

South Australian Productivity Commission

Submission on the Draft Report of the Inquiry into
Positioning All South Australians to Share in the Benefits
of Economic Growth

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The Smith Family

The Smith Family welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Draft Report of the South Australian Productivity Commission's Inquiry into Positioning All South Australians to Share in the Benefits of Economic Growth.

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.

We support many thousands of children and young people experiencing disadvantage in South Australia, including around **7,800** on our long-term educational scholarship program, **Learning for Life**. We work in 10 South Australian communities including Port Adelaide Enfield, Salisbury, Playford, Onkaparinga, Port Augusta and Whyalla, and have partnerships with **80 schools**, all of which have a low Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage (ICSEA).

We are very pleased to be partnering with the **South Australian Government**, with their funding support of \$4.2m over four years enabling The Smith Family to bring an additional **2,800 students** on to the *Learning for Life* program. We are also very grateful to the **Department for Education** for entering into a data sharing agreement with The Smith Family in 2021, which gives our frontline team members real time access to key data on students on the *Learning for Life* program. This partnership with the Department is grounded in a **shared commitment** to improving the outcomes of students experiencing disadvantage and the contribution that data can do to that. Our team members are now able to provide much more targeted and timely support to students and families, contributing to improved outcomes. South Australia was the first jurisdiction to enter into such an agreement with The Smith Family and this partnership is an exemplar of using **data for purpose**. The partnership was featured in the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare's report *Australia's welfare 2023 data insights*.

Broad conclusions of the Inquiry

The Smith Family welcomes the broad conclusions of the Inquiry outlined by the Chairman, namely:

- There is **much more that can be done** to support young people in South Australia to successfully transition out of school into work or education that is meaningful to them.
- Addressing this issue is both a **social justice** priority and **economic imperative**.
- The South Australian **Government school system** has a central role to play in delivering improvements in this area.
- **Data, targets** and **public reporting** on progress over time is essential.
- **High quality careers support** has a critical role to play, particularly for young people experiencing disadvantage.

We also note and endorse the need for much more **integrated** and **comprehensive supports** being provided to young people, including through 'full service schools' or similar models, given the range of challenges that impact on young people's educational engagement and achievement, and promote positive post-school pathways.

The Smith Family notes that to implement these recommendations, particularly in schools supporting significant numbers of young people experiencing disadvantage will require **additional resources** and that South Australian Government schools are not yet receiving 100 percent of the Schooling Resource Standard (SRS) needed to educate students. This is a significant concern to The Smith Family and we hope that the Federal and South Australian Governments will soon enter into both a bilateral agreement and the national **Better and Fairer Schools Agreement (BAFS) 2025-2034**.

Specific commentary on areas included in the report

Data, targets and public accountability

The Smith Family is cognisant both of the **range** of educational data collected in South Australia, noting for example, that SA has led the nation in tracking student wellbeing since 2013, as well as the significant data **gaps** which remain. The latter is problematic given data is essential to ensure that students' progress over time can be assessed and that **resources and support** can be directed to **where they are most needed**.

The Smith Family believes that **Better and Fairer Schools Agreement** can make a contribution in this area. We believe the measures that are included in the agreement are the right things to focus on – namely school attendance, achievement in literacy and numeracy, Year 12 completion and wellbeing – as we know from our own longitudinal research and that of others, the importance of these measures, to young people's choices and life outcomes.

The BASF includes a focus on improvements in these measures **for all students** and importantly for **equity groups**, such as those from low SES background, First Nations students, and students who live in regional and remote areas. The associated bilateral agreements which have already been signed by the Northern Territory, Western Australia and Tasmania, identify that each state/territory will have their own targets based on the jurisdiction's relevant starting point for each measure. Disaggregated data will be essential for all of the measures, in order that there is clear visibility around which groups of students are or aren't making progress in these key areas.

Importantly, the BASF Agreement includes a commitment from all jurisdictions to **Review the Measurement Framework for Schooling in Australia** to ensure it remains a relevant tool including the range of student level outcome data captured, disaggregation of data and potential new and updated measures including:

- A new measure of **student engagement**
- A new **equity in learning gain** measure, to enable measurement of student learning growth. This is particularly important so that we have a stronger sense of the progress students are making, regardless of what their starting point is.
- Measures of access, participation and outcomes for **students with a disability**. This is very important given the significant numbers of children with a disability in Australia (including South Australia), the significant resources allocated to support them, and the very limited data available to assess outcomes for these children.

The BASF also includes the requirement of an **Annual Report to the Federal Parliament** that the Federal Education Minister will be required to make under the new *Better and Fairer Schools (Funding and Refore) Bill 2024*. The Smith Family welcomes this higher level of national public accountability and believes this can also support enhanced **state/territory level accountability** regarding education. Such accountability we believe can be used to better understand how all South Australian students, particularly those in equity cohorts, are faring. It would therefore support the broader aims of this Inquiry.

Year 12 completion and the role of high quality careers support

The Smith Family strongly supports the draft report's conclusion that "the current rate of year 12 completions is clearly inconsistent with the South Australian Government's vision of transforming South Australia into a high-skill and equitable economy. Far too many young South Australians in disadvantaged suburbs, towns and regional areas are being left behind".

There is very clear evidence of the **link between year 12 completion** and a range of **positive life outcomes** including income and job security, a wider range of occupational choices, better physical and mental health, and the development of the skills and knowledge to be an active and informed community member. Year 12 completion provides young people with **more choices** and **opportunities** to shape their futures.

High quality systematic careers support across a young person's schooling and post-school is a central contributor to not only lifting the rate of year 12 completion but ensuring young people, particularly those experiencing disadvantage have more positive post-school pathways. Quality careers support helps young people understand how their school experience connects to post-school opportunities and the value of year 12 completion, in the current and future labour market realities.

The Smith Family's experience working in government schools across South Australia (and indeed nationally) is that while there are **pockets of good practice** careers support, it generally tends to be **ad hoc**, despite the best efforts of schools and their communities. This is particularly the case for schools supporting high proportions of young people experiencing disadvantage.

We therefore welcome the draft report's focus on ensuring a systematic approach to ensure all students receive high quality careers support across their schooling and the need to **strengthen links** between employers, employees and disadvantaged schools. The latter is crucial given the strong evidence that exposing school students to the world of work is key to them being engaged in work and/or study post-school.

Many policy and research reports have identified the need for **local partnerships** between schools, communities, industry, and vocational and higher education providers to enhance student learning and increase capacity to navigate post-school pathways, and The Smith Family supports this. We would however caution that **implementation of such partnerships**, including associated recommendations in the draft report needs to be very **carefully managed and supported**, given the contexts in which many disadvantaged schools are operating – including but not limited to, increasing student complexity, staff shortages and limited resources.

The Parliament of Victoria's review of career education in Victorian schools highlighted the value of **external coordinators who could broker partnerships** and pool resources or organise events for a cluster of schools in the careers space (Parliament of Victoria, 2018). Torii (2018) similarly highlights the benefits of **facilitation or brokering** of large-scale partnerships by external coordinators (**intermediaries**).

Schools serving high proportions of disadvantaged students **lack the time and resources** to prioritise developing and sustaining partnerships amongst other priorities. As such, intermediaries can play a critical role in **streamlining** some of the administrative and time burdens on schools and industry partners, as well as **finding and matching partners** for schools that lack the networks, connections and resources to do so.

Place-based, **multi-stakeholder partnerships** focused on school-based career education have also been advocated by Austin et al (2020a), Australian Government (2018), Education Council (2020), and Groves et al (2023). Bennett et al (2024) and Torii (2018) describe the benefits of scale in "**regional ecosystem**" partnerships involving multiple schools, employers,

and tertiary providers, with component activities running over multiple years to create opportunities for students to successfully transition from school.

Facilitated by **intermediaries** such as not-for-profit organisations and government departments, robust local partnerships have the potential to alleviate inequities and support the quality provision of career education. **Regional partnerships** of this nature provide increased opportunities for students to explore a range of career options and pathways and allow career education to be tailored to the needs of the local region.

The Smith Family's experience working in the careers space over many years reinforces the need for 'intermediaries' operating at local/regional levels, in order to maximise impact and ensure coordination and efficient implementation, appropriate to local contexts.

Below is an example of careers support at one of the schools The Smith Family partners with, which has evolved over time.

A careers support case study of Playford International College

Playford International College offers an array of intentional, tailored, and well-designed programs and career activities aimed at helping students stay engaged with their education, identify post-school pathways, and transition successfully into further education or the workforce.

Career education approach and intentionality

Playford International College initially adopted an approach to career education, that targeted all students. For pupils in Years 7 to 9, the Pathways Team facilitated at least two career interactions annually. These included career education activities conducted through **partnerships** with The Smith Family (such as Knowing Me, Presenting Your Strengths, Your Career Journey Interview, and excursions like the Careers Fair Scavenger Hunt) or events hosted by Flinders University (such as the University River Journey).

Initially career expos and cohort programs used generic resources and these were not as effective as hoped, so these evolved to tailored programs that involved both teachers and students and yielded better outcomes, albeit not without challenges, prompting further refinement.

The refined strategy focused on students in years 10 and 11, offering specific, targeted interactions through career development programs. This alignment with the rollout of The Smith Family's Growing Careers Program (GCP), funded through the Federal Department of Education for a period of five years, enabled the implementation of bespoke initiatives developed collaboratively with the Coordinator of Student Pathways and GCP.

The Pathways Team and increased student engagement

The Coordinator of VET and Student Pathways, based in the Senior Centre, is available for career discussions during break periods. The coordinator also proactively interacts with students to understand their interests and match them with suitable excursion opportunities, ensuring appropriate student participation in relevant activities.

Working closely with the Coordinator of VET and Student Pathways, the Career Transition Officer—a full-time non-teaching role - is crucial for student engagement. Also located in the Senior Centre, this officer establishes relationships with students, provides career support, contributes to destination data reports by maintaining contact with students and their families, and manages pre- and post-excursion sessions to optimise student experiences with employer contacts.

The Career Transition Officer also engages student leaders to influence peer groups effectively. By targeting key students, the officer quickly disseminates information and encourages others to seek assistance. This targeted approach fosters a sense of exclusivity among students.

Responsibilities within The Pathways Team are clearly delineated enhancing the program's effectiveness: the Coordinator of VET and Student Pathways manages VET administration, while the Career Transition Officer offers tailored support.

The combined efforts of both roles, the school's focus on career education and partnership with The Smith Family, have greatly improved student outcomes, with higher engagement and successful career placements. The team's trust with students and teachers, and the financial and coordination support from GCP have been important in what's being achieved.

Teacher engagement in Career Education

Due to time and other constraints, teachers frequently refer students to the Pathways Team based on their industry interests for further follow-up. The Pathways Team link curriculum areas to real-world jobs, significantly enhancing student engagement and achievement. Teachers in career-related subjects are encouraged to participate in career excursions to deepen their understanding of various careers and better support their students.

The Career Transition Officer also plays a vital role in cultivating relationships with teachers to advance career education initiatives. Consequently, teachers have become more engaged, proposing their own career-related activities and showing increased commitment.

Collaboration, tailoring, and student outcomes

Since 2021, Playford International College has partnered with the Growing Careers Program. The Pathways Team collaborates with the GCP Project Coordinator to ideate, plan, coordinate, and deliver immersion and excursion activities.

A notable aspect of GCP is its collaborative approach with partner schools to intentionally plan and customise career and industry experiences tailored to students' needs and aspirations. Schools often face challenges in providing personalised Career Education due to limited time and budget constraints.

For example, GCP significantly assisted Playford in organising a school expo attended by 34 employers and over 800 students from years 7 to 12. GCP provided funding for the expo and facilitated expanding the school's network of industry contacts and business partners. As a result, six work experience placements were secured with a range of employers and an apprenticeship. Additionally, several students were also invited to apply for part-time jobs.

Tailored excursions, such as a visit to the French Beauty Academy, have been organised based on student interests, resulting in increased engagement and eight out of seventeen students subsequently enrolling in a VET Beauty Therapy Course. These excursions allow students to explore an employment sector without financial burden, expanding their understanding of various industries and providing valuable experiences beyond their local community.

The Smith Family through GCP is working in partnership and complementing careers support offered by schools such as Playford International and facilitating additional partnerships, networks and resources (including funds) to schools serving students experiencing disadvantage. Sustaining effective multi-layered partnerships such as this is critical, given the importance of high quality careers support and the key data around Year 12 completion and post-school engagement in work and/or study that is highlighted in the draft report from the Inquiry.

Ensuring students and families have timely access to the range of supports they need

As The Smith Family noted in its initial submission to the Inquiry, reducing the link in South Australia (and nationally) between student background and educational outcomes requires a **systemic approach** – rather than one that focuses just on a young person in isolation of the family, school, community, services and systems which influence their lives. The **multiple factors** influencing educational outcomes for young people experiencing disadvantage go **beyond** those which are the **direct responsibility of schools**. Over a third of the students for example that The Smith supports in SA, have a health or disability issue.

We are therefore very supportive of the draft report's focus on **additional and coordinated 'wraparound' supports**, including through 'full service schools'. We note that this focus is also part of the **Better and Fairer Schools Agreement**, with the Western Australian government already committing in its bilateral agreement with the Federal Government to 'design and trial place-based approaches to delivering a full-service schools model in at least four WA public schools from 2026 to inform development of a full-service schools framework for expanding linkages between schools and other community, health and social services, and undertaking an independent review in 2028'.

The Smith Family sees this as being another valuable outcome which would flow from the South Australian Government signing the BAFS Agreement and entering into an associated bilateral agreement with the Federal Government.

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