

Media Release

Chiefs of Staff, News Directors

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Tasmania unites around the promise of a brighter future, built on education

A specialist centre will be established to help understand the issues that constrain Tasmanian educational outcomes.

The Peter Underwood Centre for Educational Attainment bears the name of Tasmania's late Governor, a University alumnus, accomplished lawyer, esteemed judge and passionate champion of the power of education.

It was launched today by his widow, and the Centre's Patron, Mrs Frances Underwood, University Vice-Chancellor Professor Peter Rathjen and Education Minister Jeremy Rockliff. An advisory board will be chaired by Tasmanian Governor, Professor Kate Warner AM.

This is a path-breaking partnership between Government House, the University and the State Government.

The Centre will bring the full power of the University's world-renowned research to focus on the causes, nature and implications of educational underachievement for individuals, society and the economy. It will engage the Tasmanian community, as well as the educational workforce in charting a new future for the State.

Mrs Underwood said: "For our entire lives, my husband and I shared a deeply held belief about the power of education and its promise in creating new, better futures for Tasmania and Tasmanians."

"We believed that where you are you born and the circumstances into which you are born shouldn't be a determinant of the sort of life you are going to live. The centre will focus our minds on research to better understand how this can be achieved. Tasmanian children should not just succeed but flourish."

Professor Rathjen said the Centre would bring together two great independent institutions – the University and Government House – to work in partnership with Government to focus on improving educational outcomes in the State.

“The disappointing educational outcomes in Tasmania reflect a tangle of influences which include, amongst other things, a unique history and demography, the educational attainment of older generations, the economic circumstances of our communities, and geographical dispersion of our communities,” Professor Rathjen said.

“We must have the courage to seek Tasmanian solutions that can improve our education, integrating learnings from overseas with the unique local context, harnessing the capabilities of researchers across disciplines, and grounding advice in evidence and research.”

University Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Students and Education) Professor David Sadler said: “This is a unique moment in which Tasmania has come together to address a common purpose.”

The Centre will be supported by three key programs:

- A concerted, multi-disciplinary research effort headed by an endowed Chair that can provide impartial and evidence-based advice.
- A professional development framework for teachers held in partnership between the University and State Government, providing skills and support to staff in the education system.
- Building educational aspiration amongst children, parents, schools and community organisations.

“The establishment of the Peter Underwood Centre for Educational Attainment is not in and of itself an end,” Professor Rathjen said.

“It is an acknowledgement that there is much to do and that addressing the issues which are holding Tasmanian children back will take many years to improve.

“This is, however, a significant step on a road which Tasmania has not travelled up until this point. Tackling the issue requires focus, strong leadership, fruitful partnerships and community support. This is what is offered by the Peter Underwood Centre for Educational Attainment.”

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