



UNIVERSITY *of*
TASMANIA

**Submission in response to the Interim
Consultation Paper for the Review of
Tasmania's State Service**

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1. Introduction

This submission is shaped by the University's role as a key public institution in Tasmania with a deep commitment to our State and its people. We therefore have a strong shared interest with the Tasmanian State Service (TSS) in understanding and responding to the emerging needs and aspirations of all Tasmanians.

This submission highlights where closer engagement and collaboration between the University of Tasmania and the TSS would benefit both organisations and the wider Tasmanian community. Capturing the dividends of closer collaboration and the wider Review process will be especially important given both Tasmania's scale and the central role of both the TSS and the University of Tasmania in our State's recovery from COVID-19.

Pre-existing challenges for Tasmania remain and may be compounded by new forms of risk for specific populations, industries, places and sectors. The Premier's Economic and Social Recovery Advisory Council (PESRAC) *Interim Report* has noted the urgency of reform and we believe there is a particular need for both the TSS and University to become more adaptive, agile and place-based given the challenges associated with the COVID-19 recovery.

As key public institutions in Tasmania, both the TSS and UTAS operate under Acts of Parliament with statutory obligations to serve and work towards a better future for all Tasmanians. Both organisations face common challenges through the recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic and will need to prepare and support Tasmanians for the future challenges and opportunities which lie ahead.

This submission outlines two inter-related themes which we believe are relevant to the Review of the Tasmanian State Service while also contributing to priorities identified in the PESRAC *Interim Report*. Specifically, we believe the University could make an important contribution to the Review's overarching aim of building a more efficient and effective state service to better meet the future needs of the Tasmanian community by:

- 1) Developing a shared focus on 'place' and community-level outcomes and collaboration as a strategic priority and organising principle; and
- 2) Identifying and addressing common priorities which are emerging as a result of COVID-19 and its aftermath

This submission argues that deeper and more strategic collaboration between the TSS and UTAS would be mutually beneficial as well as advantageous to the State. However, it is also important to acknowledge that we already have many longstanding and successful partnerships spanning learning and professional training, research and various forms of civic engagement. Indeed, our significant collaborations during the COVID-19 response highlight the benefits of working together in the interests of Tasmania.

Our shared objective therefore is to consider how these partnerships can be refined and expanded to support the Review's overarching objective of creating a more efficient and effective TSS which can deliver services to promote a more prosperous, inclusive and sustainable Tasmania.

2. 'Place' and collaboration as an organising principle

There is growing recognition that well-designed place-based initiatives which build community capability in collaborative and relevant ways can address complex social challenges, promote wellbeing and support economic development at a community level. Such an approach is particularly relevant to regional communities given their distinctive needs and the real limits of centralised service delivery models. The focus of place-based approaches is on building community-level systems, resilience and adaptive capacity and human and intellectual capital rather than delivering specific programs or outputs.

The goal is to identify and address the specific barriers to engagement with public institutions and accessing services experienced by citizens in regional communities. This focus on engaging with and empowering citizens has the potential to improve access to both service delivery systems and address complex social challenges (focus of the TSS) and improve learning access and pathways (focus of UTAS) for Tasmanians who have historically been 'hard to reach' on the fringe of service delivery systems.

This orientation to place-based approaches and deeper collaboration between the TSS, UTAS and our communities could be a central theme of the broader Review of the Tasmanian State Service. This approach not only has the potential to address many of the key challenges facing public administration in the post COVID-19 world, but would also build on a number of significant place-based initiatives recently established by the Tasmanian Government as well as the University of Tasmania's *2019-24 Strategic Plan*.

For the TSS and the University there is a key opportunity to jointly frame up and work on key place-based problems that Tasmania needs to solve. This unity of purpose could see smarter collaboration and better outcomes for Tasmanians.

Examples of emerging place-based initiatives include:

Strategic growth

In 2018 the Tasmanian Government committed to pursuing a strategic growth agenda to find innovative local solutions to increase inclusion and participation in our growing economy and to unlock the potential in our regional communities.

The strategic growth agenda is not simply about expanding welfare support and social services (although this may be required). Rather, it is about empowering communities and creating opportunities to ensure that all members of society can fully participate in, and share the benefits of, economic growth.

Another distinctive element of Tasmania's strategic growth agenda is its regional focus. We know that some communities face greater hurdles when it comes to accessing work or learning pathways and contributing to economic activity. University staff have been working with the TSS, Tasmanian Council of Social Services (TASCROSS) and the Tasmanian Chamber of Commerce and Industry (TCCI) on various regional strategic growth initiatives including in Georgetown and with the Tasmanian Employment Partnership - Jobs Action Package. At scale and scope such initiatives could potentially reshape regional service delivery models.

Place-based service delivery

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic there was considerable interest² and⁷ established pilot projects underway across all public services in Tasmania (Commonwealth, TSS and Local Government), in integrated place-based service delivery. Examples included the abovementioned Jobs Action project (regional employment services), Anticipatory Care (chronic disease prevention) and the recently adopted State-wide Child and Youth Wellbeing Framework¹ under which all TSS agencies and potentially other service systems and providers will coalesce around a common framing of problems, goals, progress measures and impacts.

Not only will place-based approaches become more important in the context of COVID-19, they will be enabled by advances in integrated data networks which allow service designers and providers to analyse and share community-level data.

Some of the core enablers – such as digital inclusion frameworks – are relatively more advanced in Tasmania than in many other jurisdictions. This positions us well to identify and intervene early in those places and with individuals/families most at risk to enable earlier intervention to be targeted with significant wellbeing benefits and efficiencies to be accrued.

Place branding and Brand Tasmania

Brand Tasmania was established in 2019 as a new entity for engaging with all Tasmanians to build a clearer picture of our values and aspirations and what we want to achieve together as a community. Brand Tasmania is another important resource in the development of a place-based strategy in that it will provide insights which will inform both the TSS and the University of Tasmania about the needs and priorities of the Tasmanian community while helping to identify and promote distinctive and authentic place assets. Above all, this emphasis on place will help ensure that all public institutions are more responsive and accountable to the communities they serve.

Building a place-based University

In the higher education sector the focus on collaboration and ‘place’ is reflected in a growing recognition that universities should adopt a more ‘civic’ orientation and become more responsive to the needs of their communities in teaching, research and public engagement. In the knowledge economy of the 21st century universities should collaborate with government, industry and the wider community to develop solutions to local problems and strategies to capitalise on emerging opportunities. This is especially true of major universities in regional settings where they have a key role in providing training and developing skills, knowledge creation and driving innovation to create stronger and more prosperous communities.

The University of Tasmania’s *Strategic Plan (2019-24)* explicitly embraces a place-based approach where we work *for* and *from* Tasmania so all of our work and collective effort is focused on meeting the challenges Tasmania faces. It shapes everything we do, from our course distinctiveness to our research foci and the design and utilisation of our campuses. This is something we as a University cannot achieve in isolation or in a siloed way. We must be deeply connected to the State which we serve and a key part of that is being in step with TSS so that we can maximise impact.

The challenge of a place-based strategy

This orientation to place and the associated emphasis on community-level problem solving and investing in human and intellectual capital does require a reorientation and is not without challenges. However, in the context of COVID-19, the case for an innovative place-based approach is more compelling than ever, especially in regional settings. The following section will briefly outline seven emerging COVID-related priorities where the TTS, UTAS and other partners could collaborate on place-based strategies to promote better outcomes for all Tasmanians.

3. Place, the COVID-19 recovery and seven areas of possible collaboration for consideration

This section is prepared in the context of both

- 1) the Review's expanded scope to reflect on the lessons learned during the COVID-19 pandemic to develop new, more effective ways of working, and
- 2) the PESRAC *Interim Report* in particular Recommendation 63 on implementing a regionally based model for coordinating the recovery journey.

There are seven areas (see below) where we believe the COVID-19 experience to date has given clear direction on priorities for public administration reform.

Importantly, the COVID experience has highlighted just how important the public service is to the spectrum of crisis management, recovery, and resilience-building.

3.1 Increasing Tasmania's 'surge capacity'

As a small jurisdiction Tasmania has limited personnel to draw upon in times of large-scale emergencies and a limited capacity to hold specialist expertise on standby. However, in an emergency, the capacity to access specialist expertise is critical.

We need public services which are flexible and can be mobilised to respond to major crises. The need for such change was already evident following the bush fires of 2019 and COVID-19 has reinforced the need to be able to mobilise the public sector in a wide range of crisis response scenarios. Until very recently, emergencies have been regarded as ad hoc or unusual events demanding improvised responses. However, emergency response is now rightly regarded as part of mainstream service delivery requiring a reconfiguration of the public sector to create a state of constant readiness.

To date, most public sectors have relied on specific purpose 'task force' approaches to respond, usually within a largely 'command and control' model based on relevant crisis management legislation. We note that with COVID both the TSS and other public bodies such as the University were able to quickly reconfigure resources to focus on the issue at hand.

The University already provides complementary and supplementary capabilities to the TSS across a range of areas requiring deep technical skills that are essential in scaled emergencies. This is particularly the case in those key areas of our distinctive

research and learning and teaching, such as that led by the Tasmanian Institute of Agriculture and the Institute of Marine and Antarctic Studies. A recent example of University-Government collaboration during the COVID-19 response included committing over 30 university-based public health staff available to assist the public health response, conducting epidemiological modelling and risk analysis and offering a wide range of expertise and resources to the Tasmanian Government.

We have an opportunity here to expand this into a more structured partnership across a range of areas where in the future Tasmania will require surge capacity, often at short notice. This would involve identifying relevant expertise and resources across the University and developing a framework for the expeditious mobilisation of these resources.

3.2 Enhanced project capacity

As noted above, it is often the case that in a small jurisdiction there is limited capacity in many areas of professional expertise to justify ongoing full-time employment for individuals or for teams. In many instances the University may possess specialist skills and expertise which the TSS requires for key projects. Clearly there are many benefits from pooling or sharing such project capacity and developing models for establishing project-based collaborations, joint appointments and strategic secondments. It is important to highlight this is not about the University 'doing' policy for the TSS but providing the TSS with the analytic capacity to do good policy. Part of the focus would also be on enabling University staff to make use of applied collaborative work with government in their research as part of ongoing work.

Such collaborative arrangements might also be an important attractor for people considering employment in Tasmania given they would be presented with the opportunity to move between sectors and develop a more diverse skills base. This shared approach may see the attraction, retention and development of a deeply skilled and flexible workforce across Tasmania.

3.3 A State entity governance partnership

The University of Tasmania and the TSS have many existing partnership arrangements, some formal, some informal. Many of these partnerships are ongoing and established arrangements, including those with the Tasmanian Institute of Agriculture, the Institute for Marine and Antarctic Studies and the Peter Underwood Centre. The University has also historically been involved in a range of learning and teaching both for specific skill sets (such as nursing and policing) as well as more general professional development activities.

Most of these arrangements have emerged incrementally over time and whilst largely successful, there is an opportunity to explore a structured and strategic approach, especially since COVID-19 has added another overlay of complexity stretching our already relatively thin policy and operational capabilities. This presents an opportunity to learn from our most successful joint endeavours and transition other ad hoc and transactional relationships to more embedded strategic partnerships.

The TSS often draws on the University's expertise around specialist policy areas as well as having many staff of the University sitting on Boards and Committees of

various types. While this is a key function of a Civic University, it could be more strategically organised for professional development for both TSS and University staff.

For example, the University could coordinate a list of talented staff whom we think would make great board/committee members and would gain greatly by being board members. This would support the TSS increasing diversity on State entity bodies and make sure we are making best use of Tasmanian talent. There may also be opportunities to look at a more structured approach to how the TSS engages with our various University committees and advisory arrangements. With a joint place-based commitment, it would be important to look at how we could develop such capabilities on a more regionally-inclusive basis. Again, such partnerships may help the attraction and retention of staff to both the University and the TSS, for example by providing leadership development opportunities.

3.4 More flexible systems and funding

The COVID-19 response has highlighted the need to develop mechanisms for budget flexibility which allow speedy redirection of resources (budget, labour, and equipment). COVID-19 has seen all levels of government and other sectors (including universities) quickly redirect funding towards crisis management and recovery efforts. There may be an opportunity here to better align at place level the cumulative impact of such efforts.

The trade-off here for both the TSS and the University is between increased flexibility and risk management around monitoring and accountability and being able to maintain business as usual for core service delivery.

3.5 Flexible and effective information systems

Real-time decision-making data (data in motion) and monitoring data allow public institutions to rapidly identify new risks and opportunities as well as ensuring monitoring and accountability alongside the assessment of policy impact. However, there are trade-offs to be considered around privacy, data management, data access and data storage for which new policy and protocols are required. This is an area where the University and the TSS share many common interests, especially around the idea of a shared state-wide data platform.

An appropriately designed state-wide data platform could be the basis of collaborative research collaborations and policy analysis which would help establish a shared evidence base in relation to Tasmania and its future as well as a focal point for developing relevant data management and analysis skills and capabilities.

3.6 New and more flexible working situations and systems

COVID-19 has driven the rapid adoption of technology which will transform white collar work and service delivery. Like all service-oriented organisations the TSS and the University are reviewing both where and how employees work as well as exploring new, more flexible and effective ways of collaborating to deliver services to Tasmanians. The public sector, like all organisations, needs to understand the implications of these changes and develop strategies to capitalise on them.

More flexible organisational practices and remote working solutions responding to COVID-19 could lay the groundwork for longer term flexibility in public services to maintain pandemic protection and respond to changing service and service delivery needs. These more flexible patterns can enable more rapid responses to new circumstances but can reduce some of the efficiencies associated with agglomeration and more structured work patterns. The longer-term innovation and productivity impacts of these new patterns remain unclear as do the psychological and cultural impacts on staff.

There is an important place component to this issue, especially the opportunity to examine an enhanced regional public sector presence across Tasmania. Again, we note that flexible working arrangements entail some risks. For example, in many instances there will be a disproportionate additional burden on some employees such as those with caring responsibilities (still predominantly women) or those who do not have access to a suitable workspace at home. This is another important area where the University and the TSS can share learnings in the unique Tasmanian context.

3.7 Embracing digital technologies and digital service delivery

Public sectors globally are embracing digital technologies to achieve better governance. Information and communications technology are rapidly reshaping public sector workforces and their management. COVID has accelerated this across the community. For example, the University rapidly moved to more substantial online delivery of learning and teaching for 2020 and is considering what elements have worked well and should be retained in 2021 and beyond.

Whilst the move to digitisation and online/remote service delivery has had many positive impacts (such as allowing greater geographical access to courses and the ability to continue to function during a crisis), there are numerous challenges associated with privacy and security, with overcoming digital exclusion and exacerbating existing inequities.

Tasmania is relatively well positioned from the initial NBN rollout to take more of a leadership role in digital inclusion strategies and development of digital service delivery platforms; again an area where we share a joint interest with the TSS.

4. Specific economic development opportunities

Notwithstanding that the Tasmanian economy performed relatively well in recent years, prior to COVID-19 Tasmania faced a series of structural challenges to economic development and many of these have been exacerbated by COVID-19. These barriers and strategic solutions have most recently been a focus within the PESRAC *Interim Report* and flagged as a major focus for the final report.

Universities play a key role in stimulating economic activity in regional economies. They provide much of the knowledge that enables existing industries to be more competitive exporters; help industries increase their value add; and provide the skills for employment in higher paying jobs and in rapidly growing new enterprises.

Globally those regions that do well are most usually associated with a university deeply embedded in and working for the regional economy.

In particular, we believe there are opportunities in Tasmania to focus more on the central role of SME's in shaping Tasmania's future and therefore on the policy and funding settings that can best support entrepreneurship, innovation and enterprise development.

Specific areas of partnerships that could be explored include a common approach to understanding regional economic activity and its performance, stimulating innovation through industry-wide R&D; accelerating the launch of new ventures and; bridging the regional skills gap through meaningful training and attraction strategies.

5. Summary

The Review of the TSS provides a unique opportunity for Tasmania to take the lead in structural transformation in each of the areas articulated above. This is an opportunity to explore strategic problem solving in real time. In many cases, the University is facing similar challenges in institutional re-design and cultural change as a result of COVID-19 and there are opportunities to share knowledge and experience.

Crucially we believe that there is an opportunity for closer collaboration around identifying a shared understanding of the future challenges Tasmania faces and to develop a more integrated approach to problem framing/solving and the evidence base to inform strategy development. This could significantly deepen Tasmania's policy capabilities as well as accruing economies of scale and scope over time. The opportunity here is to jointly focus our resources on a small number of critical strategic problems.

In our University journey to date we can see considerable synergies with the Review terms of reference especially around the need to focus on structural transformation, to have greater clarity around mission and core priorities, to identify place-based strengths, to enhance service delivery and to embrace a broader range of partnerships and to ensure a right-sized and sustainable future.

We believe that more aligned and structured approaches to enhancing the relative adaptive capacity of Tasmania can accrue regional economies of scale and scope as well as deepening our policy and problem-solving capabilities. Tasmania has an opportunity to lead in this key area of institutional redesign, noting that many of these ideas also relate to relations with other key public services in Tasmania, especially those within local government and the Commonwealth Government.

We believe that the more we can identify areas where the TSS and the University share interests, objectives and data sets the more likely we can construct a longer term partnership and a shared approach to attracting and retaining talent in Tasmania.

The University is committed to working with the communities of Tasmania to lift educational attainment, revitalise our regions, tackle the health and social challenges we face here and to engage with the industries of the future and support innovation, enterprise and employment in these sectors. In doing so we can lift the measures that determine what quality of life looks and feels like for Tasmanians.

These underlying principles are shared with the TSS and for both institutions to succeed and achieve the most meaningful impact, we will need to work at a whole of system level in place-based and people-centred ways. We have an opportunity before us to align the ways in which we work and allocate resources to maximise our impact. This submission begins the work of identifying key areas of priority for the shared purposes of ensuring excellent outcomes for Tasmania.