

**A submission of
The Smith Family
to the
Commonwealth Department of Education, Employment
and Workplace Relations**

on

**The Review of Australian Higher Education
Discussion Paper**

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everyone's family



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Preface

The Smith Family welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Review of Australian Higher Education Discussion Paper.

The Smith Family is a national, independent social enterprise that supports disadvantaged Australian children to create a better future through education. Since 1999, we have undergone a comprehensive organisational transformation, moving from a welfare-oriented model to that of a leading social enterprise focused on children and education.

The overarching purpose of The Smith Family's flagship *Learning for Life* suite of inter-connecting programs is to provide educational opportunities across the life span for disadvantaged children and their families. They reflect a focus on key transition points within this continuum where evidence has shown support to be critical, including the transition from home to school, primary to secondary and school to work / further education. As an evidence-based organisation, our *Learning for Life* suite of programs is also regularly evaluated within an outcomes-based framework to maximise the impact of our contribution at the individual, family and community levels. The *Learning for Life* suite is organised into three complementary streams:

- **Financial Scholarships:** Our sponsorship program provides direct financial assistance in the form of a scholarship to the family of each sponsored student to help cover school-related expenses such as uniforms, shoes, books, excursions and equipment.
- **Personal Support:** We provide a network of personal support through tutoring, coaching and mentoring targeted at key transition stages in a student's education. These programs complement formal learning and help students to develop the skills they need to participate in society.
- **Personal Development:** Our programs that focus on developing a student's social and emotional development through informal learning by participating in extra-curricular activities such as sports and the arts. This helps develop skills and behaviours such as team work, tenacity and self confidence which impact a student's interaction with others and the community.

Within these streams *Learning for Life* concentrates on improving essential literacies such as numeracy and comprehension, financial and digital literacy.

Based on our research findings, our Submission provides a perspective on the contemporary education and training environment and on how the Review of Australian Higher Education can facilitate social inclusion through access and opportunity currently not broadly available for disadvantaged communities and families, which continue to face multiple and diverse barriers to education and training participation and achievement. This focus accords 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 social cohesion and interaction between the generations.

The Smith Family's Submission particularly addresses the following term of reference:

Underpinning social inclusion through access and opportunity by supporting and widening access to higher education, including participation by students from a wide range of backgrounds.

In responding to the Term of Reference, we will offer evidence in relation to three of the nine key challenges and issues for higher education that have been identified by the Discussion Paper:

- Opportunities to participate in higher education
- Connecting with other education and training sectors
- Higher education's contribution to Australia's economic, social and cultural capital.



Each of the challenges is relevant to The Smith Family's agenda for societal change in enabling educational access, workforce participation and advancement among disadvantaged communities and families, thereby strengthening their capacity to contribute as active citizens.

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A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Elaine Henry".

Chief Executive Officer

The Smith Family

1. Executive Summary

Our Submission begins with a consideration of the traditional underrepresentation of disadvantaged groups in university in Australia and the importance of developing a lifecycle approach in effectively addressing the challenge. To this end, The Smith Family (TSF) facilitates full participation for disadvantaged families in the education process and works with children, young people and their families to gain the knowledge, skills and confidence to exercise realistic life choices. The central objective of our flagship *Learning for Life* (LfL) suite of programs is to improve access to life opportunities that can impact positively on the 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 not restricted to either compulsory schooling or particular levels of post-compulsory education and training. Instead, we use research to guide us in identifying how best to provide support and encouragement for students to develop the capacity for and an openness to lifelong learning that will help them make informed decisions about the paths they wish to follow. We also use research for the continuing development of our LfL suite of programs to assist them and their families in this process.

The key factor in defining a lifelong learner is not the type of education or training in which they are involved, but the personal characteristics that lead to such involvement. Lifelong learners must have the motivation and capacity to learn, in any type of setting, with any type of teacher, or simply by themselves. Their development 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 period greatly increases their chances of better learning outcomes and more successful life transitions later on (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.

An education lifecycle approach prior to, during and post compulsory education comprises important stages in the development of an orientation to lifelong learning among children and young people at critical transition points along the lifecycle: home to school, primary to middle, middle to senior secondary, and senior secondary to further education / work. This is particularly so for disadvantaged students, whose parents / families are considerably less likely to have had the kind of early childhood support that research has now recognised as so critical to successful long-term outcomes (Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000; Shonkoff & Meisels, 2000). The key values associated with lifelong learning (such as personal agency, self-confidence and information literacy¹) are also highly relevant to positive short-term outcomes in helping students manage the many academic challenges encountered during compulsory education and post-graduation. Yet while the benefits of lifelong learning are clear, understanding how to impart and inspire these values among students is not (The Smith Family, 2004). The benchmarks depend less on satisfying specific curriculum criteria (or achieving a particular employment outcome), and more on helping students to develop a sense of responsibility, confidence and motivation towards their own learning. Conceptualising lifelong learning as more of a perspective than a particular educational system in this way allows for the cultivation of these qualities in a number of formal and informal environments, through a range of subjects and using a variety of forms of support.

The types of *short-term* responses that The Smith Family provides for opportunities to build a capacity for lifelong learning are directed towards facilitating the participation of greater numbers of disadvantaged children and young people and their families in education and learning through the LfL suite of programs. The evidence and experience that we have in providing this type of support is

¹ Information literacy means that students must have the skills to explore information independently, know how to evaluate a source of information, how to collect, analyse and organise information from multiple sources and how to interrogate information. For more on the characteristics of lifelong learning, see The Smith Family, 2004.

particularly relevant with regard to the second challenge highlighted by the Review of Australian Higher Education, namely, *opportunities to participate in higher education*. Our research has shown that the following factors are very important in providing opportunities for disadvantaged children and young people to participate in education:

- *Ensuring adequate financial assistance*: Low-income households devote much less of their budgets to education than medium and high-SES groups, and the costs associated with participation in higher education can present significant financial challenges from the perspective of disadvantaged students (The Smith Family, 2003).² This is particularly so in light of a report by the Senate that found current student income support schemes to be inadequate (Senate, 2005).
- *Ensuring equitable educational opportunities for students*: Children from low SES families have lower levels of literacies including numeracy, comprehension, and digital and are more likely to have difficulties with their studies, more likely to exhibit higher levels of problematic school behaviour (e.g. truancy) and more likely to leave school early (The Smith Family, 2008; 2005; 2004; 2003; 2002a; 2001). These findings therefore raise concerns as to whether low SES students will be able to either qualify or compete successfully for higher education placements.
- *Engaging with family / community members*: Who students confide in when making decisions about their education and career is an important factor influencing the quality of their outcome. Our research (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 counselor (19%), a teacher (26%) or friends (27%). 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 (The Smith Family, 2007).

The *medium term* responses that The Smith Family is facilitating to build capacity for lifelong learning focus on successful transitions from school to work (The Smith Family, 2005, 2005a, 2006, 2007). The evidence and experience that we have in providing this type of support is particularly relevant to the fourth challenge highlighted by the Review of Australian Higher Education, namely, *connecting with other education and training sectors*. To date, our work has benefited from research on students in junior and senior secondary school, and is providing an evidence base to further guide the development of LfL and the evaluation of our present suite of programs. However, The Smith Family is also working closely with the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) in tracking the post-school destinations of LfL students after they have left school and exited the program.³ Different aspects of this research are integrated into this submission. One of the key findings with relation to Review of Australian Higher Education concerns:

- *The importance of quality career guidance and support*: 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. Secondary school students looking to progress their learning are today faced with a multitude of options and pathways that present a considerable challenge to negotiate. A large proportion of students, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds, experience difficulty in navigating these paths, and do not appear to interpret and apply information provided on career pathways to their best advantage, or, at least

² The Smith Family is currently working with the Centre for Program Evaluation at the University of Melbourne in a three-year evaluation of the scholarship component of *Learning for Life*. In addition to providing evidence on the importance of the scholarship, the evaluation methodology is also addressing the complementary forms of support provided by students' families and their sponsors. A comprehensive overview of the complementary roles played by the scholarship and sponsor relationship can be found in *Enabling Relationships: Students Connecting with Sponsors*, one in a series of reports released by The Smith Family as part of its 85th Birthday Celebrations, at www.thesmithfamily.com.au.

³ An exit student for the purposes of the study is defined as a *Learning for Life* student who has either completed Years 11 and 12 and subsequently ceased participation in the program; or one who has left school, and therefore the *Learning for Life* program in Year 11 or 12.

with comparably positive outcomes as more advantaged students (The Smith Family, 2004; NCVET, 2000). Our research has also shown that at least a third of junior secondary school students themselves have difficulty in matching their educational paths to their preferred career (The Smith Family, 2005). These findings have important implications for the Review of Australian Higher Education not only in terms of the type of supports that students need in making decisions about tertiary pathways, but also with regard to assisting students after they are in tertiary education to make connections between what they are learning and their intended career pathways.⁴ In the period both prior to and during tertiary education our research has confirmed the importance of mentors.⁵

The *long-term* responses that The Smith Family provides speak to the importance of investing early in the developmental pathway to ensure the best foundations for developing capacities for lifelong learning. The way we are projecting our work in this area into the future is particularly relevant to the seventh challenge highlighted by the Review of Australian Higher Education, namely, *higher education's contribution to Australia's economic, social and cultural capital*. An example of the Discussion Paper's focus on third stream activities for Universities in relation to economic, social and cultural capital is offered in relation to The Smith Family's focus on 'innovation relationships' and the development of a *Families Learning Together* model of dual generational learning.

The Submission concludes with a number of general recommendations for consideration to maximise short, medium, and long-term outcomes to enhance the participating of disadvantaged groups in higher education in Australia.

⁴ Griffith University has recognised how this challenge can persist into university and is among those tertiary institutions that decided to do something about university students who found themselves in a quandary over how to convert the education they were receiving into a satisfying career by establishing an industry mentoring program. The Griffith University Mentoring Program has helped students make the transition from university to the workforce for over 14 years and has been recognised with an Australian Learning and Teaching Council citation.

⁵ For a comprehensive overview of our mentoring programs see *Building Relationships: Mentees Connecting with Mentors* at www.thesmithfamily.com.au, one in a series of reports issued as part of The Smith Family's 85th Birthday celebrations. There are currently 8 different types of mentoring programs offered as part of *Learning for Life*, in addition, to those available for tertiary students: Breakfast with a Mentor (for parents of children preparing to make the home to school transition); student2student; Transition to High School; *iTrack*; Plan-it-youth; Student entrepreneur program; Next Steps; and, the Senior Secondary Indigenous Mentoring Program.

2. Disadvantaged Australians and Tertiary Education

Disadvantaged groups in Australia have traditionally been underrepresented at university. For over a decade they have had approximately half the likelihood of participating in higher education as Australians from medium and higher socioeconomic status (SES). This phenomenon has remained relatively stable for over a decade, despite extensive equity initiatives across the higher education system as a whole (James, 2002). Compared with higher SES students, those from lower SES groups: (a) have a stronger belief that a TAFE course would be more useful to them than a university course; (b) are less confident that their parents want them to do a university course; and (c) exhibit a stronger interest in earning an income as soon as they leave school (James, 2002). Of the more than one in four Australians aged 15-19 years participating in the VET sector each year⁶, disadvantaged students are therefore likely to constitute a significant proportion. This makes it essential to consider the particular needs of these groups in relation to new initiatives such as increased access to and opportunities for greater participation at universities in the tertiary sector.

While confirming the evident potential of the Review of Australian Higher Education to promote effectively the greater inclusion of disadvantaged groups in higher education, an effective strategy will have to address the barriers that many indigenous and low SES students face in acquiring entry to the tertiary sector, as well as the supports needed to contribute to higher participation and completion rates. A national approach could facilitate the consistent provision of opportunities in all of the states and territories and also address the issue of outreach to students and families that have traditionally been put off by either perceived or real barriers to entrance and participation in higher education.

This submission also reflects the importance of developing a more holistic approach that encompasses and is informed by the experience of children and youth both prior to and beyond their involvement in formal education / the tertiary sector. 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, including workforce participation. These include transitions from home to school, from primary to secondary schooling, from secondary to tertiary education, school to work, and work back to further education / different employment. The Smith Family's agenda for societal change is focusing on all of these transitions. They 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. Our strategic direction is particularly reflective of 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 in our role as a facilitating partner in the Australian Government's Communities for Children initiative.⁷

Funding spent on prevention has significantly better positive outcomes for individuals and society than funding spent on individuals already caught in unemployment and poverty cycles.⁸ In addition,

⁶ See Quarterly reports produced by the National Council for Vocational Education Research (NCVER) available online at www.ncver.edu.au

⁷ The Smith Family is the facilitating partner in seven Communities for Children locations: Mirrabooka and Kwinana in Western Australia; Fairfield and Ryamond Terrace/Karuah in New South Wales; Brimbank in Victoria; Katherine in the Northern Territory; and, Townsville West in Queensland providing support for over 16,000 babies and toddlers. For more information, see The Smith Family web site: www.thesmithfamily.com.au.

⁸ See, for example, J. Heckman, 'The Economics of Human Skills: Evidence and Policy Implications', Research School of Social Sciences, ANU, 2006; Professor M. Keane, 'Quasi-Structural Estimation of a Model of Child Care Choices and Child Cognitive Ability Production', Department of Economics, Yale University, March 2006, and Mission Australia's 'Pathways to Prevention' project, which also notes that programs in the United States have provided benefits in the range of \$7 to \$17 for

linkages need to be established at key transition points between pre-school initiatives, primary, secondary and tertiary education to sustain gains made at each level. Prior to the federal election last November the Australian Financial Review (Bisley and Chauntri, AFR 5 November 2007) commented that a piecemeal approach to education policy in the primary, secondary and tertiary sectors – without sufficient consideration of the connectivity across these sectors – is necessarily flawed. In addition to the connectivity across all levels, a way forward will also entail much greater diversity of institutional types at the tertiary level. The intellectual division of labour between secondary and tertiary education has to change to reflect the broader social changes demanding shifts at the tertiary level.

In addition, to the importance of best practice early childhood education and care and early school education, a broader challenge is the transformation of and connectivity among education and training systems across the pre-school, primary, secondary and tertiary levels.

Why the challenge to transform education and training systems?⁹

Australia needs a world leading education and training system. Providing world-class, high-quality education and training to young Australians will give them the best opportunity to enter into a rewarding career and to continue to learn throughout their lives. Unfortunately, a large proportion of our schools have had the same centralised governance and management structures in place for 40 years or more. The poor condition of infrastructure, including buildings and technology, reflects a lack of investment and an outdated mindset when it comes to priorities for education.

Education's benefit for *individuals* has been reflected in recent years in a more national approach to school education. This has occurred in part through the joint efforts of state, territory and commonwealth ministers of education. Agreement has been reached around a number of matters, including national goals for schooling, national literacy and numeracy tests at years 3, 5, 7 and 9, and national curriculum consistency in some subjects. This approach also has been driven by the Australian Government, for example through the introduction of common forms of reporting to parents, and the concept of a national Year 12 certificate.

For *society*, levels of education and training are also positively and strongly correlated with a range of measures of health, family functioning, children's wellbeing, a clean environment and the absence of violent crime (Leigh, 1998). From the point of view of the Australian economy, future policies that deliver an increase in education and training levels are likely to have wide-ranging benefits for individuals, standards of living and social cohesion (Access Economics, 2005). Unfortunately, our current education and training systems are letting us down in a number of key areas.

Too many young people achieving only minimum standards of education

Despite overall increases in education levels among young Australians in recent decades, and high average levels of reading, mathematical and scientific literacy at 15 years of age, many young people leave secondary school in Australia with only minimal standards of education, giving Australia one of the lowest secondary school completion rates among OECD countries. Young people whose school achievements are in the lowest quarter or who do not complete a Year 12 certificate or its equivalent are more likely to experience multiple periods of time outside the workforce and are less likely to engage in further education or training after leaving school (Hillman, 2005).

In the basic skills of literacy and numeracy, up to 10 per cent of students achieve only minimal levels by Year 7 (MCEETYA, 2007). Perhaps a further 20 per cent have levels below those required for effective functioning in adult society (Rothman, 2002).

every \$1 spent. The Smith Family has achieved progress using dual generational learning where educational activities and support address the developmental needs of more than one generation. Note: the source for Figures 1 and 2 is ABS Catalogue No. 6202.0.55.001, *Labour Force, Australia, Spreadsheets*, August 2007.

⁹ Caldwell in *Re-imagining Educational Leadership* argues that more than reform of education and training systems is needed. He defines transformation as "... change – especially under challenging circumstance – that is significant, systematic and sustained resulting in high levels of achievement for all students in all settings." (Caldwell, 2006, p. 7)

Research shows that low levels of literacy and numeracy are associated with early school leaving – young people in the bottom 25 per cent on literacy and numeracy tests in Year 9 are four times more likely to leave school early than those in the top 25 per cent (Abelson, 2002) – and are correlated with a range of other variables, including low overall academic achievement, disengagement, truancy and anti-social behaviour.

The Council of Australian Governments (COAG, 2006) has set a goal to improve basic skills among potentially ‘at risk’ students by:

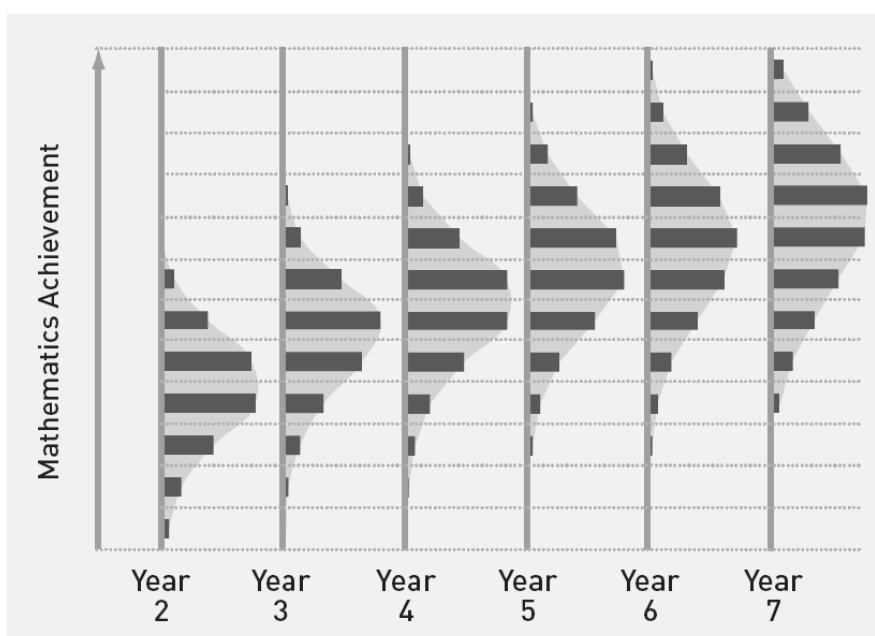
- significantly improving the proportion of children acquiring the basic skills for life and learning (including closing the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous children)
- increasing the proportion of young people meeting basic literacy and numeracy standards, and
- improving overall levels of achievement.

Unacceptably wide achievement gaps

Throughout the years of school there are also wide variations in students’ levels of achievement. Children begin school with markedly different levels of individual development and school readiness. Students from low socio-economic and Indigenous backgrounds tend to be over-represented in the tail of the achievement distribution with increasing variability across the years of school sometimes reflected in growing gaps between students from lower and higher socio-economic backgrounds and between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students.

Australian research has shown that by Year 5, the top 10 per cent of children in reading are at least five years ahead of the bottom 10 per cent of readers (Masters & Forster, 1997). This is not a new phenomenon or a peculiarly Australian phenomenon. By the end of primary school in the UK, the highest achieving students in mathematics are reported to be approximately six years ahead of the lowest achievers (Harlen, 1997). Figure 2 below shows comparable gaps in mathematics achievement for US students in Years 2 to 7 (Hauser, 2003). Children in the upper end of the distribution appear to make steady progress across these years of school, but there is significant overlap in the distributions and increasing variability as students in the tail of the distribution fall further behind. The consequence is little average improvement in mathematics, particularly between Years 6 and 7.

Figure 2: Increasing variability in mathematics levels in Years 2 -- 7



Too few young people are work ready

A 2006 survey conducted by the Australian Industry Group found that 85 per cent of companies considered 'building the skills base' to be the key strategy for ensuring international competitiveness. Australia faces a particular skills shortage at the trade and associate professional levels. Currently, 87 per cent of available jobs require post-school qualifications, but 50 per cent of the workforce lacks these qualifications (Australian Industry Group, 2006).¹⁰ We are failing more than 300,000 young people aged between 15 and 24 who are either unemployed or working part-time and not undertaking full-time education. Currently, the overall level of unemployment is 4.3 per cent; the unemployment rate for 15-to-24-year-olds is more than double that rate at 9.1 per cent.

¹⁰ Heather Ridout, CEO of the Australian Industry Group (AiG) commenting on the skills and training reforms proposed by the Victorian Government highlighted four critical tests for the reform to meet the needs of more young people in need of contemporary work ready skills: a real increase in the overall investment in skills development; a quantifiable and relevant increase in the skill levels of the working age population; quality improvement; and, compatibility with the national training system (The Australian, 02 July, 2008).

3. Responses to Three Key Challenges

Opportunities to participate in higher education

The Discussion Paper, citing estimates of the Centre for the Economics of Education and Training (CEET), notes that in the 10 year period from 2006 to 2016 a total of four million people will need to acquire higher education or vocational education and training qualifications to meet expected skill needs arising from employment growth, retirements and skill deepening, primarily due to an overall rise in the level of skill and qualifications within occupations, and secondly due to higher skilled occupations growing faster (Shah and Burke 2006). CEET also estimated that most of the projected need for skills can be met by vocational education and training.

However, Professor Bob Birrell of the Monash Centre for Population and Urban Research argues that skill shortages now and in the foreseeable future will lie mainly in occupations requiring university training. He analyses census data on employment by industry and occupation over the decade 1996 to 2006 and concludes that demand for university-trained professionals and associate professionals grew much more strongly than demand for trade skills. In addition, he cites evidence in the form of sponsorship by business of skilled migrants under the business long-stay 457 visa category, which he states was concentrated on professional occupations in 2006-07.

Concluding that these trends are unlikely to abate, Birrell argues that there is a far greater need for additional training at the university level than at the vocational level. He notes that there was very little increase in domestic commencements at Australian universities between 2002 and 2006, despite the expansion in employment at the professional, managerial and associate professional level over this period, and urges public policy action to address this situation (Birrell, Healy and Smith 2008).

In combination, the findings from the CEET research and Professor Birrell point to the need for a much better coordinated higher education sector that can respond more flexibly across a range of population needs for the skills and qualifications required in a 21st c knowledge society. While initiatives in response to the skills shortage have tended to focus overwhelmingly on expanding levels of access and opportunity within the VET and TAFE sectors, the extent of the need suggests that it is time to leverage opportunities that can be made available across the entire tertiary education sector.

The Smith Family's short-term responses

The Smith Family's short-term responses are directed towards facilitating the participation of greater numbers of disadvantaged children and young people and their families in education and learning, including the tertiary sector, through the *LfL* suite of programs. They provide a platform on which we respond to the second challenge raised in the Discussion Paper: *Opportunities to participate in higher education*. Our research has shown that three factors in particular are very important in increasing access to opportunities for participation: Providing adequate financial assistance; ensuring students from all SES backgrounds have equitable access to educational opportunities; and engaging family and community members in the interests of sustainability. Our experience with disadvantaged groups also suggests that effective strategies for greater access and participation levels have to focus simultaneously on overcoming barriers at point of entry and the longer-term challenge of enhanced opportunities for development along the education lifecycle.¹¹

Providing adequate financial assistance

¹¹ As an organisation facilitating financial and educational support to over 28,000 students through our flagship *Learning for Life* suite of programs, The Smith Family is thus fully committed to the progressive enhancement of opportunities for greater access to and opportunities for higher education as a vital component in the building of a more cohesive and caring community.

The Smith Family has produced a number of reports over the years exploring the various financial, educational and technological barriers that disadvantaged students face in participating throughout the education system (The Smith Family, 2005; 2004; 2003; 2002b; 2002c; 2001). With regard to university costs, external research has revealed how HECS and HECS-HELP have increased participation rates for middle and high SES students, and have not disadvantaged low SES students. However, the scheme has not significantly increased the participation of low SES students, and reflects the further financial challenges that low SES students in particular face in meeting other expenses beyond those of university fees and associated education-related costs. The Senate Inquiry into student income support raised questions about the adequacy of income support assistance for university students noting that 'The current level of [student] income support does not come to close to providing students with a decent living wage to cover the cost of accommodation, food, bills and transport' and that 'various anomalies and inconsistencies with the eligibility criteria penalise students who are most in need of financial assistance' (Senate, 2005). These apparent loopholes in student financial support need attention to provide sufficient support for students within the education system as whole. Our own research (The Smith Family, 2003) has shown that low-income households devote much less of their budgets to education than medium and high-SES groups, which suggests that low SES students, even with HECS-HELP assistance can still face significant financial challenges.

Higher education receives its direct government funding overwhelmingly from the Commonwealth, yet universities are established under state or territory legislation. The vocational education and training sector is largely controlled and funded by the states, yet operates to a national curriculum framework and with significant, though largely indirect, Commonwealth funding.¹² This poses particular problems for those providers (public and private) in each sector operating as dual-sector institutions which need to navigate a maze of conflicting governmental reporting requirements, different industrial relations agendas and competing governmental aspirations. While these are mostly management challenges, they create significant governance dilemmas.

Ensuring equitable access to educational opportunities for all students

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). An OECD report has shown that students with favourable background characteristics¹³ 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 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 moving beyond the limitations of intergenerational disadvantage,¹⁴ students from disadvantaged backgrounds are continually identified as having disproportionately high rates of early school leaving.¹⁵ This may be the result of personal factors such as a lack of self-esteem, confidence, motivation or ability, or it could

¹² The Commonwealth has primary responsibility for the financing of higher education, providing an average of 56 per cent of its total revenue in 2006 (this includes grants, HECS-HELP and FEE-HELP). State and local governments provided only four per cent of total revenue for higher education institutions in 2006 (includes vocational education and training funding for dual providers).

¹³ '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).

¹⁴ 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).

¹⁵ 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.

be a consequence of the significant variance in quality of teaching and resources identified by the OECD within the Australian education environment (OECD, 2005). In most cases, it is a combination of many 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.

Engaging with family and community members

The Smith Family's 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, 2005, 2005a, 2006, 2007). Earlier research (The Smith Family, 2002b) has also shown that in making career and education-related decisions, around 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.

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 and prior to entrance into the post-secondary sector. 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).

Connecting with other education and training sectors

Convergence as a way of overcoming institutional barriers

The Discussion Paper remarks that while there are differing views about the role and missions of the vocational education and training sector and the higher education sector, convergence is being driven by a range of factors including: government policy and directions; efficiency and cost savings; competition for students; institutional mission in individual institutions; and employer and student needs. All players in the tertiary sector are demonstrating increased overlap in terms of courses, awards, links with employers and overall approach (PhillipsKPA 2006a). A number of commentators support convergence and suggest a move towards formal recognition of a 'tertiary sector' in Australia consistent with other countries. Marginson suggests that we need a new comprehensive *federal tertiary sector* (with continuing support from the states and territories) where: "TAFE institutions and all private training institutions offering two-year full-time equivalent (FTE) tertiary programs should be designated as 'higher education'. This would be consistent with the OECD definition of tertiary education and with the United States' definition of 'higher education', which includes the community college sector (Marginson 2008, p. 8).

The Discussion Paper suggested that a number of significant opportunities may be missed if the missions of institutional types in the tertiary sector do not begin to converge. For example, there could be considerable benefit from a two-way flow of vocational education between TAFE and VET and universities for many occupations and professions. Similarly, it is also likely that innovation broadly defined, particularly in the application and adaptation of skills and knowledge to drive productivity in enterprises, could be progressed if vocational education and training, in addition to higher education, were seen as critical to the 'development' component of research and development (R & D), which comprises over two thirds of all business R & D expenditure (ABS 2007a).

The Smith Family's medium term responses

The Smith Family's medium term responses focus on successful transitions from school to work and the complex challenges that students face in navigating appropriate learning pathways suited to their current learning needs and projected job and/or career aspirations. While our research with the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) has emphasised the importance of quality career guidance and support, the Review of Australian Higher Education Discussion Paper points to the *institutional barriers* that students may encounter in constructing a pathway that is responsive to their learning needs. The lack of institutional linkages between vocational education and training and higher education continues to block access to the pathways that characterise the learning trajectories of many young people. Movement between the sectors of students with credit could be facilitated if tertiary institutions offered a more flexible approach to the meeting of requisites and prerequisites that was more responsive to the presenting learning needs of young people. Research The Smith Family conducted from 2003-2007 showed that students and young people are more likely to stay engaged in education and reach better participation levels if they have the opportunities to plan and pursue learning around their chosen areas of interest, as well as their skills sets at a given point in time.

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. Secondary school students looking to progress their learning are today faced with a multitude of pathways through the school to work transition, with at least a third of students in Years 8 and 9 exhibiting difficulty in matching their educational paths to their preferred career (The Smith Family, 2005). Those from disadvantaged backgrounds in particular do not appear to interpret and apply information provided on career pathways to their best advantage, or, at least with comparably positive outcomes as more advantaged students (The Smith Family, 2004; NCVET, 2000). Moreover, the ability of disadvantaged groups to identify their training needs and be proactive in negotiating with training providers has been questioned (Kilpatrick, 2003).

These findings point to the need of many students for quality, learner-centred guidance and support such as that provided by mentors before enrolling and throughout their learning within the higher education sector.¹⁶ 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).

The feasibility of students changing their mind and being able to transfer easily among institutional types in the higher education sector is in too many situations a matter left to the discretion of each individual. Research suggests that ensuring flexibility in this context would significantly strengthen the retention of students who currently encounter difficulty in navigating pathways that would allow them to access relevant course offerings across institutional types in the tertiary sector. The role of the career advisor/mentor is critical in supporting students who experience this kind of difficulty, and may prove a valuable tool in negotiating flexibility. The career advisor/mentor may also be crucial in assisting students whose tertiary education learning needs and pathways involve variation across states in the actual mix of academic and vocational subjects which can be undertaken at senior secondary level, and which can lead to eligible tertiary entry.

Currently, the Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF) descriptors are sector-based and may contribute to difficulties in building pathways and providing credit between the sectors. Many commentators consider that it may be an appropriate time to consider whether the AQF needs to be a more integrated framework to provide for more flexible and streamlined pathways. A seamless post-secondary education system was one of the key ambitions of the Productivity Stream at the 2020 Summit, with participants calling for a system that allowed people to move in and out of education at all levels throughout various stages of life and work.

The Summit participants in the Productivity Stream identified as an overall ambition that by 2020, every Australian resident will have the opportunity to be skilled and educated at many points in their

¹⁶ See footnote 5 above.

life, to meet their own wants and needs and to meet the needs of the workforce. It was hoped that those currently marginalised in the education sector would be able to access and succeed to the same level as the broader Australian population, and that employers and the industry sector would be active participants in the formal education system and would contribute along with individuals, government and non-government sectors.

Higher education's contribution to Australia's economic, social and cultural capital

Over the last decade a significant trend among many universities has been towards a third function, in addition to its core functions of teaching and research, which has been described using a range of terms such as knowledge transfer, community service, community engagement and the third stream. The third stream encompasses a disparate range of functions and activities which make it difficult to define precisely. In its report on third stream activities to the Russell Group of Universities, the Science and Technology Policy Research Unit at Sussex University defined it as follows:

Third Stream activities are therefore concerned with the generation, use, application and exploitation of knowledge and other university capabilities outside academic environments. In other words, the Third Stream is about the interactions between universities and the rest of society. (Molas-Gallart J et al. 2002, p. iii)

The Science and Technology Policy Research Unit argues that this goes beyond the commercialisation of research:

Universities make contributions to government and civil society as well as the private sector, assisting not only with economic performance but also helping to improve quality of life and the effectiveness of public services. Any approach to university Third Stream activities that focuses purely on university commercial activities is likely to miss large and important parts of the picture. (Molas-Gallart J et al. 2002, p. iv)¹⁷

Through such engagement tertiary institutions can establish networks and a presence that provides access to young people who might not otherwise ever become aware of learning and development opportunities that may be available to them. Community engagement and knowledge transfer can create two-way opportunities for the leveraging of resources from the tertiary area to the community and from the community to tertiary institutions. This flow can strengthen civil society engagement in the education sector, and could potentially contribute to Australia's economic, social and cultural capital.

One factor contributing to the trend towards greater involvement in the community has developed as a result of new innovation agendas which encourage crossovers from higher education into industry and which have subsequently encouraged engagement on social and cultural aspects;¹⁸ technology which enables development of networks which span different organisations, sectors and individuals; and the need to address national and international challenges which cross national and discipline boundaries.¹⁹

¹⁷ Professor Mary O'Kane's review of co-operative research centres released 05 August 2008 to Innovation Minister Kim Carr's inquiry into the nation's research effort, recommends injecting funding into the system to allow it to respond to address urgent and emerging community issues. In particular Professor O'Kane calls for funding to be aligned to the "level of likely induced social benefit" with a public good selection criterion, "particularly in areas of social justice and social service." (The Australian 06 August 2006, p. 23) The report was also endorsed by the Australian Technology Network universities. ATN chairwoman Margaret Gardner said the group supported the view "that CRCs should be positioned in the pre-competitive, pre-applicative space rather than the current emphasis on exploitation-commercialisation of research outcomes".

¹⁸ The British Secretary of State for Innovation, Universities and Skills recently noted that universities can provide: ". . . incubation support, business workspace, education and training programs, mentoring and access to other support networks, professional advice on subjects such as financial and legal issues, access to specialist facilities and expertise (DIUS 2008b, p. 7)." The Smith Family recently collaborated with the Faculty of Business and Enterprise at Swinburne University of Technology in developing a strategy to engage stakeholders in a social incubator focusing on "Future Communities Through the Eyes of a Child."

¹⁹ One of The Smith Family's 85th Birthday Reports, *Innovation Relationships: Connecting Different People in Different Ways for Different Outcomes*, discusses the cross-sectoral relationships that The Smith Family has built (and continues to build) that

This trend and the opportunities which it offers for development of greater synergies across higher education, industry, governments, regional agencies and community groups, has been formally recognised in a number of countries. The United Kingdom Government has introduced third stream funding to support initiatives of this nature, and the United States has amended its Carnegie classification of higher education institutions to include an 'elective' classification on 'community engagement'. Australia has recognised engagement as an important component of university activity in its *National Protocols for Higher Education Approval Processes*.

A case study of third stream activities

In the United States in communities throughout the state of Ohio there are examples of a strategy that could facilitate the engagement of universities and educational institutions in general in third stream activities which could serve as a model of how universities and educational institutions could respond to the global shape of the economy, by integrating educational reform and economic development in new and more powerful ways than it has up to the present. The strategy (McGrath, 2005) leverages more comprehensive community-wide and regional action to deepen shared understandings, increase trust, broaden communication, and build strong working relationships among a wide range of groups in many communities, to significantly increase the capacity for problem-solving and collective action.

The strategy draws together previously stand alone activities and isolated programs into a model of well-planned, coordinated, community-wide strategies to strengthen the preparation of students, coordinate services, enhance the skill of adult workers and attract and grow the types of jobs that provide good wages and economic security.

The strategy incorporates an approach that facilitates networks of organisations linked by bonds of collaboration and interdependent action towards:

- Pursuing a comprehensive vision of local and regional development
- Maximising resources by aligning and coordinating programs
- Using data to set priorities
- Bringing promising initiatives to scale.

By looking at common features across four examples of the convergence strategy distinctive characteristics emerge:

- A **lead institution**, typically an intermediate organisation whose role is to strengthen the mutual understanding and shared agreement about regional priorities among the ever more connected 'network of networks' they help create, acts as a champion in forming and guiding comprehensive coordinated efforts;
- **Explicit links** are developed between education reform efforts and local/regional economic development;
- Efforts involve **partners** from K-12 and higher education, business, government, nonprofits, faith and community organisations;
- Sites **leverage local resources** to maximize their impact, and bolster these networks by taking a collaborative approach to new funding;
- **Incubation of and scaling up** of innovative programs;
- **Data is used strategically** as a stimulus to action, to benchmark progress, for goal setting, for evaluation and assessment, and to establish credibility.

The potential of the strategy to help communities meet the challenges of a knowledge based economy is significant, and can be fully realized only if public policy similar evolves to support collaboration. Some possible policy considerations are:

allow us to achieve scalability and impact in our work through social innovation. 'Innovation relationships' are essentially those that build the capacity of an organisation to develop new solutions to difficult social issues through new collaborations. Embracing innovation as a way of working has never been more important, with new ideas that work to improve people's lives urgently needed if we are to reduce the "growing gap between the scale of the problems we face and the scale of the solutions on offer". (See Mulgan, G. with S. Tuedcker, R. Ali & B. Sanders (2007) *Social Innovation: What it is, why it matters and how it can be accelerated*. Said Business School, University of Oxford: Basingstoke Press, p. 7.

- Developing a national approach to education and economic development that recognizes and matches the entrepreneurship, innovation and creativity exhibited at the regional and community level by an emphasis on promoting shared learning, incentives for innovation, and the priority of local efforts;
- Encouraging joint agency and department grant-making to support local and regional collaborative initiatives;
- Demonstration sites to develop outreach, information, and educational campaigns targeted to low-income and minority families;
- Creation of multiple and efficient pathways for adult workers to develop the competencies needed to move them from non-credit and credit programs into college-level studies and skilled careers.

A university's third stream activities can provide a focus for links with community organisations that can address needs in disadvantaged areas; and with cultural and community development initiatives at local level. In 2006 the Australian Vice-Chancellors' Committee expressed strong support for engagement between universities and the community:

The Australian Vice-Chancellors' Committee firmly believes that Australian universities, the industry and community partners in a knowledge transfer relationship and the Australian economy as a whole would benefit from continued and strengthened efforts to strengthen university-industry linkages, networks and relationships. (AVCC 2006, p. 1)²⁰

Universities can also assist with the 'joining up' of a range of national policies at the regional level (for example, in areas such as science and technology, industry, education and skills, health, culture, sport, environmental sustainability and social inclusion). The OECD suggests a number of ways in which governments can use their higher education systems to support regional development, such as including regional engagement in higher education legislation, providing funding to support regional engagement and developing indicators to monitor the impact of institutions on regional performance (OECD 2007c).

The Smith Family's Long-Term Responses

The Smith Family's long-term outcomes speak to the importance of investing early in the developmental pathway to ensure the best outcomes for those who participate in higher education. Hence, our long-term outcomes focus on the early years and the importance of dual generational learning (DGL) in the family context.

A recent expression of DGL that The Smith Family is looking at is *Families Learning Together* (FLT).

FLT encourages all family members independently and together to engage in learning by providing:

- *Early education and development* for children to aid their cognitive and non-cognitive development and assist their transition to school
- *Parenting education for adults* to build their confidence and capacity to provide a stable home environment
- *Adult education for parents* to assist them in engaging in learning opportunities and improving their prospects of entering the workforce
- *Parent and Child Together Time* which not only improves skills and development but strengthens relationships and communication skills within families.

The model has been developed with the pro bono assistance of McKinsey and Company who sourced evidence to inform the development of a business plan in preparation for the eventual implementation

²⁰ A number of Australian universities have formed the Australian Universities Community Engagement Alliance "to promote the social, environmental and economic and cultural development of communities" (AUCEA 2006, p. 4).



of the model. The Families Learning Together initiative also provides an example of a community based initiative that could be enhanced and strengthened by the types of third stream activities that can build a capacity for innovation.

4. Recommendations

The Smith Family is ultimately concerned with societal change. At a program implementation level, we aim 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. We consider 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. Furthering opportunity for Australians to successfully access, and participate in higher education is an integral component of The Smith Family's response to the incidence of financial disadvantage and social exclusion in our community.

The Review of Australian Higher Education provides a timely opportunity for universities and other tertiary institutions to strengthen their role in *underpinning social inclusion through access and opportunity by supporting and widening access to higher education*. Equitable access and participation need to be driving factors in goals and targets established through the current review so that the tertiary sector can be brought closer to its democratic potential in creating a society where learning is both valued and open to *all socioeconomic groups*. To this end, and prior to making a more general set of recommendations, The Smith Family would like to put forth our position on the full fee paying option for university students.

Support for disadvantaged students and the full fee paying option: a false dilemma?

The Smith Family considers that Professor Birrell (Section 3, p.12 above) makes a compelling case for ensuring that as many opportunities as possible become available in Australia for students to participate in higher education. However, The Smith Family also recognises the requirement that universities have to increase and diversify their funding streams for sustainability to remain, not only viable, but competitive in attracting students and the highest calibre staff, while providing as many avenues of access as possible. Is there a way to address both of these challenges in a compatible manner?

Opportunities for more students to participate in higher education

As noted in the Preface to this Submission, The Smith Family has selected three challenges from the Discussion Paper that frame our Submission and which in combination are intended to identify forms of short, medium, and long-term support, the institutional changes, and the types of networks and innovation that can enhance the offer of such opportunities for students. The provision of a full fee paying option has been one such form of support that has extended opportunities to a stream of students, albeit advantaged, who might not otherwise gain access to university. To this end, it has contributed to ensuring that as many opportunities as possible for participation in higher education become available.

Throughout this Submission we emphasised a variety and range of supports that The Smith Family, in our work with disadvantaged young people, can make available to facilitate their entry to, and participation in, a university course. Our research and experience have repeatedly confirmed the value of these complementary forms of support in addition to financial assistance to meet the needs and challenges that disadvantaged students face in entering and continuing on at university. Hence, we recognised the validity of the research by Richard James cited in Section 2, p. 8 of this Submission which confirms that equity schemes based on financial assistance alone fall short on two counts: they do not ensure that disadvantaged students are more broadly represented in university; and, they often cannot compensate for the developmental deficits that may have disadvantaged some groups in competing for university placements.

In addition, our research and experience has also given us the capacity to offer additional forms of assistance that have to be provided earlier in the education lifecycle to create a platform on which supports at the tertiary level can build. In particular, our research with the Australian Council for

Educational Research (ACER) identified challenges particularly faced by, and advantaging factors for, disadvantaged students at the secondary level to make successful school to work transitions (See Section 3, pp. 15 – 16). However, if assistance at the tertiary and secondary levels is to have a stronger likelihood of achieving the outcomes for which it is provided, the need for additional forms of support has to be addressed not only at the compulsory school level, but in the early years. Here, again, The Smith Family, has worked with families and their kids reflecting some of the most powerful research that has driven the development of our early years programs, as well as of our dual generational Families Learning Together (FLT) model (See Section 2, p 8). In sum, The Smith Family's *Learning for Life* suite of programs provide various forms of support to disadvantaged groups to progress successfully through transitions from home to school, from primary to secondary, from secondary to tertiary, school to work, and work back to further education /different employment.

Hence, the evidence and experience of The Smith Family moves us to propose that funds designated for universities to ensure equity of access for disadvantaged students be made available to organisations like The Smith Family. We and other community organisations that work with and are trusted by disadvantaged families are in an excellent position to offer a range of complementary supports that can leverage and enhance the benefit that financially disadvantaged groups derive from financial assistance. These complementary supports better equip students from our families for entry into, completion, and successful transition out of university, while universities are not generally in a position, by virtue of their missions, to offer a comparable range of complementary supports.

Our proposition could also facilitate the third stream activities of knowledge transfer, community service, and community engagement, referred to in Section 3, pp. 16 -- 18 of this Submission. Collaboration between universities and community organisations has the potential to ensure that larger numbers of disadvantaged students are represented in higher education by leveraging financial support with a set of complementary supports for these students.

It is, therefore, the position of The Smith Family that the continuation of the full fee paying option, which has proven to be effective, not only in increasing student numbers at university, but in providing a potentially sustainable funding stream for universities, is compatible with bringing about greater representation of financially disadvantaged students at university. Indeed, if retained in combination with universities collaborating more broadly with community organisations funded to facilitate greater representation of disadvantaged students at university, 1) the mix of students from different SES and cultural backgrounds at university could be enriched and contribute to the development of a more cohesive society; 2) Australia could have a workforce with a greater concentration of the skills and capabilities suited to a 21st century knowledge society, and 3) universities could continue to benefit from a sustainable funding stream while also leveraging resources in complementary third stream activities.

The Smith Family also particularly recognises that the Review must be complemented and supported by the efforts of diverse resources from across society that involves individuals, families, communities, businesses, organisations and institutions. To this end, the following recommendations are for consideration, recognising the desirability of all working usefully together towards mutually agreed outcomes.

General recommendations:

- That continuous and systematic evaluation mechanisms regarding policy and program outcomes are integrated across all stakeholder levels within the tertiary sector (student, teacher, local business etc.) to further facilitate evidence-based strategies.
- That all initiatives within the tertiary sector recognise the importance of early childhood development in influencing subsequent educational outcomes and the transition from home to school, school to work and back from work to further education / different employment.
- That further research be conducted to explore the variable outcomes and participation of disadvantaged groups within the tertiary sector, and that particular efforts be made to understand

and minimize the various financial, educational and technological barriers that may hinder their full participation.

Maximising short-term outcomes:

- That the Government take steps to provide adequate and accessible financial assistance for students from disadvantaged backgrounds who wish to enrol in tertiary education, while rectifying anomalies that may currently exist within the student income support system.²¹
- That tertiary institutions adopt a flexible and inclusive approach to the recruitment and support of students from all SES backgrounds, ensuring equitable application processes and opportunities that are reflective of the needs and socioeconomic characteristics of the region.
- That a broad range of community stakeholders from all SES levels, including family members and civil society groups be given formal opportunities to participate in the planning, management and evaluation of tertiary providers in their area, in order to maximise local relevance, ownership and responsibility for learning.

Maximising medium-term outcomes:

- That students and their parents/guardians are able to access appropriate information, guidance and support regarding navigable tertiary pathways across the school to work transition as a whole, ensuring that the promotional aspects of all types of tertiary institutions and feeder schools make clear the type of commitment that is required by students who wish to participate.
- That clear and coherent bridges among a range of further education pathways (e.g. local universities, TAFEs) be created to allow graduates to take more active roles in moving from one institution to another in responding to their learning needs.
- That further research be conducted around the factors influencing the rates of withdrawal and non-completion within the tertiary sector.
- That safety nets are installed at tertiary and community levels to offer appropriate financial or psychological support to those who do decide to leave a tertiary course early, and that opportunities for these individuals to enter alternative VET pathways or re-enter their original pathway are formalised within the administration and curricula of tertiary organisations without stigmatisation.

Maximising long-term outcomes:

- That tertiary policy and providers recognise the important role the their sector plays in the promotion and facilitation of lifelong learning across the community, and that all teaching methodologies are consistent with the lifelong learning outcomes of developing capacity in self-direction and motivated engagement among learners.
- That a systems approach that acknowledges and connects with the different stages of the education life cycle be developed by all types of tertiary education organisations.
- That a more learner-centred (as opposed to employer or industry-centred) approach be adopted within the tertiary sector to facilitate a more diverse and appropriate range of learning structures for students of mixed ability and background.

²¹ The Commonwealth Government is currently considering giving eligible vocational education and training students an entitlement to study that they can use at any institution, public or private. The idea is that public funding should support students and their outcomes, and not the bricks and mortar of publicly owned institutions (The Weekend Australian 9-10 August 2008). The proposed voucher system could potentially introduce a source of funding that would greatly simplify financial support to students in accessing relevant tertiary institutions.



- That universities incorporate a social as well as a commercial focus in their Cooperative Research Centre (CRC) and third stream activities.

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