

**A submission of
The Smith Family**
to the
State of Victoria
Department of Education and Training

Regarding

The Review of Education and Training
Legislation

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everyone's family



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Introduction

The Smith Family welcomes the opportunity to respond to the DET review of Education and Training Legislation in the State of Victoria. Featuring evidence-based research, our submission reflects on the numerous local and national changes in the contemporary education and training environment, and provides our insight into how new or revised legislation can best respond to these transformations. Particular attention is paid to our promotion of legislation that is relevant to and inclusive of disadvantaged communities, who continue to face multiple and diverse barriers to education and training participation and achievement. This focus is concomitant with The Smith Family's dual generational approach to education and community support, whereby we consider learners within the wider context of their families in order to strengthen the social cohesion and interaction between the generations. This perspective then reflects our mission that 'together with caring Australians, The Smith Family will unlock opportunities for disadvantaged families to participate more fully in society'.

This submission also reflects the importance of developing an holistic approach to policy reform that encompasses and is informed by the experience of children beyond their involvement in formal education. Research has shown that there exist various points or phases along the continuum of individual development that are highly influential with regard to educational and economic outcomes. These include the transition from primary to secondary schooling, from secondary to tertiary education, school to work, and work back to further education / different employment. These emphases are currently reflected in The Smith Family's *Learning for Life* suite of programs, which provide various forms of support to disadvantaged groups to progress through these transitions as smoothly as possible. There is also a significant body of research that shows that supporting children in the years before school (0-5 years) greatly increases their chances of better learning outcomes and more successful transitions from home to school and through other life transitions (Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000; Shonkoff & Meisels, 2000; Keating & Hertzman, 1999). This has informed The Smith Family's involvement in early childhood intervention as a component of lifelong learning for a number of years, and our commitment to this developmental phase has been most recently expressed in our role as a facilitating partner for the Australian Government's *Communities for Children* initiative.¹

Creating this kind of developmental baseline data through the assessment of needs and experiences of children at the pre-school stage is likely to prove very valuable in informing a more coherent and learner-focused education and training policy strategy. The piloting in Perth of the Australian Early Development Index (AEDI) in 2003 was a significant first step in this respect, providing a community-level measure of young children's development in the fields of language and cognitive skills, emotional maturity, physical health and well-being, communication skills / general knowledge, and social competence.² As has been shown in both Perth and Canada (where the EDI was originally developed), using the tool has given communities the chance to strengthen and increase collaboration between schools, early childhood services and local agencies supporting children and families. Using the AEDI to inform education and training policy reform in the context of lifelong learning will therefore help unlock opportunities for disadvantaged families to participate more fully in society, and increase the likelihood of more prosperous and coherent outcomes for all.

¹ The Smith Family manages Communities for Children initiatives in five locations in New South Wales, Western Australia and Victoria providing support for an extra 12,000 babies and toddlers. For more information, see The Smith Family web site: www.smithfamily.com.au.

² A comprehensive listing of the five development domains examined by the Australian Early Development Index can be found in Appendix A of this submission. For more information, see The Centre for Community Health, Royal Children's Hospital (Melbourne), http://www.rch.org.au/australianedi/index.cfm?doc_id=6210.

Terms of Reference

We note the key terms of reference for the DET Discussion Paper, which reflect the central objectives and expectations of both government and communities in relation to the changing nature of education and training in Australia:

- Universal completion of education to the end of secondary schooling or its training equivalent;
- Multiple pathways between education, training and work;
- High standards of achievement at all levels of education and training;
- A culture of lifelong learning across the community;
- Community confidence in the range and quality of education and training provision.

The Smith Family's submission examines each of these objectives in light of their potential to facilitate greater social inclusion and educational participation among disadvantaged communities. In particular, it translates these goals into specific principles that faithfully respond to the complexity of contemporary educational and training-related paths available to Australians. These terms of reference therefore have relevance to The Smith Family's agenda for societal change in enabling educational access and advancement among communities and thereby strengthening their capacity to move beyond some of their present levels of disadvantage.

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1. Executive Summary

The Smith Family (TSF) facilitates full participation for disadvantaged families in the education process and works with people to gain the knowledge, skill and confidence to exercise realistic life choices. The central objective of our flagship *Learning for Life* suite of programs is to improve the life opportunities and self-esteem of students from low socioeconomic status (SES) backgrounds to ensure that current disadvantage does not translate into lifelong disadvantage. Our perspective on education is therefore oriented less to particular levels of achievement and more to providing support and encouragement for students to develop a lifelong learning mentality that will help them make informed decisions about the paths they wish to follow.

A recent report discussing ‘School Factors related to Quality and Equity’ across OECD countries revealed that while students in Australia demonstrate a relatively high degree of mean performance, the overall level of equity in terms of the deviation in student performances and the quality of school resources is relatively low.³ In other words, although the overall trend in educational outcomes may be positive, the experience of students within the system is far from uniform or equitable, particularly among those from disadvantaged backgrounds. It is suggested in the report that this is not so much a consequence of variance *between* schools (which is relatively small), but rather *within* schools, suggesting a need for policy reform to focus on internal factors such as discipline and the manner of presenting learning and development challenges.

Within this context, the submission looks closely at government and community objectives for education in Australia with a view to ensuring proposed policy reforms by the State of Victoria incorporate adequate and appropriate provisions for the equitable participation and inclusion of disadvantaged families and their children. While The Smith Family supports the critical thinking behind the five key objectives set out in the *Review of Education and Training Legislation* Discussion Paper, we are inclined to think that varying degrees of qualification and expansion are further required to respond more effectively to students from low SES. From a broad perspective, this submission calls for the cultivation of more learner-centred approaches to teaching, career guidance and support for disadvantaged students in overcoming the multiple barriers to learning and participation that currently exist, with the unifying principle of equity of opportunity within education present throughout. More specifically, the argument raises the following issues for consideration within the proposed reforms:

- With regard to Objective 1, ‘**Universal completion of education to the end of secondary schooling or its training equivalent**’, we discuss the need for policy to ensure greater equality of opportunity in education by tackling the disproportionate representation of low SES students among early school leavers. We highlight some of the contextual factors contributing to this phenomenon that have arisen from our own research with disadvantaged groups, and press for their fuller recognition within policy frameworks. Moreover, we argue that the current emphasis on school retention rates, while important, is not adequately balanced by the promotion of alternative pathways for students who may be less academically-inclined, and has led to the widespread lack of incentives for early school leavers to re-enter education.
- In relation to Objective 2, ‘**Multiple pathways between education, training and work**’, we analyse the concept of a ‘pathway’ in the contemporary education environment and point to the emergence of the portfolio career as an important factor in policy planning and development. We also point to the need for clearer and more comprehensive ‘sign-posting’ of pathways, and for appropriate information, guidance and support that would assist students (particularly those from low SES) in making decisions that are most beneficial to their future participation in society.

³ Mean student performance is here measured through an assessment of reading literacy. For details, see OECD (2005) *School Factors Related to Quality and Equity – Results from PISA 2000*. OECD: Paris.

- In the examination of Objective 3, ***‘High standards of achievement at all levels of education and training’***, we highlight the evidence base underlying the quality of teaching as the prime influential factor with regard to educational outcomes. We then argue for policy reform to provide the space and flexibility for schools and their teachers to develop more innovative structures for learning in order to respond more appropriately to the varying needs and abilities of their students. Finally, we advocate the importance of ensuring participation as a precursor to achievement, and the need to address the multiple socioeconomic barriers that currently prevent disadvantaged students from equitable degrees of participation in learning contexts.
- Objective 4, ***‘A culture of lifelong learning across the community’***, looks at The Smith Family’s conceptualisation of lifelong learning, and the need to develop a learner-centred approach within educational policy that will assist in making this orientation more sustainable and valued within the community. Examples of some successful initiatives facilitated by The Smith Family are provided, including the ‘Unlimited Potential’ Community Technology Learning Centres (CTLCS) and the Swan Nyungar Sports Education Project in Western Australia. The section then concludes with a discussion of the multiple psychological and economic barriers to learning that policy reform must tackle if lifelong learning is to become a tool for contemporary living, rather than a luxury.
- Finally, in light of Objective 5, ***‘Community confidence in the range and quality of education and training provision’***, we emphasise the need for policy to facilitate greater engagement of parents and community members in the education process, in light of the positive impact this has on educational outcomes. We also press for the regulation of the current trend for schools to impose ‘voluntary levies’, as these can impact very negatively on the participation and attitude to learning of disadvantaged families. A more constructive form of engagement is then advocated, in which community stakeholders offer input and support for the development of teaching and learning methodologies, thereby increasing their involvement and broadening the social responsibility for learning.

As all of these objectives are to some extent inter-related and overlapping, this submission emphasises the importance of policy integration within and across the fields of education, employment and the transitions from home to school in early childhood, school to work and back from work to further education and learning. A holistic evidence-based perspective of this nature has great potential in unlocking opportunities for disadvantaged families to participate more fully in the education process and work with people to gain the knowledge, skill and confidence to exercise realistic and beneficial life choices.

2. Rationale

The Smith Family is a national, independent, social enterprise established in 1922. We are working to achieve our mission of unlocking opportunities for disadvantaged Australians in two ways – by increasing the participation of those in society who have previously been marginalised and through the engagement of those who have the capacity to give.

Pursuing our vision for a more caring and cohesive Australian community, The Smith Family researches different forms of disadvantage to propose preventive responses to them, and to promote social change. Through advocacy, The Smith Family works for the development of social policy to benefit the entire community.

Recognizing the impact of global, domestic and local labour market changes, The Smith Family has focused program initiatives to enable opportunities to allow disadvantaged Australians to acquire and develop skills required to successfully participate in the new knowledge economy. Having conducted and commissioned research and considered other studies, the provision and promotion of lifelong learning opportunities and preventive programs is the key strategy through which The Smith Family believes it can best contribute towards preventing those in disadvantage from living in continued circumstances of social exclusion.

The past few years have seen spiraling concerns around the problem of Australia's aging population, prominently voiced in the Treasurer's Intergenerational Report (Commonwealth of Australia, 2002) and the more recent Productivity Commission's report on 'The Economic Implications of an Ageing Australia' (Australian Government Productivity Commission, 2005). The need for greater participation in the workforce has been especially stressed, and as better educated people generally have higher rates of participation,⁴ it is in the interests of all to provide more educational opportunities for those who have been previously marginalised. This requires more than the provision of youth apprenticeships and training – according to The House of Representatives, the issue is more about assisting all Australians to be financially independent and secure in their futures, which demands a longer-term policy perspective (Commonwealth of Australia, 2005).

Our own research and experience with disadvantaged groups suggests that this longer-term strategy for increased workforce participation and social inclusion can be facilitated through engaging individuals in lifelong learning. As this submission will show, ensuring that education is characterised by equitable opportunities and the full participation of students from all groups within society is critical to cultivating a community where learning is a tool for contemporary living, rather than a luxury. Extended flexibility in the areas of teaching methodologies, curricula, school to work transitions and civil society engagement in the education sector, could all potentially contribute to a more active and productive workforce. As an organisation providing financial and educational support to over 22,000 students through our flagship *Learning for Life* suite of programs, The Smith Family is thus fully committed to the progressive evaluation of teaching and learning strategies within our own operations, and as part of the bank of knowledge emanating from the public and private sectors.

⁴ Australian Government Productivity Commission (2005), pXIX.

3. Response to Terms of Reference

Universal completion of education to the end of secondary schooling or its training equivalent

Ensuring equality within education

As an organisation involved in the promotion of social capability across the population, The Smith Family (TSF) holds firmly to the view that education is critical to promoting an active and inclusive citizenry. While most societies throughout history have recognised the importance of education, divisions of class or socioeconomic status, rather than ability, have in many instances skewed access and participation in educational and learning processes toward the more advantaged (Teese & Polesel, 2003). As a recent OECD report has shown, students with favourable background characteristics⁵ tend to receive better conditions of schooling in Australia, contributing to a high degree of variance and inequality in student performance and school quality (OECD, 2005). Although the concept and system of mass education has become a widely accepted norm, this lack of equity of opportunity within and around the education system continues to ensure that financial disadvantage and exclusion are often an intergenerational phenomena among disadvantaged Australians. The completion of secondary schooling to the end of Year 12 is a case in point here, for while research from many different sectors has confirmed the multiple benefits of this level of attainment in accessing employment and breaking the cycle of poverty,⁶ students from disadvantaged backgrounds are continually identified as having disproportionately high rates of early school leaving.⁷ This may be the result of personal factors such as a lack of self-esteem, confidence, motivation or ability, or it could be a consequence of the significant variance in quality of teaching and resources identified by OECD within the Australian education environment (OECD, 2005). In most cases, it is a combination of factors. However, the issue remains that those students for whom upper secondary school completion would arguably be most beneficial in helping them overcome a cycle of disadvantage are, for various reasons, slipping through the net.

Identifying the factors influencing educational outcomes

Both State and Federal government education departments have developed concerted policy strategies to increase retention rates through a number of measures as well as disincentives: the promotion of curriculum and certification reform; increasing 'at school' allowances; and, the abolishment of unemployment benefits for those under 18. However, research by The Smith Family has identified a number of issues specific to disadvantaged students and their educational outcomes that have not yet been adequately recognised or responded to within policy frameworks (The Smith Family, 2002; 2003; 2004; 2005). It is often assumed that those students who fail to complete upper secondary schooling – particularly those from low SES backgrounds – are therefore less motivated or able than with regard to education than their counterparts from a higher SES. Many are directed by school counsellors, teachers or their families towards

⁵ 'Background characteristics' are understood in the context of the report as comprising parent's occupational status, immigrant status, gender and socioeconomic status. For more on this, see OECD (2005).

⁶ Entry requirements for many jobs now increasingly demand high levels of educational attainment meaning that 'twelve years of schooling are now considered a basic requirement for an educated population' (Bagnall, 2001). Those who leave early are more likely to be unemployed, obtain low skilled work, earn less money and have a higher probability of not being in the labour force compared to those who complete Year 12 (Fullarton, 2001).

⁷ Early school leavers are defined here as those students who are unable for whatever reason to complete schooling to the end of Year 12 or its equivalent. For details on the statistical representation of disadvantaged students within this group, see The Smith Family (2002a) *School to Adult life Transitions through work and study: A select review of the literature*. Research & Social Policy Team, Background Paper No.4. The Smith Family: Sydney.

vocational rather than tertiary pathways for this very reason, in the belief that these paths are somehow more appropriate or suitable for students from particular socioeconomic groups.

On the contrary, research by The Smith Family has shown that students from low SES backgrounds are far from the homogenous entity this would suggest. Analysis of disadvantaged students on our *Learning for Life* program with a comparable group of Year 11 students from the general population has shown that the former are actually more likely to be strongly positive about school and learning than the latter, and that they generally get more enjoyment out of their learning experiences (The Smith Family, 2003). Similarly, our research has disproved the popular stereotype upheld in the media that students from one-parent families are more likely to have poor educational outcomes than are students from two-parent families (The Smith Family, 2003).

It is rather the diversity of contextual factors that influence attitudes towards learning and education, and that subsequently impact on learning difficulties, which lead to the over-representation of low SES students among vocational / school-leaving trajectories. These include:

- **The educational attainments of parents.** Research by The Smith Family has found these to be more significant than economic factors (e.g. a family's capacity to purchase goods and services) in explaining different educational outcomes of students. It is argued that the higher the level of education of the parent(s), the higher the level of motivation and achievement is found among their children (The Smith Family, 2001). It is also associated with increased odds of students reporting feeling positive at school and enjoying what they do in the classroom (The Smith Family, 2003:52). This has important consequences for current government approaches to addressing the effects of low SES in education, which are predominantly aimed at the economic redistribution of resources and direct financial assistance (The Smith Family, 2001). While financial assistance either to schools or families is one of a number of factors, other policies and programs are also needed to increase the education levels of parents. Encouraging adults to engage with their children's education or to (re)enter the learning environment themselves is a crucial part of the inter-generational approach The Smith Family takes in its range of community programs, and needs expression within holistic policy frameworks that target more than the individual student.
- **The type of school.** A number of studies have shown a 'school effect' with regard to different educational outcomes, in that students attending state government schools are less likely to stay on to Year 12 and to have lower levels of achievement than do those attending non-government schools (The Smith Family, 2003:57). Teachers at schools with higher levels of disadvantaged students often hold lower expectations of their students and may be less motivated in their teaching as a consequence. This can impact detrimentally on the latter's perceptions of self-ability and self-worth, both of which have been shown by our research to be strongly influential in decisions regarding Year 12 participation and beyond (The Smith Family, 2005). Policy therefore needs to target procedural issues surrounding access of disadvantaged students to different kinds of schools to ensure a greater equity of opportunity and avoid creating 'ghettos' of disadvantaged schools.
- **School 'climate'.** Understood as aspects such as discipline, teacher/student relations, students' sense of belonging and teacher morale, school climate has been shown to be a key factor impacting educational outcomes (OECD, 2005). It operates as an influence distinct from the 'type' of school discussed above, although the two are often confused through a chain of stereotypes and assumptions that link private schools with wealthier students, better discipline and inherently more 'positive' learning climates. The Smith Family's involvement in an indigenous education project in WA has shown that productive relationships between teachers and students are less a matter of the level of resources available and more the extent to which those resources are centred around the interests of the learner (Elderfield & Loudon, 2005). A policy framework that recognises this climate and provides staff and students with the space and encouragement to develop their learning environments in

tandem would therefore be extremely valuable in increasing / sustaining commitment and motivation in institutions where the number of students from low SES backgrounds is consistently high.

- **Geographical location.** Students from non-metropolitan areas (rural and remote) are more likely to have lower educational outcomes in terms of academic performance and retention rates than students from metropolitan areas (HREOC, 2000). Students from low SES families are particularly hindered by the cost and availability of transport, and lower levels of family income support (The Smith Family, 2003). Policy needs therefore to be sufficiently flexible at a local level to recognise and respond to the varying needs of and increased support required by students attending these schools.
- **Gender.** The inequality in educational performance and experience according to gender in Australian schools is apparent in the recent OECD report (2005), where reading literacy is used as an indicator to show the significant advantage of female students over male.⁸ Research by The Smith Family (2005) with students from low SES families also suggests that girls in Years 8 and 9 are significantly more likely to plan to complete Year 12 than boys, and similarly more inclined to plan post-school study than boys. Moreover, girls were also more aware of the educational levels they needed for their preferred anticipated occupation than boys. Further research is needed to untangle the range of factors that are likely to have contributed to this disparity, but current findings are sufficient to suggest that gender specialisation may be an important part of effective educational policy.

Although some of these factors have been targeted within different policy sectors and frameworks, there exists a lack of coherence and coordination between them that render the actual support received by low SES students to be piecemeal, poorly timed and often inadequate. More diversified and coherent evidence-based policy frameworks are needed in order to alleviate some of the negative educational outcomes associated with financial disadvantage.

Balancing school retention and the promotion of alternative pathways

The Smith Family is developing its suite of programs based on evidence that shows that the longer students can be encouraged and supported to stay within the education system, the better equipped they will be to cope with adult life. However, we do not support the development of a policy framework emphasising school retention to the point of sacrificing or impacting detrimentally upon the provision of options for those students who have reflected on and shown a preference for alternate learning pathways other than senior secondary school. However, if alternate learning pathways are not promoted effectively and are not readily accessible, the situation may become one of 'forced retention' for students who do not see attractive alternatives (Teese *et. al*, 2000). Our research has pointed to the importance of tapping into students' interests as a key component in identifying pathways that are more likely to lead to sustained educational and/or workplace involvement.

The Smith Family in principle supports the objective of universal completion of schooling to the end of Year 12 or its equivalent. We also recognise how important it is to provide adequate forms of support to assist students in selecting learning pathways most suited to their interests and abilities. The life patterns and circumstances influencing how students and their families make the decision to leave early and embark on a different pathway are many and varied, and not always connected to a low socioeconomic status (see Appendix B for typology of early school leavers). In fact, there are different degrees of 'at-riskness' for both school completers and early leavers, and this complexity needs to be reflected in a policy framework that ensures any focus on retention rates is balanced by equal attention to the potential benefits of other pathways.

⁸ With regard to the reading advantage of female students, Australia was given a decile score of 6, which reflects only a medium level equity between the performance of both sexes (a score of 1-2 indicates a high level of equity, 9-10 low equity). For a more detailed discussion of this data set, see OECD (2005).

This perspective suggests that the design and implementation of secondary school curricula is probably more effective when students are able to make connections between what's happening in school and their lives and their future plans for work. Research by The Smith Family has shown that ability, gender and vocational orientation are strong influences on the formation of post-school plans among Year 9 students, but that the curricula and support provided to them in making choices is not responsive to these emphases (The Smith Family, 2004). At least one-third of junior secondary school students are failing to plan a sufficient level of education or skills development to allow entry into their most preferred job, a mismatch that could result in long-term disadvantage (The Smith Family, 2005). These concerns need addressing at a policy level if students are to make more informed and appropriate choices regarding their education, training and employment options.

Providing incentives to re-enter the education system

Finally, policy must ensure that more measures are put in place to assist early school leavers to re-enter the education system. There is an unspoken assumption within current education frameworks nationwide that once a student has left school they are unlikely to want to return, and without proper support and appropriate incentives, such students may indeed have little opportunity to do so. Dedicated assistance, incentives and resources to help reintegrate early leavers back into education or training has been successful in some OECD countries,⁹ through the integration of education and employment policies. It has been argued that if policy frameworks provided more continuous support for the transitions from school to work and back from work to further education/learning, the national economy would gain a long-term increase in GDP of 0.28%, or an additional \$1.8 billion on the bottom line (Spierings, 2003).

Multiple pathways between education, training and work

The emergence of portfolio careers

The idea of 'pathways' from school to work has influenced most post-compulsory education policy in Australia since the 1980s, and was a key concept in the landmark report by the Australian Education Council Review Committee (Finn, 1991), which described it as:

...movement through a coherent set of educational and employment experiences leading to some identified destination, which may also be a link into a subsequent pathway. (Finn, 1991:94)

Research by The Smith Family and others has suggested that this assumed linearity is in practice experienced more as a fractured multi-dimensionality in young people's lives (The Smith Family, 2002a; Dearn, 2001). In light of this, the concept of 'transitions' from education to work need to be expanded to encompass broader conceptions of youth and adulthood that focus on more than the study / work dichotomy. The range and diversity of pathways open to students today is so considerable that following a linear career trajectory is a non sequitur, with portfolio careers now the accepted mantra. Yet the ability to make informed choices as to routes within this maze, and to access appropriate information, guidance and support remains relatively poor and inconsistent,

⁹ The Nordic countries' efforts at reintegration of early school leavers have had particularly promising results. Under the 'youth guarantee' concept, every young person up to 20 years of age is entitled to an education at upper-secondary level. For example, in Norway, a 'follow-up service', set up as part of the 1994 education reforms, is designed to reintegrate early leavers back into school and enable them to gain an upper secondary qualification. The service works in close contact with school counsellors and the school psychological service, with the public employment service, and with health, welfare and other community services. Initial monitoring of the follow-up service has yielded positive results, with school drop-out rates falling and very high proportions of those contacted by the service engaged in education and employment. For more, see OECD (2000) *From Initial Education to Working Life – Making Transitions Work*. OECD, Paris.

particularly for students from disadvantaged backgrounds. Too often, these kinds of services – whether classroom or counsellor based – are marginalised within schools, or function simply to steer higher achieving students into tertiary education and other lower achievers into ‘subordinate’ vocational training or poor quality jobs. A lack of institutionalised bridges between vocational training, apprenticeship and tertiary education further exacerbate this artificial binary division, reducing the likelihood of students on either path of fully understanding the flexibility or range of their options.

Sign-posting pathways through education and training

The key challenge for policy in relation to multiple pathways is to ensure not only that students are adequately informed of the variety of routes available, but also to create solid linkages and coherent qualification frameworks of which they may take advantage as their needs and learning progress.¹⁰ Research has shown that no one type of pathway – whether apprenticeship, school-based vocational or general education – holds the keys to consistently successful transitional outcomes, which suggests that policy should seek to avoid emphasising some routes above others and rather ensure that such pathways are well organised, accessible and clearly defined. Encouraging students to pursue their interests along a mix of pathways will then help them to develop a greater variety of general, technical, vocational, personal and work-related skills that can increase their overall employability.

However, understanding the best way in which to equip students – particularly disadvantaged students – with the information, guidance and support needed to confidently negotiate these paths remains a significant policy challenge. Many schools utilise approaches that seek to ‘match’ a student’s perceived abilities to a particular job or course rather than assisting them to develop more active self-assessment and career planning skills through a lifelong learning perspective. Others have introduced computer-based packages to fill the gap, but both of these approaches tend to be effective only in the context of additional sources of advice and support. Moreover, they have difficulty in adapting rapidly enough to changing course and job requirements in the broader work environment. The Smith Family has taken numerous steps towards mitigating this problem through collaborative research into mentoring strategies, and now manages a large team of volunteers from a range of professional fields who provide accurate and up to date advice for students at various stages of the *Learning for Life* suite of programs.¹¹

Accessing appropriate information

Who students confide in when making decisions about their education and career should therefore be a key factor in related policy development. Research conducted by The Smith Family (The Smith Family, 2002b) has shown that just under 75% of students from disadvantaged backgrounds turn to their parents or wider family, as opposed to a career counsellor (19%), a teacher (26%) or friends (27%). This suggests a relatively high degree of trust and support between parents and their children, and reflects The Smith Family’s dual generational approach of providing information and support not just to students but to their parents as well. Policy must enhance the knowledge capacity and engagement of parents in the educational process if it is to lead to outcomes that are both positive and sustainable.

Ensuring information is timely and appropriate is also of importance for effective education policy, particularly in light of recent research by The Smith Family (2005), which has suggested that

¹⁰ A good example of a coherent framework of this nature in practice is the Gippsland Education Precinct, a \$14 million post-compulsory education development centre in Victoria that brings secondary school students in contact with Gippsland Group Training, GippsTAFE and Monash University facilities through a range of clearly articulated and connected pathways. For more on this initiative, see <http://www.gippsland.monash.edu.au/campus/gep/>.

¹¹ For more on the mentoring components of The Smith Family’s community programs (e.g. Plan-It Youth, eXLR8, Student2Student and On Track), see our web site, www.smithfamily.com.au

students in Australia begin considering their career pathways from an earlier age than schools or parents usually begin providing advice. 70% of students surveyed while in Years 8 and 9 were able to nominate an occupation they would like to do by age 25, while two-thirds had already planned to complete Year 12. That students form clear vocational and educational goals so early on was a significant finding, but of greater concern was the fact that around one-third of those students who had nominated their desired occupation were planning an education that would be at too low a level to achieve this. Of this group, 70% still expected that they would get this job, suggesting a significant lack of realistic guidance, information and support in forming these goals. Moreover, boys were more likely than girls to have a mismatch between their planned education level and the skill level of their preferred job, reconfirming the need for gender specialisation within policy strategies relating to information provision.¹²

High standards of achievement at all levels of education and training

Raising the quality of teaching

The Smith Family views education and learning as lifelong processes, reflected more in people's ability to apply knowledge and skills to meet real-life challenges rather than the extent to which they have mastered a specific school curriculum. While curriculum-based grades are evidently necessary for evaluation of school performance and a systemic education sector as a whole, such an approach has led in practice to significant discontinuities between grade achievements and stages of school and learning. This is particularly true for classes of mixed ability students, where this framework effectively masks the progressively widening divide between the top students and the lower achievers as they move together through the school system.¹³ Given that children from low SES families are more likely to have lower educational outcomes than those from higher SES backgrounds,¹⁴ the stratified school system as it currently operates actually perpetuates and exacerbates the exclusion of the disadvantaged by failing to provide teaching and assistance appropriate to their needs. These persistent inequalities of opportunity and outcomes in the provision of secondary schooling in Australia have long term effects for both individual aspirations and, it is argued, the social fabric of the nation (Teese & Polesel, 2003).

In light of this, The Smith Family believes that raising the quality of teaching and developing more responsive and equitable structures for learning within schools should be a vital part of policy reform in the education sector. Research has shown that quality teaching is by far the most important factor influencing educational achievement (accounting for up to 60% of variations in learning outcomes), and that teaching is most effective when targeted at an individual's current level of knowledge, understanding and skill.¹⁵ In response to this evidence, the Australian Government established the National Institute of Quality Teaching and School Leadership in 2004 to provide teachers and school leaders with a national voice and body through which the profession can determine and articulate standards.¹⁶ However, it is likely to be some time before

¹² For details, see The Smith Family (2005) *What do Students think of Work? Are they on the right page?* The Smith Family: Sydney.

¹³ Professor Geoff Masters (CEO ACER and Chair of The Australian College of Educators), 'How Good are Australian Schools? Should the best teachers be better rewarded?' Concurrent session at the *Sustaining Prosperity* Conference, University of Melbourne, 31 March – 1 April 2005.

¹⁴ See The Smith Family (2001) *Educational Performance among school students from financially disadvantaged backgrounds*. Working Paper 4, The Smith Family: Sydney.

¹⁵ Professor Geoff Masters (CEO ACER and Chair of The Australian College of Educators), 'How Good are Australian Schools? Should the best teachers be better rewarded?' Concurrent session at the *Sustaining Prosperity* Conference, University of Melbourne, 31 March – 1 April 2005.

¹⁶ For more on the Institute, see the Department of Education, Science and Training web site, <http://www.dest.gov.au/schools/qualityteaching/default.htm>.

the impact of this institute is felt in terms of devising standards and enabling professional learning for school leaders and classroom staff. In the meantime, Minister Nelson argues that teachers remain poorly organised professionally, with outdated salary structures and a lack of resources that could facilitate the level of flexibility needed to raise the inclusion and achievement levels of disadvantaged students.¹⁷ Moreover, there remain few incentives in Australia for the best teachers to teach in the poorest neighbourhoods – rather, the current situation encourages exactly the opposite (Keating, 2004:108).

Addressing the barriers to participation

Our research has shown that student motivation, self-esteem and level of participation in the learning process are all key factors influencing educational outcomes (The Smith Family, 2005, 2004, 2003, 2002b). Our flagship *Learning for Life* suite of programs has been developed around the central objective of unlocking opportunities for disadvantaged students to obtain a more participatory and inclusive education. Put simply, the challenge is to ensure disadvantaged students feel that they belong, that they fit in with and are not marginalised by/from their peers and other adults. Yet there exist today a number of barriers to their full participation in schooling, which have impacted negatively on their achievements and self-perceptions of wellbeing. Previous research by The Smith Family has shown the multiple hidden costs of participating fully in the ‘free’ education system, notably those incurred through excursions, uniforms, text-books and other ‘voluntary’ fees.¹⁸ The inability of many parents to meet these expenses has led large numbers of socioeconomically disadvantaged students to miss out on these opportunities, further marginalising them within the school community. The detrimental impact of this on children’s self-esteem, motivation and identity in relation to other school children is a matter for concern, particularly in light of recent media reports suggesting that more and more families are struggling to meet the costs of helping their child participate in all activities. Figures provided to *The Age* by the State Schools Relief Committee of Victoria show that over the past five years the number of government school students receiving handouts to buy shoes and uniforms has increased by almost a quarter, while some families are now sacrificing food and rent to allow a child to attend an excursion.¹⁹ While the provision of scholarships to help students from financially disadvantaged families participate fully in school is a central part of The Smith Family’s *Learning for Life* program, developing more explicit provisions to safeguard this inclusion within education policy frameworks is of critical importance.

¹⁷ ‘Underpinning Prosperity: Our Agenda in Education, Science and Training’. Speech by The Hon Dr Brendan Nelson MP at the *Sustaining Prosperity* Conference, University of Melbourne, 31 March – 1 April 2005.

¹⁸ In 1998, the associated costs of primary schooling for one child were \$2800 per year, while the cost of secondary education for one student was \$3500. See The Smith Family (1997, 1999, 2002c) for more details.

¹⁹ Green, S. (2005) ‘Parents too poor to outfit students’, *The Age*, 28 March.

A culture of lifelong learning across the community

Conceptualising lifelong learning

The concept of 'lifelong learning' has generated a large amount of literature and analysis over the last few decades, most of which has focused on determining its meaning and elucidating the potential personal, social, economic and political benefits of this approach to learning. From the perspective of The Smith Family, 'lifelong learning' refers to an orientation that encourages engagement with learning, and the development of characteristics that will make learning an integral part of the learner's life (Bryce & Withers, 2003, quoted in The Smith Family, 2004). 'Learning' is here construed in the broadest possible terms and includes learning undertaken in both formal and informal education settings. It may also include moral or personal aspects. The development of these skills begins in early childhood (0-5 years), when individuals undergo significant transformations in their physical health and wellbeing, social knowledge and competence, emotional health, language and cognition, and communication. Research has shown that supporting children during this critical period greatly increases their chances of better learning outcomes and more successful life transitions later on (Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000; Shonkoff & Meisels, 2000). This has informed The Smith Family's involvement in early childhood intervention as a component of lifelong learning for many years, and our commitment to this development phase has been most recently expressed in our role as a facilitating partner for the Australian Government's *Communities for Children* initiative.

We know from the evidence cited above that positive early childhood experiences provide a strong foundation for the development of other lifelong learning skills, particularly those of engagement and self-direction. These are necessary to acquire not only the job skills demanded by the new knowledge economy, but also to improve an individual's social skills and thereby develop social capital within the community. However, early childhood as a constituent of lifelong learning is still to receive adequate expression at the policy level, which focuses primarily on regulating aspects within the boundaries of the formal education sector (6-18 years). It may therefore be necessary to expand policy perspectives to encompass the full breadth of the learning horizon experienced from birth, through childhood, adulthood and beyond. As Keating (2004) warns, 'Australia needs to seriously embrace lifelong learning on a very much larger scale than has so far been contemplated' (124).

Developing learner-centred approaches

An important step towards cultivating an orientation to lifelong learning within students is to shift to a learner-centred approach within education policy, as opposed to furthering current directives that revolve around the more manageable units of the classroom, school or curricula systems. Sometimes referred to as 'personalisation',²⁰ this covers practices that enable student-directed learning and the identification of student interests, which our research (The Smith Family, 2005) has shown to be critical as the starting point of effective learning. The impetus for this shift has gradually increased in line with the spread of individualism across Australian society,²¹ which has in turn generated expectations among communities that public services such as education should be tailored to meet the particular needs of individuals rather than an assumed homogeneity. It is also enforced by the reinterpretation of equity as a guiding principle in the delivery of public services, from a presumption that all citizens should be given the same treatment to one that is directed to ensuring 'equality of opportunity', achievable only through differentiated and personalised assistance (Keating, 2004:78).

²⁰ The importance of 'personalisation' was either implicitly or explicitly reflected in a large number of the presentations made at *Making Schools Better: A Summit Conference on the Performance, Management & Funding of Australian Schools*, held in Melbourne 26-27 August 2004.

²¹ Professor Eva Cox, 'Social Capital and Values'. Paper presented at 'Neighbourhoods and Social Capital – Building Supportive Communities for Kids', One day Conference, 29 April 2005, Macquarie University.

Adapting curricula to student's interests and needs, particularly those of Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) groups may not be a straightforward task, but can be achieved at a number of different levels and in multiple ways. The examples in the box below show how a partnership between the WA Department of Education, the Swan Nyungar indigenous community, The Smith Family and business used a variety of learner-centred approaches to overcome some of these difficulties to better engage indigenous students in Western Australia.

Personalised Learning Initiatives

The Swan Nyungar Sports Education Project (SNSEP), Balga Senior High School (WA)

Initiative One - Collapsing Timetables

In 2002, in the spirit of adapting the school environment to suit the needs of the students, the SNSEP timetable was collapsed so that there were fewer, but longer, lessons. This was done for three reasons:

- (a) To limit the confusion and discipline issues caused by students moving around to different classes and teachers, particularly when they had come from a more stable environment with one classroom and one teacher.
- (b) To give more time for relationships defined by respect and trust to develop between the students and teachers. Extended class time gives the teachers time to develop the necessary rapport and strategies to be effective, thereby building the confidence in their own performance and building the students' confidence in them as authoritative figures.
- (c) To allow teachers the time needed to develop flexible and innovative lessons filled with diverse experiences.

The collapsed timetable has proven to be a major structural success for the program. Most of the staff remains pleased with the time it has given them to foster relationships with their students and actively manage behavioural, attitudinal, attendance and learning issues.

Initiative Two – Individualised Education Plans (IEPs)

The program develops IEPs for all students who are at risk of developing educational difficulties. These are usually modified versions of the curriculum that the teacher uses for the rest of the class, so as to avoid alienating the student. Teachers may use shorter and less complicated texts combined with less intensive or complicated tasks or outcomes. This approach is proactive, rather than reactive. The teachers feel that if students have achievable tasks they are less likely to misbehave. In addition, if students know that their teachers are dedicated to helping and supporting them they are more likely to invest in the learning experience themselves.

Examples taken from Elderfield and Loudon (2005)

To further expand this culture of personalised lifelong learning across an entire community may require considerably more effort, as the concept may be variously unfamiliar, unattractive and intimidating to many, particularly among those from disadvantaged backgrounds who have had negative learning experiences. The key lies in understanding how to help people relate to and absorb the concept of lifelong learning in relation to their everyday lives, promoting lifelong learning as a contemporary tool rather than a luxury.

A good example of this is the 'Unlimited Potential' (UP) ICT network of Community Technology Learning Centres (CTLCs) being facilitated by The Smith Family as a foundational partner with Microsoft Australia and a number of other community organisations. Through the CTLCs, the UP program works by encouraging people to pursue their own personal interests (or 'fields of

fascination') and by teaching them ICT Literacy skills along the way as the means to achieving goals relevant to these interests or their lives in general. Both young and old are able to participate, support and learn from each other through the relaxed and informal environment of the CTLCs, leading to a diverse range of activities and people within any one centre. However, as valuable as this variety is in giving participants the chance to pursue anything from typing a letter to designing a PowerPoint presentation, the specific ICT skills absorbed are all largely incidental to the overriding aim of helping them believe they can learn (again) and see themselves as learners. It is the cultivation of this mentality, in addition to the portfolio of ICT skills they may develop along the way, that we believe is most significant in helping them approach new challenges and overcome them through learning (see case study in the box below).

Lifelong Learning in Action

Case study from the Unlimited Potential program in Australia

James is a very bright nine year old who attends a Smith Family UP Centre. His mother, **Mary** is a single mum who receives financial and non-financial support from The Smith Family's *Learning for Life* program. They live in a Housing Commission property close to an UP Centre. Mary, like many others, aspires to move out of the Housing Commission flat and own her own home.

James and Mary cannot afford to have a computer at home. Together they come to the weekly Computer Club at the CTLC. James undertakes school-related tasks on the computer as a first priority. When these are completed, he develops other IT skills under the direction of a Smith Family Tutor.

The group is aimed primarily at children but parents are encouraged to stay and experiment with the technology. Mary is learning at a slower pace that suits her and she is making exciting progress. She is a volunteer at a local community agency and believes that if she can develop her computer and office skills, she could get part time work. In addition, she knows that if her skills improve, she will be able to volunteer at the local Financial Community Co-op and qualify for a discounted home loan. Her dream of owning her own home may then become a reality.

More case studies are available on The Smith Family web site, www.smithfamily.com.au

Addressing the barriers to learning

The first step on this road would be for policy to significantly reduce or eliminate the various social, economic and political barriers that currently prevent or de-motivate people from learning. These currently include a lack of access, financial/material resources, confidence, time and support (The Smith Family, 2003). Previous government responses to these issues have taken the form of either (a) providing schools in disadvantaged areas with better resources; or (b) providing money to schools whose students come from disadvantaged backgrounds to establish special assistance programs. The success of these initiatives has varied considerably, and sustainability has been a continuing problem (The Smith Family, 2000). In contrast, The Smith Family's *Learning for Life* suite of programs is an intervention aimed directly at individuals in the context of their families and communities (rather than at the school), providing both material and non-material support directly to those in financial disadvantage. A key component of this is the award of scholarships that entitle students to long-term financial assistance at the rate applicable to their school year, and the provision of information, guidance and support to both students and their parents to help them secure better educational outcomes. Although the Federal Government has committed itself along these lines to improving the information available to parents and

communities concerning the performance of individual students and the school as a whole,²² it is not yet clear how this will be translated into policy and practice.

Overall, developing a lifelong learning approach involves ensuring that formal education and training sectors are viewed not as ends in themselves, but as foundational units for inspiring further learning and active participation in wider society. It will require new and expanded flexibility in, among others, the areas of teaching methodologies, curricula, school to work transition paths and civil society engagement in the education sector. Ultimately, while this experimentation may not significantly narrow the gap in achievement between different SES groups, it is likely to facilitate an increased level of equity in educational opportunities, attract a greater rate of participation and bring the benefits of lifelong learning to a wider community.

Community confidence in the range and quality of education and training provision

Increasing parental involvement in education

The provision of public services such as education has been affected over time by the changing nature of the relationship between government and society in Australia. Since the second half of the 19th century, communities have traditionally placed their faith in the state for education provision, partly from a desire to ensure a uniformity of standards (Keating, 2004:77). While this emphasis on uniformity is still present in policy discourse today, it relates more in practice to specifying universal outcomes to be achieved than a process to be followed, as reflected in the first of the terms of reference for this paper. As a result, parents and communities are less clear or confident regarding the range and quality of education provision available, with the burgeoning growth and popularity of the private sector providing evidence of this insecurity and a reduced faith in government capacity. Without wishing to enter into the multi-faceted debate over private vs. public education, The Smith Family would instead point to the current lack of parental and community engagement in the educational process as a potentially key contributing factor in this problem, particularly among disadvantaged groups.

Our research has consistently shown a positive correlation between the level of family and community engagement in the educational process and the motivation of students to continue learning (The Smith Family, 2003, 2004, 2005). Establishing the value of learning among parents and communities, particularly among those where historically participation in education may be low or negative, is a critical part of creating a wider network of support for students outside of the school. The active engagement of interest groups such as employers, family members and civil society groups will ensure that the expectations and demands they hold with regard to education and training within their community will be more attuned to the outcomes of students. Given that curricula, skills and social values continue to evolve over time through national and international influences, ensuring the involvement of the wider community in the planning and/or management of local education opportunities will help the prosperity of the region as a whole. Having a greater degree of local autonomy in determining school policies, financial resources, curricula and instruction has also been associated with better school performance in many OECD countries (OECD, 2005).

Where government is in the driving seat, there must be adequate transparency and consultation with these groups as appropriate, for confidence is rarely inspired in the absence of accurate and accessible information. This may range from clearer assessments of individual student performances to evaluating teaching methodologies and funding provisions. Both can assist in broadening the ownership and responsibility for ensuring successful and locally-relevant systems. This includes mechanisms to ensure the equal and full participation of disadvantaged groups in

²² Underpinning Prosperity: Our Agenda in Education, Science and Training'. Speech by The Hon Dr Brendan Nelson MP at the *Sustaining Prosperity* Conference, University of Melbourne, 31 March – 1 April 2005.

learning opportunities, local safety nets for those at risk of leaving early, and formal linkages between school and community industries to facilitate smoother transitions to work.

Addressing voluntary levies imposed by schools

One of the most common channels through which many schools engage with their local communities appears at present to be that of fundraising and the demands for 'voluntary levies' to cover expenses for equipment, materials, activities and services not otherwise funded by government. The practice has become so widespread however, that locally raised funds, primarily parental voluntary contributions, comprise almost one-third of public school operating budgets nationwide, and in some areas up to 40%.²³ While some states, such as Western Australia, have devised a comprehensive legislative approach setting out the criteria for the charging of voluntary contributions, others such as NSW and Victoria continue to permit unregulated and *ad hoc* levies through insufficient legislation. This impacts most heavily upon financially disadvantaged families, who suffer both marginalisation and frequent de-motivation from further participation in the education process beyond the absolute minimum.

A far more positive and constructive manner of engaging students, their families and the wider community within the education process is to promote regular feedback channels on their experiences of learning. This can bring valuable insights to further the professional development and performance management of teachers, as well as inspiring a larger sense of ownership and responsibility towards the development of young people within a particular community. The Bendigo Senior Secondary School in Victoria is an example of one such institution where these feedback channels have been formalised through regular student surveys, creating a strong performance and development culture around teaching and learning methodologies that has benefited all community stakeholders.²⁴ Ensuring that qualitative, rather than purely financial engagement channels are created between schools and their communities is therefore a key consideration for sustainable policy reforms.

²³ Australian Senate Employment, Education and Training References Committee (1997).

²⁴ Kamener, L. (2005) 'Creating and Sustaining a Performance and Development Culture in Schools'. Paper given at the *Sustaining Prosperity* Conference, University of Melbourne, 31 March – 1 April 2005.

4. Recommendations

The Smith Family is ultimately concerned with societal change. At a program implementation level, The Smith Family aims to increase the personal and collective resources of individuals, families and communities to help them develop skills and capacities they need to respond to challenges and more fully participate in society. Furthering opportunity for Australians to successfully access, and participate in, education may be seen as an asset-building, as opposed to a deficit-bridging, response to the incidence of financial disadvantage and social deprivation in our community. Furthermore, successful participation in education is a vital foundation in enabling Australians to become lifelong learners, sufficiently equipped to adjust to changing circumstances across the life course.

The state government of Victoria has an important opportunity through these proposed reforms to create an education system that puts the needs of students and their communities first. While some of the following recommendations have already been raised under the reform program outlined in the *Blueprint for Government Schools* (launched by the Victorian government in November 2003), they are included here to reflect emphasis and priority. Equitable access and participation need to be driving factors in goals and targets established through the modernisation of existing policy, so that education can be brought closer to its democratic potential in creating a society where learning is both valued and open to all socioeconomic groups. The Smith Family recognises that the government's efforts in reforming policy frameworks must be complemented and supported by those of a larger society that involves individuals, families, communities, businesses, organisations and institutions. To this end, the following recommendations are for consideration in this context, recognising the desirability of all working usefully together towards mutually agreed outcomes.

The Smith Family recommends:

General recommendations:

- That any reforms to the existing education policy framework directly or indirectly contribute to a more equitable and inclusive system in which disadvantaged groups within society may fully participate.
- That continuous and systematic evaluation mechanisms regarding policy and program outcomes are installed across all stakeholder levels within the education process (student, teacher, local government etc.) to further facilitate evidence-based strategies.
- That adequate attention is paid to how education policy affects (and is affected by) legislation in related sectors such as employment and social welfare, and to the potential for greater communication and coherency between these entities as a foundation of reform.
- That policy reform recognises the importance of early childhood development (and tools such as the Australian Early Development Index) in influencing subsequent educational outcomes and the transition from home to school, school to work and back from work to further education / different employment.

Universal completion of education to the end of secondary schooling or its training equivalent

- That recognition is given to the contextual factors influencing attitudes to learning and education among disadvantaged groups and consequent efforts made to redress the stereotypical perception of such students as inherently poor achievers.
- That more resources and opportunities for learning are activated at the community level to encourage the (re)entry of adults into formal and non-formal education, recognising the significant positive influence of this on the educational outcomes of students within their immediate circle.
- That efforts are made (beyond the standardisation of curricula) to leverage the resources of government and non-government schools for enhanced student outcomes in both types of schools.
- That appropriate gender-specific policies and programs are put in place to address the differential between girls' and boys' educational experiences and outcomes.
- That safety nets are installed at the school and community levels to offer appropriate financial or psychological support to those who do decide to leave school early, and that opportunities for these individuals to re-enter education are formalised within the administration and curricula of the school without stigmatisation.
- That (further) mechanisms are put in place to gauge feedback from students who do not continue to Years 11 and 12 as to the reasoning and critical factors behind their decisions, whilst avoiding stigmatisation.

Multiple pathways between education, training and work

- That students and their parents/guardians are able to access appropriate information, guidance and support regarding their options at timely intervals throughout secondary and tertiary education, through a mixture of self-assessment programs and formal counselling.
- That solid linkages and coherent qualification frameworks are put in place between schools and the wider community to maximise the chance for students to experience a smooth/successful transition from school to work.
- That vocational or apprenticeship pathways are given equal status and treatment in the distribution of resources as tertiary education, and that clear and coherent bridges between these pathways are created to allow students to explore different skills and experiences without limiting their options.

High standards of achievement at all levels of education and training

- That recognition is given to the primary importance of equitable opportunity for participation in education for students from all social backgrounds as a precursor to measuring achievement.
- That a ceiling be introduced for financially disadvantaged families on the amounts of voluntary contribution requested by schools as a proportion of school operating budgets.
- That more concerted efforts are made to broaden and support the range of personal and social skills that schooling develops in students (such as the orientation for lifelong learning), as opposed to furthering appreciation of achievement based solely on curriculum-related outcomes.

- That various feedback and evaluation mechanisms are installed between students and teachers within school management processes to ensure a more systematic monitoring of teaching quality in accordance with a culture of professional development.

A culture of lifelong learning across the community

- That the cultivation of engagement and self-direction be recognised as critical components of a lifelong learning approach to education, and that students clearly understand the benefits and utility of these skills in relation to solving problems in their everyday lives, as opposed to learning for the sake of learning.
- That a learner-centred (as opposed to school or curriculum-centred) approach be adopted throughout education policy reforms to facilitate a more diverse and appropriate range of teaching and learning structures for students of mixed ability within the same year.

Community confidence in the range and quality of education and training provision

- That a broad range of community stakeholders from all SES levels, including employers, family members and civil society groups be given formal opportunities to participate in the planning, management and evaluation of education and training provision in their area, in order to maximise local relevance, ownership and responsibility for learning.
- That government funding mechanisms/strategies and decision-making processes are made as transparent, flexible and consultative as possible to minimise miscommunication, possible resentment and devaluation of education within the community.
- That formal channels are put in place between students, school staff, community and local government to facilitate information flow, discussion and feedback regarding the range and quality of local education and training provision.

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Appendix A – The Australian Early Development Index (AEDI)

In each of the five development domains there are a series of questions asked to obtain a wide range of information about children. Examples of these are:

- **Physical health and well being**
 - Gross and fine motor skills
 - Holding a pencil
 - Running in the playground
 - Motor coordination
 - Adequate energy levels for classroom activities
 - Independence in looking after own needs
 - Daily living skills
- **Social knowledge and competence**
 - Curiosity about the world
 - Eagerness to try new experiences
 - Knowledge of standards and acceptable behaviour in a public place
 - Ability to control own behaviour
 - Appropriate respect for adult authority
 - Cooperation with others
 - Following rules
 - Ability to play and work with other children
- **Emotional health/maturity**
 - Ability to reflect before acting
 - Balance between being too fearful and too impulsive
 - Ability to deal with feelings at an age-appropriate level
 - Empathetic response to other peoples feelings
- **Language and cognitive development**
 - Reading awareness
 - Age-appropriate reading and writing skills
 - Age-appropriate numeracy skills
 - Board games
 - Ability to understand similarities and differences
 - Ability to recite back specific pieces of information from memory
- **Communication skills and general knowledge**
 - Skills to communicate needs and wants in socially appropriate ways
 - Symbolic use of language
 - Story telling
 - Age-appropriate knowledge about the life and world around.

Source: Centre for Community Health, Royal Children's Hospital, Melbourne

http://www.rch.org.au/australianedi/index.cfm?doc_id=6210

Appendix B – Typology of Early School Leavers

Type of Early School Leaver	Description
Positive	These students leave school with a career goal in mind and actively seek to take up employment in their chosen area
Opportune	Opportune leavers take an opportunity to leave school on finding a job or establishing a personal relationship
Would-be	Would-be leavers are not early school leavers in the strict sense as they reluctantly stay in school because there are no other options open to them
Circumstantial	Circumstantial leavers are forced to leave school for largely non-educational reasons such as need for income, housing or relationship problems
Discouraged	These early leavers leave school because they are not doing well and have little interest in being there
Alienated	Similar to discouraged leavers but often displaying behavioural problems or have been expelled or suspended

Source: McIntyre et al (1999:47)