**State of the Nation: Tasmania**

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**Background**

**Government**

**Directions for Education**

The Government “Directions for Education” statement announced in April 1997 promised a laptop for every teacher, new computers in a ratio of 1:5 full time students K-12, all schools fully networked, routed permanent Internet connection to every machine, a professional development program and a service agreement for ongoing performance and maintenance of the new learning technologies facilities.

**Non-Government**

Under “Directions for Education” there was originally no direct funding assigned to non government schools. At the time of writing all Directions initiatives are to be made available for purchase by non government schools (economy of scale) and in July 1998 it was announced that $1.9 million would be allocated to non government schools for Information Technology.

**Teacher perceptions:**

Some schools have ceased to spend the funds they usually would assign to technology in expectation of the imminent roll out of Directions computers. This causes frustrations at times as whole cohorts complete another school year under resourced in this area. There is an air of optimism accompanied by a degree of fear and the natural consequences of enforced/imposed change on a major scale.

**Common Positive views**

- Level of equipment is very substantial particularly for smaller schools
- Laptops for teachers seen as recognition of professionalism
- The role and importance of education as an agent for social change is recognised through this funding
- Support is seen as valuable especially by Principals and schools in rural/remote areas
- Focus on education rather than technology (especially important for Primary Schools)
- Free professional development welcomed by most teachers
- Reduced load on school resource budget as most of IT is centrally funded
- Economies of scale from software bulk purchase seen as beneficial for school management
- Assessment and reporting software is receiving favourable comment from teachers

**Common Negative views**

- Degree of scepticism that the promise will be delivered
- Fear of the unknown by many teachers
- Perception of loss of autonomy and control mechanism
- Bulk purchasing of software may stifle creativity
- Changed role of IT coordinators
- People believe that this gain will be at the expense of resources elsewhere in education and in schools eg no music teacher, no building repairs
- Schools may become targets of theft and vandalism
- Increased workload and impact of change on teachers
- Fear of centralised reporting as being a management mechanism
- Costs to schools for furniture, power points, lighting, shading, heating, ventilation, occupational health and safety, building modifications seen as onerous

**General Comments**

The change process is too fast for some but the equipment roll out is too slow. Some teachers undertake professional development and training and are then unable to practise what they have learned. This is frustrating for the teachers concerned and demonstrative of some omissions in the professional development planning.

The linking of teaching tools with learning outcomes has the potential to identify successful practices without imposing additional burdens. It is encouraging that multiple professional development models are emerging and are being implemented systemically. There is scope for professional associations to fill niche gaps and contribute to the professional development offerings in the State.

A revolution in terms of educational pedagogy in every learning area has occurred. This means that every learning area has enormous needs in making best use of technology in their curriculum. Making the vision a reality requires the marshalling of all resources including professional associations.

The Directions for Education implementation team has made use of multiple strategies for consultation and communication of progress. In particular they have adopted a proactive role in communicating with grass roots teachers via the online community hosted by TASITE and it has been more than encouraging to see their willingness to listen and adapt where possible.

With so much of the journey of planning and infrastructure of Directions for Education now completed yet so little actually implemented, it is ironic its future now depends on the outcome of the State election which will be known by the time this is published. That outcome will determine whether the brave and optimistic vision that has attracted attention worldwide is continued, diluted below the critical mass level or abandoned.

**NOTE:** This article was prepared before the recent political changes in Tasmania. Some of the initiatives described are in doubt.