals promised a part return to the old pre-1960s system of post-secondary education: 'all 28 district schools around the state also would be given more resources to teach students up to grade 12 to avoid the need to travel long distances to go to college'.^{lix} Moreover, 'Mr Bartlett's education experiment has divided Tasmania's community and forced students to choose too early in life whether they want to pursue an academic or technical career, at a time when international researchers are warning against early streaming'.^{lx}

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Napier, denied the policy returned the status quo existing before Labor's reforms, without tackling the core problem of a 61.8 per cent post-year 10 retention rate. For the Liberals, students' choice of educational pathway was essential. Hodgman, 'promised all course options available in *Tasmania Tomorrow* would be retained'.^{lxi}

The policy immediately won the favour of the AEU, which was threatening to run a damaging campaign against *Tasmania Tomorrow* in the lead-up to the election. 'The large number of post-year 10 members who have campaigned for the rollback of *Tasmania Tomorrow* will be thrilled at such a proposition,' Wright said. 'I think some of them think they have been taking part in an unsuccessful experiment'.^{lxii}

During the same week as Napier's announcement, there came an announcement in *The Mercury* Brown was signalling industrial action. 'Hundreds of staff at senior secondary colleges, the Tasmanian Academy and the Tasmanian Polytechnic are set to hold three half-day stop-work meetings ... before marching on Parliament on March 16'. According to *The Mercury*, 'about 1200 staff from the senior secondary institutions are expected to take part in the action, which could spread to the rest of the government sector'.^{lxiii}

However, an ABC News article on the same day as the last-mentioned *Mercury* article revealed deep divisions within the AEU on the issue. Apparently Brown had acted without the consent of the AEU – Tasmanian Branch executive, and was publicly criticised by Wright. Moreover, the ABC report claimed only a small percentage of the AEU post-secondary teachers supported the planned industrial action.^{lxiv}

Moreover, Labor's cause was advanced when the Tasmanian business community, traditionally supporters of the Liberal Party, came out in support of *Tasmania Tomorrow*. *The Australian* reported, 'while taking a non-partisan approach to one of the tightest campaigns of recent history', the Tasmanian Chamber of

Commerce & Industry publically endorsed Labor's scheme for post-secondary colleges. The national newspaper added, 'intervention by the peak business group in one of the key issues before the March 20 election is a blow to ... Hodgman, who is promising to roll back ... Bartlett's changes'.^{lxv}

Still, the election remained a neck-and-neck struggle. And this was accentuated when the Tasmanian Greens, the powerful third force in Tasmanian politics, came out in support of the AEU in its opposition to *Tasmania Tomorrow*.^{lxvi}

With polls showing a very close result at the 20 March election and the possibility of a hung parliament, there were considerable political imperatives on Tasmanian Labor. Bartlett had to make some concessions to the AEU. A key point in the AEU campaign promised to be a mass stop-work meeting on the lawns of Parliament House during the last week of the campaign. Indeed, the highly respected EMRS polling only two weeks before the election put the Green vote at a historic high (22 per cent) – neck-and-neck with Labor (23 per cent) and the undecided vote (22 per cent), with the Liberals on 30 per cent.^{lxvii}

Bartlett's Labor Party needed to make up considerable ground. The AEU, however, rejected Bartlett's appeal for conciliation on the question of *Tasmania Tomorrow*. Bartlett had promised the AEU an altered *Tasmania Tomorrow*, with him pledging a re-elected Labor government would:

- Make all former college campuses dual campuses for years 11 and 12 for at least four years.
- Give all year 11 and 12 students access to the full range of subjects available no later than from the beginning of 2011.
- Allow teachers to transfer between the academy and polytechnic.
- Model the leadership structure of former college polytechnic campuses on the academy's leadership structure from 2011.^{lxviii}

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Brown, however, rejected Bartlett's attempts at reconciliation by referring to it as an election stunt.^{lxi}

Six days later, and with the election only eight days away, Bartlett wrote to post-year 10 teachers, reiterating his earlier concessions, confessing to flawed implementation of *Tasmania Tomorrow*, and pledging to put, 'the learning needs of our students ... first'.^{lxx} The AEU continued to stand firm, insisting on a complete rollback of *Tasmania Tomorrow*.

On the Sunday before the election an estimated 250-300 placard-waving teachers assembled on the lawns outside Parliament House in Hobart to protest against *Tasmania Tomorrow*. The ABC reported the crowd was addressed by nine speakers, including union leaders, Liberal and Green politicians, and college teachers. Bartlett was not invited to the rally. He later described it as a 'Green rally'. 'I hear directly back from teachers at the grass roots that actually they don't want a roll-back.' 'What they want to do is get this new system right'. Bartlett stated his concessions to teachers were 'still on the table'.^{lxxi} Was it simply a 'Green rally', or an expression on the popular will amongst Tasmanian post-secondary teachers? Bartlett had only six days to wait to see if his gamble would pay off. Or did he have in mind another move, something, as it transpired, would be close to another element of Kingdon's thesis?

The results of the 20 March election showed Bartlett's gamble may have been a loser. One week after the election Denholm reported in *The Weekend Australian* the state-wide vote was 39 per cent to the Liberals, 37 per cent to Labor, and the Greens on 21 per cent, with any significant change unlikely. The Liberals had secured 2.11 percentage points more of the statewide vote than Labor; or 6765 votes.^{lxxii} This translated into 10 Labor seats, 10 Liberal and five Greens. Indeed, a week later, Denholm headed his *Weekend Australian* article, 'Labor hands poisoned chalice to Hodgman'.^{lxxiii} In a separate *Weekend Australian* article, Denholm wrote of Prime Minister Rudd being, 'keen to court Hodgman' as Tasmania's Premier-in-waiting.^{lxxiv}

As the Tasmanian Liberals prepared for government, those who opposed *Tasmania Tomorrow* rejoiced and waited for the new government's post-secondary education policy to be implemented. However, only days after the declaration of the polls, with a hung parliament, and Tasmanians waiting for Peter Underwood, the Governor of Tasmania, to announce a Hodgman Liberal government for the next four years, Nick McKim, the Green leader, put his support behind Labor. In a move that surprised many Tasmanian, Underwood asked Bartlett to form a new government, and in the words of a *Mercury* editorial, Labor was 'back in business'.^{lxxv} But what of Liberal's and the Greens' post-secondary education policy of winding back *Tasmania Tomorrow*? It was clear Bartlett could not survive a united Liberal-Green vote on the floor of the House of Assembly.

Not surprisingly, Sue Neales reported in *The Mercury* on 10 April, 'the *Tasmania Tomorrow* school reforms [were] set to become the first battleground for the new government'. McKim, 'signalled ... he would act very quickly after Parliament resumes to unravel the loathed new Academy, Polytechnic and Skills Tasmania system'. Bartlett also conceded, 'he might have to give way and drop his unpopular senior secondary reforms if he wanted the minority parliament to work'. Neale wrote, 'the reforms could start to be scrapped from the middle of this year, with the combined college system reinstated for the 2011 school year'. Moreover, ominously, Bartlett also, 'hinted he would not retain the education portfolio in his second spell as Premier'.^{lxxvi}

On 22 April, Bartlett announced his new Labor ministry, which including two Greens. But Bartlett had handed over the Education portfolio to Lin Thorp, an ex-school teacher, with a seat in the Legislative Council. *Tasmania Tomorrow* appeared to remain intact.^{lxxvii} It was tipped she, 'may ... face the unusual possibility she may have to administer legislation she didn't vote for – namely, the roll-back of *Tasmania Tomorrow*'.^{lxxviii} Tasmanians waited for a resolution to the entanglement causing, 'deep unhappiness ... among teaching staff'.^{lxxix}

'Half-pregnant with Bartlett's baby'

It soon became clear, however, Labor was not going to budge from its *Tasmania Tomorrow* policy, despite the Green's electoral commitment to dismantle it. ABC Northern Tasmania reported:

Labor and the Greens in Tasmania are facing their first major policy clash since forming a power-sharing government.

The partners are at odds over the troubled *Tasmania Tomorrow* system for post year ten students.

The new Education Minister, Lin Thorp, yesterday ruled out dismantling the Academy and Polytechnic campuses.

The Minister says she will start talking to all teachers from next week to work through any management problems.

She says the basics of *Tasmania Tomorrow* are here to stay.^{lxxx}

But only days later the Liberal Opposition sought to drive a wedge between Labor and the Greens, by testing the strength of the Government's commitment to *Tasmania Tomorrow*. Channel 7 News reported on 7 May, the, 'Liberals introduced a bill to parliament this week to abolish the Academy and Polytechnic system for years 11 and 12'. Would the Greens support the bill after promising during the election campaign to roll back *Tasmania Tomorrow*?^{lxxxii} The legislation was not scheduled to be debated until later in June.

On the day the Liberals introduced the bill to rollback *Tasmania Tomorrow*, *The Mercury* reported Bartlett as declaring he had, 'made mistakes in the rollout of *Tasmania Tomorrow*' but would not abandon the reforms. According to Stedman, Bartlett said, 'when it comes to *Tasmania Tomorrow*, I did not get it all right, I did not communicate it right and I did not implement it all right.'^{lxxxiii} But those mistakes were not enough to abandon the program.^{lxxxii}

During June, Denholm ran a dramatic article in *The Weekend Australian* announcing 'Bartlett's biggest, boldest reform – a shake-up of post-Year 10 education – ended this week with the meekest of back-downs'.^{lxxxiii} Thorp appointed a Department of Education top-level bureaucrat 'to advise the state government on how to change post-year-10 education and training ... Legislation

is expected to be changed and the new model in place before school starts next year'.^{lxxxiv} Specifically, according to Livingston of the *Examiner*, the key points of the plan included:

- 'Scrapping the Academy and Polytechnic boards.
- Colleges go back to their original name, and each have a principal.
- Staff move back to the Department of Education.
- The increased focus on vocational courses for 16-19-year-olds is continued.
- The Skills Institute remains as it is'.^{lxxxv}

Thorp announced she expected the legislation to be passed in the next sitting of Parliament, which runs through June 2010 into the first week of July.

At the same time, *Tasmania Tomorrow* was being hailed as a success in respect to enrolments, which the Tasmanian Auditor-General had shown a twelve per cent increase in the first twelve months of its operation. The same report, however, could not show Bartlett's claim that *Tasmania Tomorrow* had improved retention rates.^{lxxxvi}

The architect of *Tasmania Tomorrow*, Smyth, was sacrificed to the rollback. On 6 July 2010, he announced his resignation 'to take up a federal position'.^{lxxxvii} ABC Northern Tasmania reported, 'Mr Smyth had been under pressure in recent weeks, with secondary teachers across the state unanimously passing motions of no confidence and called for him to resign'.^{lxxxviii}

According to Livingston from the *Examiner*, Wright, 'says he [Smyth] was more responsible for the post-year 10 changes than the Premier'. Moreover, Wright continued:

'It was his brainchild and it was adopted by a minister who was fairly inexperienced at the time,' she said.

'There were times when the AEU felt that the minister was taking much more of the blame than he should have'.^{lxxxix}

So following the March 2010 state election, the opponents of *Tasmania Tomorrow* won through. As Kingdon states, 'the combination of national mood and elections is a more potent agenda setter than organized interests'.^{xc} Bartlett, through consensus and bargaining – other important ingredients in the political element of Kingdon's thesis – won through with *Tasmanian Tomorrow*, over an assortment of opposing forces.

Conclusions

In 1962, David Selth considered the principal determining influences on Tasmanian state education were poverty and politics.^{xcⁱ} Certainly, the political influences remain true into the twenty-first century, as evidenced by the *Tasmania Tomorrow* saga. As Harris observed politics can play havoc with educational change. Unlike schools, governments have to work within the public arena of huge massive political pressures.^{xcⁱⁱ} Elections roll around with relentless regularity, and politicians can never 'take their eye off the ball'. Rodwell demonstrated the effect political pressures had on the Tasmanian Labor Government's ELs curriculum.^{xcⁱⁱⁱ} Bartlett abandoned ELs in 2006, but hung on to *Tasmania Tomorrow* like a limpet. Admittedly, ELs was not his creation, and *Tasmania Tomorrow* was.

In understanding the failure of *Tasmania Tomorrow* as contested educational policy, readers can recall Livingston's statement^{xc^{iv}} with which this article began. Bartlett sought to maintain *Tasmania Tomorrow*, and, 'repeatedly staked his political future on voters' reaction to it'. The Liberals wanted to roll it back, and so, too, did the Greens. With a hung parliament, and Labor depending on support from the Greens, compromise was inevitable.

All national indicators showed Tasmanian retention rates posed a serious problem, economically, socially, as well as educationally. This was, in Kingdon's terms a 'pressing problem'.^{xc^v} The three major Tasmanian political parties agreed upon that. It was the policies to remediate the problem they could not agree upon. This

policy process was about political power, what Kingdon calls ‘powerful agenda setters’.^{xvii} It was the Tasmanian Greens fillip to bargain with Labor – in Kingdon’s terms, ‘consensus’ ‘more than persuasion’^{xviii} – and rolled back *Tasmania Tomorrow* during an extremely contested and problematic period in the history of Tasmanian education policy development.

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