

Review of Western Australian senior secondary pathways

Submission on the Expert Panel Report

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The Smith Family

The Smith Family welcomes the opportunity to continue to contribute to the important work of the Western Australian Pathways to Post-School Success Review, through this short response to the Expert Panel's Draft Consultation Report.

The Smith Family is a national charity and our **vision** is a world where every child has the opportunity to change their future. Our **belief** is that education is one of the world's most powerful change agents and our **purpose** is to overcome educational inequality caused by poverty.

In FY23, we supported around **16,000** children, young people, parents, carers and community professionals in Western Australia. This includes over **5,300** students on our long-term educational scholarship program, **Learning for Life (LfL)**. Students on LfL are all living in **low-income** families and their parent/carer works in partnership with The Smith Family to support their child to achieve educationally. Our longitudinal research with LfL students and families provides unique insights which can help ongoing program and policy development to strengthen young people's senior secondary pathways.

Six key imperatives

The Expert Panel's report identifies six key imperatives, which The Smith Family endorses, and we also note and support the report's commentary that these imperatives are **interconnected** requiring concerted system effort. The latter means that sophisticated **implementation** planning and tracking of **progress** will be required to ensure that the desired student outcomes are achieved, and schools and the broader system are able to manage the significant changes required. We note the work already undertaken by the Review in Appendix 5 regarding proposed timeframes for implementation of the Review's recommendations.

With regards the six key imperatives, The Smith Family would particularly emphasise the importance of:

- **Increasing student retention and achievement** – as this has such a strong **equity** dimension in WA, as it does in all Australian jurisdictions. This includes for First Nations students, those from lower SES backgrounds, those living with a disability, and those living in rural and remote areas. Being able to track **progress** in these areas over time will be critical and making this data publicly available. Given the **intersectionality** of educational outcomes, a **data development** agenda that allows outcomes to be reported for example, by Indigeneity *and* gender or Indigeneity *and* low SES may be required.
- **Better support for students from diverse backgrounds** – this also has a strong **equity** dimension.

- **Responding to new opportunities in the world of work** – labour market changes will continue to be a feature of young people’s lives in the decades ahead. These changes provide significant opportunities for young people, as well as risks, particularly for young people experiencing disadvantage. As recent research from the OECD has indicated, there is a significant link between career guidance, social inequality and social mobility¹. As flagged in our first submission to the review, there is significant work we believe needs to be done, to provide more integrated, comprehensive and quality careers support to young people as they move through school and beyond. This provision, as the OECD research shows also has an equity dimension.

Clarifying the purposes of senior secondary education

The Smith Family understands the need to have an agreed community understanding of the purpose of senior secondary education, and one that is centred on young people. It also supports the need for an inclusive process to develop this. We hope this can occur concurrently with other work needed to move forward the recommendations of the review.

We suggest that the **Alice Springs (Mparntwe) Education Declaration**, the Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth (ARACY’s) **Wellbeing Framework** and the OECD’s **Creating Better Opportunities for Young People** are some of the existing and complementary sources that could inform the articulation of the purposes of senior secondary education in WA:

1. The Alice Springs (Mparntwe) Education Declaration:
 - All young (West) Australians are confident and creative, successful life-long learners and active and informed members of the community is highly relevant given it is inclusive of all students, has a longer-term focus and acknowledges a societal role for education.
 - The system focussed goal is also highly relevant given its complementary focus on equity and excellence. Western Australia’s senior secondary education system cannot be excellent if it is not equitable.
2. ARACY’s Wellbeing Framework (the Nest) considers the whole young person through its six interconnected domains and was developed from what children and young people said they needed to have a ‘good life’.
 - While senior secondary education has a particular role to play in the learning domain, there is considerable value in seeing the broader role it can and should play in contributing to all six dimensions of the Framework. Senior secondary education has a key role for example in supporting young people to have a positive sense of identity and culture.
3. The OECD’s 2023 *Recommendation of the Council on Creating Better Opportunities for Young People*, informs the skills, capabilities and mindsets young people need in the 21st century. It gives particular attention to:
 - Literacy, numeracy and problem-solving skills, social, civic, emotional, entrepreneurial, financial, communication, creativity and language skills.
 - Promoting wellbeing including equipping young people with socioemotional skills and coping strategies to protect against stress and the impacts of adversity on wellbeing.

¹ OECD 2024 *Career guidance, social inequality and social mobility: Insights from international data* OECD Education Spotlights, Directorate for Education and Skills, No. 11

- Enabling young people to participate in an increasingly digitalised world.

Supporting enhanced career education and pathway planning

As articulated in our initial submission, The Smith Family sees **enhanced career education** as being essential for young Western Australians having pathways to post-school success. This is particularly important for young people experiencing disadvantage. Evidence shows that strengthening the quality and intentionality of careers education contributes to both high rates of **school completion** and higher levels of **engagement in work, training and/or study post-school**. It is also a very practical interface that students can directly experience, with both short, medium and longer-term benefits.

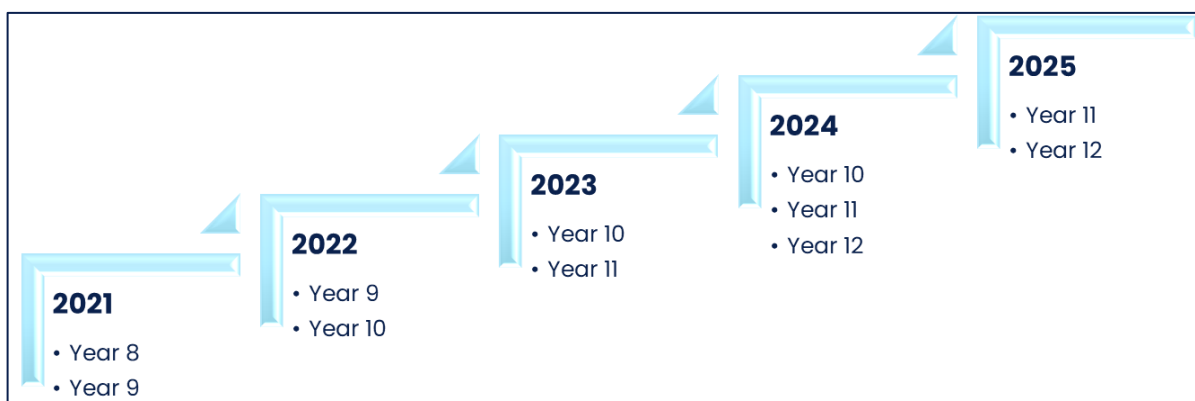
The Smith Family’s experiencing working with low ICSEA schools in Western Australia and across all other states/territories is that schools appreciate the ‘brokering’ or ‘**mediating**’ role that skilled not-for-profits can provide in bringing additional partnerships, people and resources to support career education to a school. So, we strongly recommend that the principle of ‘strengthening partnerships’ explicitly include **not-for-profits**.

By way of example, The Smith Family is currently undertaking a five year initiative, called the **Growing Careers Project (GCP)**, supported through the Australian Government’s Department of Education. GCP is working in **structured** and **strategic** ways with 60 partner high school communities across Australia, including six in WA, to support students to access an evidence based, sequential series of career guidance and occupation exploration programs. Programs are being offered to students across multiple years, focussing on their career learning needs at different stages of their development:

- Years 7 and 8: Discover and explore
- Year 9 and 10: Focus and plan
- Years 11 and 12: Decide and apply.

This structured approach leverages The Smith Family’s long-standing relationships with families experiencing disadvantage, as well as schools, education and training institutions, community organisations, businesses, philanthropy and the wider Australian community. It aims to build young people’s **social and cultural capital**, through expanding the networks of support they can draw on at a critical time in their lives. The Project has been designed to support as many young people as possible to participate in **multiple careers** activities across the five years.

The figure below illustrates the approach taken to focus delivery within specific Year levels across the five years.



From January 2021 to December 2023, GCP has provided 49,674 instances of careers related support to schools in disadvantaged communities across Australia. While the evaluation of the program is ongoing, indications from school staff are that GCP is highly regarded.

Integrated approaches such as GCP have the capacity to support how young people understand and value Vocational Education and Training, which in turn can contribute to the underpinning aim of Recommendation 9 in the Expert Panel's Report.

More fully recognising student diversity and achievement

The Smith Family strongly supports the intent of the recommendations outlined in Section 6 of the report, and as noted, a number of other jurisdictions and we would add organisations, such as Learning Creates Australia <https://www.learningcreates.org.au/> are working on responses which align with this intent and could inform implementation in WA. Particularly important in the development of new approaches to more fully recognise student achievement is that a 'two-tiered' system does not develop, with existing forms of recognition being seen as having greater value, than newer forms.

The Smith Family reinforces the importance of young people acquiring high levels of **literacy** and **numeracy**, given they are pre-requisites for economic and social participation post-school. We note Recommendation 34 which would see an expansion of methods by which students can demonstrate their skills in this area. We would also note that given the **current gap** evident in NAPLAN data for many young people from low SES, in addition to an expansion in how students might demonstrate their skills, additional efforts to **strengthen** their literacy and numeracy skills will also be required. The 2023 WA NAPLAN data shows that a quarter of Year 9 students from low SES 'needed additional support' in reading and numeracy to meet the standard. This compares to less than 2 percent of those from high SES. Simply expanding how students can demonstrate their skills in these areas will not be sufficient to genuinely address the very significant challenges faced by many young people from disadvantaged backgrounds in this key area.