

MEDIA RELEASE

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Great teachers help Tassie boys dream big

As the Australian Government prepares to inject the largest amount of funding ever into school buildings, a University of Tasmania Honours graduate has released research emphasizing that high quality teachers are the biggest influence on student success.

Joshua Moore, an Honours graduate from the Faculty of Education, says his thesis, *Where to for our boys?*, shows skilled, well-prepared teachers who can build strong relationships with their students are the biggest influences on Year 10 Tasmanian boys as they decide on further education options.

“These teachers not only prepare their students well academically for college or TAFE but crucially, they build good relationships with students,” he said.

“Students told me that they enjoyed subjects at school when they had a good relationship with the teacher and continued to study in those subject areas in their choice of further education.”

Mr Moore, who will begin his teaching career at Cressy District High School next week, did in-depth interviews with five 17-18 year-old students – three in Year 12 at college and two in second-year apprenticeships at TAFE.

He asked them what influenced the decisions they made in Year 10 about further education and how well high school prepared them to fulfil their Year 10 aspirations.

Mr Moore’s research is important because the retention rate for Tasmanian males from Year 10 to Year 12 (56.9 per cent) is lower than the national average (71 per cent) and has fallen against the national average over the past two years. In addition, according to Mr Moore, no research has been done on the reasons for Year 10 boys choosing different further education directions and he believes this is worthy of further research.

His Honours research showed that the major influences on Year 10 boys’ further education choice were:

- Their individual attitudes to schooling;
- Their enjoyment of school subjects (four of the five interview participants went into vocational areas strongly related to subjects they enjoyed;
- Teachers and career advisers (students from medium socio-economic families relied more on career advisers than those from higher socio-economic families whose parents had been to university);
- Parents (discussion with parents was important but not influential unless the student wanted to follow a parent’s vocation).

“The students I interviewed emphasized that academically they were well-prepared for college and TAFE,” Mr Moore said.

“But the college students believed they could have been better prepared for the individual study habits required there; one taster day was not enough.

“The TAFE students said the physical work involved in their apprenticeships had been a shock but they became used to it.”

Information Released by:

Media Office, University of Tasmania

Phone: 63243218 Mobile: 0438 510 616

Email: Media.Office@utas.edu.au

What Tasmanian boys say about ...

Enjoying subjects: “Oh I definitely think I would’ve been more engaged in maths ... then I would have ... had a better understanding of it. And had teachers that I got along with, then I would have done maths this year and I might have been interested in the science areas but because of my attitude towards maths in high school I lack numeracy to a certain extent ...” (George, Year 12 college student)

Influence of teachers: “I remember one teacher, she was a librarian, she was more like a friend, sort of person I could talk to cos she’d known me for a long time and she really made my decision (to do Years 11 and 12) ... I’d prefer to have fun and stuff but she made me see, you know, the bigger picture ...” (Neil, Year 12 college student)

High school preparation for further education: “In Year 11 I did a course called VET Construction, it meant I got to go to TAFE once a week. I didn’t know what to expect or anything, what it was gonna be like ... When we went down there, there was about 20 of us just to have a look about ... We went down there before we chose our subjects to see what we were thinking about doing. The time... actually counted towards our apprenticeship so it was a good lead-in program.” (Duke, second-year apprentice builder)

Transition to college: “In Year 11 I found it quite challenging cos I stuffed around a fair bit. I wasn’t used to having so much freedom because basically if I don’t wanna go to class I don’t have to ... so yeah I wagged most of maths last year ... If I did that at high school there’d be harsh punishments ...” (George, Year 12 college student)

Transition to apprenticeship: “Luckily I had done work experience with this guy ... It was a real eye-opener ... to the actual work. The first two or three weeks I was absolutely stuffed by the end of the day ... but your body just adjusts. Obviously it’s a big shock, you go from sitting in the classroom to carrying bricks and stuff...the schoolwork though, that’s been beneficial, you need your maths of course and you need your people skills when you’re talking to clients so none of it’s useless.” (Ralph, second-year apprentice builder)