

Minister for Education
Minister for Disability Services
Deputy Leader in the Legislative Council

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02 SEP 2024

Ms Tabatha Badger
Greens Member for Lyons
Email c/o Clerk of the Assembly: laura.ross@parliament.tas.gov.au

Dear Ms Badger,

Thank you for your Constituent Question on Wednesday, 7 August 2024, asked as follows:

This is a question from numerous constituent groups on the east coast. Online access centres provide vital services, particularly in our rural communities where there is often unreliable or no internet connection and a digital divide in tech services and abilities. Supported by skilled, dedicated volunteers, online access centres help rural residents manage online tasks such as paying bills, completing digitised paperwork and job searching. To be clear, this service is distinctively different from that of Libraries Tasmania.

Funding for online access centres ends in the next financial year - many operators have been trying to get clarity for a long time on what the future will hold so they can plan ahead. Can you finally ease the understandable angst of many online access centres and the communities reliant on them and articulate what the plan is for the future? Will they amalgamate into Libraries Tasmania or will we see a roll out of hubs customised for the needs of each unique community, as we have seen in Queenstown and Devonport?

I am pleased to provide the following response:

The Tasmanian Government is committed to ensuring Tasmanians have online access to services and the digital skills they need to fully participate in economic, social and civic life.

The community managed Online Access Centres are funded by the Government through the Digital Connections Grant program, administered by Libraries Tasmania.

All Online Access Centres are funded appropriately for their work through to 30 June 2025 and the recent voluntary closure of one centre, was not funding related.

Libraries Tasmania with the Department of Education, Children and Young People will undertake an independent review of investment in digital inclusion programs, including the Digital Connections Grant program.

The review will identify local areas that have the highest need for assistance in transitioning to the digital world.

The review will be completed by the end of 2024.

Until the review is complete, no decision will be made on the Online Access Centres.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Jo Palmer', with a large, stylized initial 'J'.

Hon Jo Palmer MLC
Minister for Education