



*everyone's family*

**The Smith Family's submission to the  
Department of Education, Employment, and Workplace  
Relations' (DEEWR)  
National Career Development Strategy Green Paper**

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## **1. Background on The Smith Family**

The Smith Family is a national, independent charity committed to increasing the educational participation and achievement of Australian children and young people in need. Our vision is a better future for young Australians in need. Our belief is that every child deserves a chance and our mission is to create opportunities for young Australians in need, by providing long-term support for their participation in education.

The Smith Family provides holistic and long-term support to children and young people from pre-school, through primary and secondary school and on to tertiary studies. In 2010-11, The Smith Family supported over 44,000 children, young people and parents/carers through its suite of *Learning for life* programs. This included supporting approximately 33,000 young people through an educational scholarship, approximately 4,500 of whom are of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander background. A further 73,000 children, young people and parents/carers participated in programs facilitated by The Smith Family, including a range of programs aimed at explicitly supporting the career development of secondary and tertiary students. As well as programs having this explicit emphasis, The Smith Family's suite of programs, beginning in the early years, focus on educational engagement and attainment, which are key foundations for career development.

## **2. The Smith Family's approach to supporting children and young people**

The Smith Family's approach focuses on the multiple influences which impact on a young person's wellbeing and participation in education, namely:

- Personal characteristics/attributes – for example social skills, self esteem, attitudes, intentions.
- Family – for example the resources they have access to, parental aspirations and engagement in child's learning.
- Peers – for example aspirations, attitudes to education, risk taking behaviour.
- Learning and care institutions such as schools – for example teacher quality, student mix, school ethos, expectations of students.
- Community – for example the economic and infrastructure resources available, role models, social capital/cohesion and safety.
- Society – for example norms and values relating to diversity, equity.

A key aim of The Smith Family programs is to facilitate the successful transitions young people make from school to further study, training or work. As such, many of our programs and initiatives are tailored to include senior school engagement and career development activities for young people. These programs are based on a number of key principles including:

- An evidence based approach to both the development and implementation of programs.

- Integrated and student centred activities

The support provided for career development is embedded within a broader suite of programmatic responses. A common aim across most of the programs is to develop and strengthen the core social and emotional capabilities needed to successfully engage with education and to transition into employment. The needs of the students are placed at the core

of the programmatic response, with students being supported to understand their own interests, strengths, skills and abilities. Programs also go beyond just working with young people on immediate education and labour market choices. They may include structured career development activities such as skills mapping and transferability; researching and analysing specific jobs and required qualifications and work experience; identifying alternative TAFE, university and/or apprenticeship pathways; and, networking. Mentoring programs and experiential careers days also allow young people to explore and discuss a wide range of potential learning and work experiences that assist them in their development of career management skills. This supports the development of broader notions of career self-management that will enable them to navigate further education and training and career related decisions.

- Flexible and responsive service delivery

Across the suite of careers related programs, a range of delivery methods are used, including online and telecommunications technology, face-to-face interactions, as well as group and individual-based work. Group based work provides participating students and parents with an additional support network of peers that can continue outside of the organised activities. It is also a more cost-effective delivery method. This diversity in service delivery methods ensures the flexibility and responsiveness needed for a diverse group of young people who are geographically dispersed across Australia and who have different needs and communication preferences. In addition, while some of these programs focus on the key transitional stage of young people moving into the labour market, others target students at a younger age than is traditionally the focus of career related programs. This multitude of responses ensures an early intervention approach and connection with young people who may have significant barriers to accessing private for-profit careers related services can occur.

- Parental engagement

Programs also work with parents to assist them to better meet their child's needs. Parents may have little or no labour market experience, while for others, their experiences may be limited to low-skilled and low-paid occupations. Strengthening parents' skills, capacity and knowledge so they are able to provide broad, well-informed and supportive career guidance to their children, is an important focus.

- Delivery in partnership with schools, and, where appropriate, with other community agencies, industry groups, employers and/or educational institutions.

- A place-based approach that builds and strengthens the local support networks of young people and their families. This allows for local labour market conditions and the range of potential training, education and employment outcomes to be considered and discussed with young people and parents.

- **Outcomes based accountability**  
Programs are designed, developed and implemented within an evaluation framework that incorporates outcome-based accountability (Friedman 2005) and program logic models (WK Kellogg Foundation 2004). This ensures that the activities of each program are aligned to the intended outcomes.

### **Some specific career development programs**

Some of The Smith Family's specific career development programs include:

- *iTrack*: A school-based online mentoring program that provides Year 9 to 11 students with the opportunity to discuss career plans and future pathways with trained mentors.
- *Impact! Make your Mark*: A pilot program being run in four secondary schools that works with students from Year 8 through to Year 10 and includes a strong focus on career options and pathways.
- *Career Days*: Experiential careers days and university experience days run in partnership with corporate supporters and university partners for secondary school students.
- *Extended Schools Hubs* – In these place-based pilot programs, running in two communities in Victoria and one in Western Australia, The Smith Family is the facilitating partner in the development of a community-led integrated approach that works across a cluster of schools. The hub provides a range of extended and tailored services to meet the specific needs of the students and families in the participating schools.
- *Partnership Brokers*: The Smith Family is a facilitating partner under DEEWR's School Business Community Partnership Brokers program. It fulfills this role in six regions across the Northern Territory, Queensland and New South Wales. As a facilitating partner, The Smith Family develops connections and partnerships between schools, business and the community to improve educational achievement and transitions from school to further study or work.
- *Tertiary Mentoring Program: Learning for Life* tertiary students are matched with mentors who work in the field of interest to the student. The aim is to provide students with industry relevant advice and guidance as they undertake their studies and transition to the workforce. In 2011, The Smith Family conducted a comprehensive review of this program and the extent to which it was meeting the needs of its students in identifying and navigating school to work pathways. Based on this review, a gap in program delivery was identified and, a new program initiative is being developed in response which will support young people who are not currently engaged in education, training or paid employment. These young people will be matched with a Career Mentor who will help them develop career management competencies as identified in the Australian Blueprint for Career Development (MCEECDYA 2010).

### **3. Key focus and priority for a national career development strategy**

The Smith Family welcomes the opportunity to comment on the *National Career Development Strategy Green Paper* given the role such as strategy could potentially play in supporting better educational, training and employment outcomes for young people. The extent to which career development policies, strategies and infrastructure in Australia are currently dispersed across multiple agencies and jurisdictions has fragmented career development practices (DEEWR and CDAA 2011). The Smith Family therefore endorses, in principle, the Government's overall objective to develop a National Career Development Strategy that strengthens the growth, coordination, and quality of career development support for Australians.

The Smith Family supports a lifelong perspective on career development, however it strongly recommends that any strategy ensures that the provision of intensive career development support should be prioritised for young Australians who are most at risk of not making successful transitions into the labour market. The rationale for this priority includes the fact that in 2011, over 600,000 15 to 24 year old Australians (21% of young people) were not engaged in full-time employment or education (FYA 2011). Among these young Australians are critical sub-groups for whom successful transitions into the labour market are even poorer. These sub-groups include young Australians who are from low socio-economic backgrounds, Indigenous, living in rural and remote locations, born in non-English speaking countries, and early school leavers. Based on direct experience working with young people, parents, and communities with these vulnerable characteristics, The Smith Family offers the following comments and recommendations.

### **4. Setting the policy context and objectives**

#### **Strengthening career development through both a labour supply and demand focus**

The Green Paper outlines a general premise whereby improving career self-management skills is seen as supporting improved labour market flexibility and lifelong learning, which in turn allows individuals to more fully take advantage of opportunities in Australia's dynamic labour market. The Smith Family supports the view that nationally articulated and supported career development strategies and policies are integral to the economic and social development of the country and that the Commonwealth has a leadership role to play in developing such strategies.

However conceptualising career development only from the perspective of a labour supply approach is limiting, particularly as the Federal government is in a unique position to move beyond this approach and coordinate an innovative national career development strategy that also incorporates labour demand issues. As it is currently drafted, the Green Paper under-emphasises the critical role that labour market policies and strategies play in the national productivity and social inclusion agendas. If a national career development strategy is separated from labour market reforms that support industry to create a wide range of inclusive employment opportunities and career structures, there will continue to be problems with the structural unemployment (Oesch 2010) and 'skills crises' (Watson 2008) that currently impede improvements to national economic and social development.

The Smith Family would therefore urge a broader conceptualisation of a national careers strategy which takes into account both labour supply and demand issues. By leveraging existing relationships across government and industry, the Federal Government can ensure that a national career development strategy is integrated into broader labour market policy, labour demand strategies and into other federal initiatives such the recently announced *Australia's skills and workforce development strategy* (AWAP 2012).

The Smith Family also believes that a national strategy should recognise other factors that are relevant to career development support services and their delivery methods, including:

- *Long-term labour market changes*

For example, the shift from full-time employment in lifelong careers to more dynamic and varied work lives. Increasingly, in Australia and across many first world countries, people need skills and knowledge to manage growing labour market complexity while also negotiating increasingly complex transitions through the life-course. The traditional relatively linear pathway from school and education into full-time employment and into retirement in later life, even with the variations experienced by parents, is no longer typical for most people. This is particularly the case for young people. It is far more typical now for individual life-course transitions to involve multiple non-linear movements in and out of the labour force. Individuals increasingly have to incorporate skill and qualification acquisition throughout their career as the labour market demand for credentials increases. Structural industry changes have also brought about periods of unemployment and/or changes in working hours for an increasing proportion of the labour market. Further, more and more adults are faced with caring responsibilities that require different employment arrangements and transitions into retirement are increasingly incorporating periods of part-time work before full retirement (Schmid 2008).

- *Changes in the education system*

There has been significant growth in the number of complex pathways in Australia's tertiary education system into and through TAFE, university, apprenticeships, and/or work experience (Harris et al. 2006). While school-based vocational education programs have increased very significantly in Australia over recent years, the extent to which this expansion has included well-informed and related careers advice and support has lagged. Research has shown that young people, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds, would benefit from increased

support in navigating pathways through and between school, university and the VET systems (Harris, Rainey & Summer 2006).

- *Technological change*

The mediums and manner in which individuals prefer to access information, including the potential to leverage interactive online technologies has changed vastly over the past 10 years and will continue to do so.

How the national strategy might take account of these and other relevant factors is noted later in this submission.

### **Policy linkages**

The Green Paper identifies important connections between career development skills and competencies and a range of policy objectives such as sustainable economic development, social inclusion, and engagement in education and the labour force. Highlighting the impact that career development can have in these policy areas is important to secure engagement from key partners to deliver on a national strategy. These policy linkages raise the profile of career development as a means to achieve a range of policy objectives, however, they also raise the risk of policy misalignment. Policy development for economic development, social inclusion, educational engagement and labour force engagement is spread across numerous federal departments and agencies. Consideration for equity groups such as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, people with disabilities, refugees and immigrants, further adds to the number of departments involved. The Smith Family encourages DEEWR to ensure that a national strategy and related policies are aligned both within and across the various relevant departments and agencies and of course with the relevant state and territory authorities. This is particularly relevant for DEEWR itself given the range of areas within the Department which are relevant to the successful implementation of this national strategy.

### **Recognising and tailoring support for equity groups**

The Green Paper notes that disadvantaged groups are most likely to suffer from information and skills deficits that act as barriers to full participation in education, training and work. However, the Green Paper does not specify target groups on which to focus efforts/programs. The Smith Family believes that all Australians can benefit from career development support, however, as noted above, equity groups such as disadvantaged young people can benefit most and should be considered as an initial area of focus.

## **5. Key principles and goals for a national strategy**

Based upon the principles outlined in the Green Paper and The Smith Family's own approach, (identified earlier in this submission) the following principles are proposed for inclusion in the national career development strategy to inform its scope and application.

- Career development supports a range of key policy priorities (for example sustainable economic development, social inclusion, and engagement in education and the labor force).

- All Australians can benefit from career development however, the national career development strategy should prioritise the provision of services to young Australians who are most at risk of becoming disengaged from, or poorly attached to, the labour market.
- Career development strategies need to incorporate and respond to changes in the labor market, education system and technological change.
- The national career development strategy needs to be integrated into labour demand strategies, policies and initiatives.
- Career development needs to be seen as a lifelong process with specific skills and competencies required at different ages, as per the Australian Blueprint for Career Development (MCEECDYA 2010);
- A range of needs (particularly for equity groups) should be recognised and there should be flexibility in the development and delivery of services.
- Innovation needs to be encouraged in the design and delivery of programs and services in order to provide effective support.
- Parents are key influences in the study, training and work choices of young people and need to be considered in both the national strategy and any subsequent implementation.
- Effective and sustainable interventions require a focus on career self-management skills, providing the right skills at the right time, and access to up to date information.
- The national strategy should include an outcomes based accountability approach that clearly articulates how the strategy will be monitored and evaluated, including public reporting on progress.

## 6. Consultation questions for consideration

### Key priorities and proposed direction

The Smith Family supports an overall objective *to strengthen the growth, coordination, and quality of career development support for Australians* and has identified disadvantaged young people as a key priority. Based on this objective, an appropriate client-centered equity goal would be to ensure that individuals, particularly disadvantaged young people and their parents/carers, have equitable and timely access to appropriate and effective programs and services that are seamlessly integrated around their needs. The Smith Family encourages DEEWR to consider the inclusion of high-level outcomes or goals in the final strategy that are informed by submissions from stakeholders.

The Smith Family also recommends the following additions and changes to the strategy:

- *Articulating the roles and responsibilities of key stakeholders*  
The Green Paper does not identify a significant role for community organisations in providing career development support – particularly for equity groups who are not reached by more ‘mainstream’ services. As described in this submission, The Smith Family has direct experience providing career development support to disadvantaged secondary school and tertiary students. There are many other community organisations providing a similar and key role, including both within and outside of school. The Smith Family believes that the national strategy should



recognise: (i) the important work that community organisations are already doing to support career development, (ii) the potential for governments and the private sector to partner with community organisations to reach equity groups, and (iii) the contribution that community organisations can make to policy development and to the building of a stronger evidence-base (i.e., in the same manner in which the career development industry's role is described). Recognising the role of community organisations is important because their clients are more likely to include equity groups who may be marginalised and not accessing other for-profit (career development industry) or government services.

The Smith Family also recommends that an additional responsibility of the Federal Government that should be noted in the strategy is to ensure equitable and consistent access to support across all states and territories.

The Smith Family would also draw attention to the role business can play in leading initiatives such as the Work Inspiration campaign in the United Kingdom. Further information on this initiative is at <http://www.workinspiration.com/>

- *Developing a national leadership body that can bring together the key players and oversight and prioritise outcomes for the industry*

The Green Paper identifies a range of possible purposes for a national leadership body (e.g., oversight and ensuring quality, educating the public, facilitating dialogue and partnerships). While all of these purposes have the potential to support the overall objective of *strengthening the growth, coordination, and quality of career development support for Australians*, it is important to identify a clear purpose for the body and then develop a structure and mandate that supports that purpose. The Smith Family believes that a national body should focus on addressing the gaps identified in the Green Paper, including: (i) establishing standards for practitioners, (ii) capacity building by facilitating information sharing and networking across industries, sectors and jurisdictions, (iii) developing an evidence base to inform future policy decisions – including in-kind and funding support for research that evaluates existing programs and that examines service provision gaps (particularly for equity groups). The Smith Family does not have a view as to the type and structure of national body best-suited to address these gaps. However, The Smith Family strongly advocates that community organisations have a role in informing the mandate of the body and its priorities and in participating on it.

- *Supporting individuals to improve their career development skills*

The Smith Family supports this priority and specifically the focus on (i) empowering individuals by providing them with the 'right skills at the right time', and (ii) empowering those who provide informal career advice (e.g., parents). The Smith Family also supports the proposal to redevelop the myfuture.edu.au website and proposes that the redesign consider the needs of equity groups (e.g., those with low literacy skills, and people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds).

- *Improving the knowledge base through a research agenda*  
The Smith Family supports the proposal for a policy-focused research agenda. In the development of such an agenda, organisations such as The Smith Family that have direct experience providing career development support to equity groups, should be included as stakeholders.

## **7. Other areas for enhancement: The role of governments and industry**

In addition to the comments provided above, The Smith Family believes there is an opportunity for the Government to begin to embed career development more consistently throughout the national curriculum (i.e., as per the Victorian model). There is also an opportunity for these state and territory governments to leverage existing, or develop new programs, that up-skill teachers in age appropriate career development skills and competencies (e.g., as per the Australian Blueprint for Career Development).

The Green Paper outlines a limited set of roles and responsibilities for industry that are largely focused on employees once they are in the workplace. The Smith Family believes that industry has an important role to play in several parts of the strategy and a responsibility to help inform and develop the future workforce (e.g., strengthening engagement with communities and schools). There are several examples of industry successfully informing career development and workforce development programs (e.g., Business Education Alliance, Construction Skills Queensland) that provide an indication of how this can occur.

## **8. Concluding remarks**

The Smith Family has direct experience providing career development support to disadvantaged young people and their parents. Many of these individuals, and members of other equity groups, do not traditionally access career development services for a range of reasons (e.g., poor service experiences, language barriers, unfamiliarity with services). The development of a national career development strategy marks an important step in strengthening the access of these individuals to high quality, tailored and timely information and support. This in turn will contribute to the economic and social wellbeing of Australia. The Commonwealth has an important role to play in the development of such a strategy. The Green Paper offers some direction for the strategy but it would be considerably strengthened through attention to the range of issues raised in this submission, on which The Smith Family would be happy to expand.

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