



*everyone's family*

## Council of Australian Governments Education Council: Review of the Melbourne Declaration

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### Overview of The Smith Family

The Smith Family is a national charity founded in 1922 to improve the lives of disadvantaged Australian children. Our vision is a better future for young Australians in need. Our mission is to create opportunities for them by providing long-term support for their participation in education.

The Smith Family delivers programs in each state and territory, in over 90 communities, including many regional and rural communities. In 2017-18, The Smith Family supported more than 170,000 disadvantaged children, young people, parents, carers and community professionals through its education-focussed programs, including over 140,000 children and young people. We are supporting 45,000 financially disadvantaged children and young people nationally on our largest program, the *Learning for Life* educational scholarship. One in five students on the *Learning for Life* program is of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander background.

## Summary

The Smith Family welcomes the opportunity to provide a submission to the Review of the Melbourne Declaration (the Review). The Smith Family fully supports the Declaration as an important national framework for education policy.

We agree that the two goals articulated in the Declaration remain relevant and suitably aspirational for the future of Australian education. The task is to build upon them, making sure the Declaration reflects the challenges and opportunities experienced by young Australians.

In this submission, we make the following points:

- The Declaration should continue to focus on young people rather than broaden the scope to include all other age groups as well.
- The Declaration should be consistent with key national reviews and inter-governmental education agreements developed since its first issuing in 2008.
- Major changes impacting Australian education include: increasing fluidity of the labour market, greater importance of non-cognitive skills to future prospects, and proliferation of technology in everyday life.
- Building lifelong learning habits, including through early childhood education and tertiary education, should be incorporated into the Declaration.
- Equity remains a fundamental goal of the Declaration. This includes access to digital technology and development of digital skills.
- The Declaration should recognise the importance of individual students making one year's worth of learning as they progress during school.
- Critical thinking, and enterprise skills, are two attributes for young people that should be added to the Declaration alongside others listed.
- The Eight Areas for Action remain relevant. All areas, particularly regarding Stronger Partnerships, Addressing Disadvantage and Youth Transitions should reflect the latest evidence and research.
- The Declaration should make use of existing measurement mechanisms, noting that NAPLAN is currently subject to its own review.
- The Commonwealth Department of Education and the COAG Education Council should drive the various education sectors to collaborate more effectively.

## 1. Expectations for the refresh

The Smith Family believes that the Declaration should continue to focus exclusively on young Australians. However it should be expanded to include early childhood education and post-school pathways into further study, training or work, given their importance for young people's long-term economic and social participation in the community. We believe that the Declaration would be a less effective framework if broadened to include the education goals of all Australians. Even though lifelong learning is important to the future of education and training for all Australians, we do not think that the Declaration should seek to cover all age groups.

The Declaration should be consistent with, and complementary to, key national reviews and inter-governmental education agreements. There has been considerable policy development since the Declaration was first issued. This includes the *Report of the Review to Achieve Educational Excellence in Australian Schools*, and *Lifting Our Game – Report of the Review to Achieve Educational Excellence in Australian Schools through Early Childhood Interventions* and the latest National School Reform Agreement (the Agreement) signed by the Commonwealth, state and territories in 2018. In particular, the recommendations in the *Report of the Review to Achieve Educational Excellence in Australian Schools* set out a reform agenda for the schools sector relevant to the Declaration. The Declaration must reflect this suite of work to ensure it continues to be a relevant national framework over the next decade.

## 2. Reflecting major changes in the Declaration

The Smith Family believes the following three trends are having a significant impact on the future of education in Australia:

- economic change: increasing fluidity in the labour market for young people leaving high school, and the long-term impact it will have on their careers;
- social change: importance of non-cognitive skills to education, employment and citizenry; and
- technological change: Proliferation of technology in everyday lives, including inside schools and everyday life.

We discuss these below.

### *Fluidity of an evolving labour market*

A crucial challenge for young people leaving high school, university or vocational education and training is navigating the labour market to find decent, secure employment that helps them build a worthwhile, valuable career. In recent years, the difficulty young people experience in finding employment is due to several factors, including insufficient work experience, lack of appropriate education, lack of career management skills, and lack of entry level jobs, all of which can disproportionately affect disadvantaged young people.<sup>1</sup> Simultaneously, the nature of work is evolving, as is the skillset required to succeed in the workplace. A recent report from Deloitte Access Economics has found that 86 per cent of jobs created between now and 2030 will be

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<sup>1</sup> Foundation for Young Australians, *The New Work Reality*, 2018, p3; The Smith Family, *Young people's successful transition to work: What are the pre-conditions?*, September 2014, p 2-3.

knowledge worker jobs, and that two-thirds of all jobs by 2030 will be in soft-skills intensive occupations.<sup>2</sup> It is crucial that young people receive targeted, quality careers education and support as they progress through school so they can make informed decisions for future study, training or work and in turn give themselves the best chance of succeeding in the multiple careers that are likely to be the norm. Currently, careers information available at schools is extensive but fragmented and hard to contextualise. It makes it challenging for young people to obtain useful advice, particularly so for those from disadvantaged backgrounds who often require sustained assistance throughout school and afterwards.<sup>3</sup>

#### *Importance of non-cognitive skills*

Young people require a diverse set of general capabilities in order to become 'engaged thinkers, resilient and resourceful learners, creative problem solvers and active members of their communities'.<sup>4</sup> Developing a non-cognitive skill-set helps ensure young people thrive in contemporary life, be that in school, university or TAFE, the workplace or the community generally. The types of requisite capabilities include the following:<sup>5</sup>

- critical thinking;
- creativity;
- problem solving;
- collaboration;
- motivation;
- self-efficacy;
- conscientiousness; and
- perseverance.

These skills also help young people create lifelong learning habits, find viable career pathways, and make them more resilient and ready for the pace and intensity of change in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, including a rapidly changing labour market as outlined above.

#### *Proliferation of technology*

Technology has become a central component of the lives of young people at school, home, work and in the community. It is fundamental to how they interact with the wider world. The rapid pace at which digital technology and mobile devices have integrated into daily life is a dominant and undeniable feature of 21<sup>st</sup> century life. Technology presents new opportunities for how young people can learn, build relationships and work, as well challenges for their health and wellbeing, and for those without strong digital skills.

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<sup>2</sup> Deloitte Access Economics, *The path to prosperity: Why the future of work is human*, June 2019, p ii.

<sup>3</sup> Behavioural Insights Team, *Moments of choice: Final report*, 2016.

<sup>4</sup> Lamb, S., Maire, Q., Doecke, E., *Key Skills for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: an evidence-based review*, report prepared for the NSW Department of Education, 2017, p 3.

<sup>5</sup> Lamb, S., Maire, Q., Doecke, E., *Key Skills for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: an evidence-based review*, report prepared for the NSW Department of Education, 2017, p 3.

### 3. Reflecting lifelong learning in the Declaration

The Smith Family agrees that lifelong learning should be incorporated into the Declaration as flagged in the Discussion Paper. It should be framed in terms of how young people develop lifelong learning behaviours and dispositions from when they are young that they can carry forward to high school and beyond. As mentioned earlier, we believe that lifelong learning includes early childhood education as well as post-school education and training, whether that is university, vocational education and training or on-the-job training. Both the Preamble, and Goal 2, should be updated to incorporate lifelong learning.

### 4. Updating the concepts of equity, excellence and the attributes for young Australians in the Declaration

#### *Importance of equity for all young Australians*

The Smith Family strongly believes equity must remain a core component of the Declaration. One in six children and young people are living in poverty, and there is a strong relationship between child poverty and educational outcomes.<sup>6</sup> One in three (32.3 per cent) children from Australia's most disadvantaged communities does not meet one or more key developmental milestones in their first year of school, and are at risk of falling further behind.<sup>7</sup> The Grattan Institute demonstrated the significant gap in educational performance for disadvantaged students compared to their more advantaged peers. Even when capabilities are similar in Year 3, disadvantaged students fall between 12 months and 21 months behind more advantaged students by Year 9.<sup>8</sup> Year 12 completion rates are also significantly lower (60%) for students from low SES backgrounds than for students from high SES backgrounds (90%).<sup>9</sup>

The Declaration must remain committed to ensuring all Australian students regardless of their background have access to quality education, including early childhood education. As part of this commitment, the Declaration should emphasise the importance of individual learning growth and progression to all young people, as recommended in the *Review to Achieve Educational Excellence in Australian Schools*. Whilst all the findings and recommendations from this Review are important, we think it pertinent to pay particular attention to this item. The Review recommended that Australian schools should embed a focus on individual student achievement through continuous learning progress in the policies and practices of all schools and systems, with the expectation that each student should achieve at least one year's worth of growth throughout each year of schooling.

The goal of promoting equity and excellence should be complemented by plans for closing the gap in outcomes achieved by children of different backgrounds. This includes committing to providing additional, targeted support for disadvantaged students to ensure they are able to successfully progress through their schooling and build a better future for themselves, and measuring progress on this.

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<sup>6</sup> Davidson, P. et al. (2018), *Poverty in Australia, 2018*, October 2018, p 12.

<sup>7</sup> Australian Government (2018) *Australian Early Development Census National Report 2018: A snapshot of early childhood development in Australia*, Department of Education and Training.

<sup>8</sup> Grattan Institute, *Widening gaps: What NAPLAN tells us about student progress*, p 2.

<sup>9</sup> ACARA, *National Report on Schooling in Australia 2010: Additional statistics*, 2012.

*Digital deprivation and the importance of proficiency*

The Smith Family recommends that the Declaration recognise the challenge of digital deprivation and exclusion for disadvantaged students, and the need for the parties to the Declaration to address it. Recent research in New South Wales, led by the University of NSW and in partnership with The Smith Family explored what material deprivation and social exclusion looks like from the perspective of young people.<sup>10</sup> The research showed that students in government high schools and on The Smith Family's *Learning for Life* program<sup>11</sup> believe that a computer or other mobile device, as well as internet access at home, were essential for all young people to live a 'normal' life.<sup>12</sup>

This research found that the lack of a computer impacts young people's attitudes to and experiences of schooling, as well as their overall wellbeing. As digital skills are integrated into everyday teaching and learning, students with low digital ability become further disadvantaged due to an inability to complete school tasks. The 2014 NAP ICT literacy data shows only two in four students from low SES backgrounds attained the national proficiency standard for digital ability.<sup>13</sup> Young people from disadvantaged backgrounds are at significant risk of digital exclusion without sustained support. This in turn can increase the likelihood of students from disadvantaged backgrounds disengaging from school, or being unprepared for post-school study, training or work.

Similarly, we advise strengthening the language on digital proficiency that is currently included in Goal 2 of the Declaration. Currently it states that 'successful learners' should be 'creative and productive users of technology, especially ICT, as a foundation for success in all learning areas'. Young people need to be digitally proficient as a core capability for completing school and pursuing further training, work or study. This includes being digital creators as well as content consumers. Digital proficiency is fundamental to their future career prospects as well as their social and civic participation. The language in the Declaration should prioritise this alongside literacy and numeracy.

*Attributes to be included in the Declaration*

The Smith Family believes that non-cognitive skills, as outlined earlier, are fundamental for young people to thrive in school, and 21<sup>st</sup> century life generally. The Declaration already acknowledges such skills like creativity, problem-solving, collaboration and motivation.

We recommend that the Declaration also include critical thinking as an attribute required by young people to thrive. Critical thinking is a crucial, complementary trait that all young people require to for school, the tertiary sector, the workplace (in particular jobs in the knowledge economy) and the community. It is an attribute enabling young people to be avid learners, productive workers and active and informed citizens.

Critical thinking takes on particular significance in the age of social media, where young people are exposed to a vast amount of information every day, not all of which is accurate. A 2018 study

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<sup>10</sup> Saunders, P., Bedford, M., Brown, Judith, Naidoo, Y., Adamson, E., *Material Deprivation and Social Exclusion Among Young Australians: A child-focussed approach*, November 2018.

<sup>11</sup> Young people on this program are living in financially disadvantaged families.

<sup>12</sup> Saunders, P., Bedford, M., Brown, Judith, Naidoo, Y., Adamson, E., *Material Deprivation and Social Exclusion Among Young Australians: A child-focussed approach*, November 2018, p 76.

<sup>13</sup> ACARA, *National Assessment Program – ICT Literacy*, Years 6 &10, 2015.

demonstrated that young Australians aged 18 to 34 have the highest trust in news found on social media and via search engines compared with those 35 years and older.<sup>14</sup> Additionally, a 2017 survey of 1,000 young Australians aged eight to 16 examined their news engagement practices. The results indicated that while roughly one third felt they could distinguish 'fake news' from real news, one third felt they could not make this distinction. The other third were uncertain about their ability.<sup>15</sup> Young people need to be able to discern fact from falsehoods as they make daily decisions.

The Smith Family also believes that enterprise skills are important attributes for young people to thrive in the 21<sup>st</sup> century requiring acknowledgement in the Declaration. This includes project management, financial literacy and the ability to ideate.<sup>16</sup> These complement important skills like critical thinking and digital literacy. Enterprise skills help young people to navigate the labour market, and to consider starting their own ventures. For instance, over 1,400 start-ups were created in Australia in 2018 alone.<sup>17</sup>

## 5. Areas for action in the Declaration

Whilst The Smith Family thinks that the eight current areas for action should be maintained, we think that particular items should be strengthened.

We believe that developing stronger partnerships is an area where Australian governments and the various education sectors across the country can make significant improvements in the coming decade. The *Review to Achieve Educational Excellence in Australian Schools* highlighted the importance of quality partnerships between schools and wider society, including, parents, carers and families, employers, community members, community organisations and tertiary institutions. Whilst there has been progress since the issuing of the Declaration, more needs to be done to truly embed quality, productive partnerships in every school, so that responsibility for the educational outcomes of young people is shared. These partnerships are particularly important for schools in disadvantaged communities and can be a key contributor in achieving greater equity of educational outcomes. We also think that the Declaration should explicitly mention community sector organisations as a partner in education. This is important to the equity focus of the Declaration, as these organisations often work with disadvantaged students and families to help them thrive at school.

We believe that the area for action aimed at improving educational outcomes for all disadvantaged young Australians, including for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, should include digital proficiency as an educational outcome to be achieved. As mentioned earlier, digital deprivation is a major problem for disadvantaged students, and developing proficiency is critical for their

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<sup>14</sup> Park, S. et al, *Digital News Report: Australia 2018*, p 9, 28.

<sup>15</sup> Notley, T. et al, *News and Australian Children: How Young People Access, Perceive, and are Affected by the News*, November 2017, p 9; Notley, T., Dezuanni, M., 'Most young Australians can't identify fake news online', *The Conversation*, November 20, 2017.

<sup>16</sup> Foundation for Young Australians, *The New Work Order: Ensuring young Australians have skills and experience for the jobs of the future, not the past*, 2015, p 32.

<sup>17</sup> Kimmorley, S., 'The number of startups in Australia has fallen for the first time in 5 years', *Business Insider Australia*, 22 October 2018.



education and career prospects. Acquiring digital proficiency is fundamental to their future and should be acknowledged.

Finally, we think it is timely to strengthen senior years of schooling and youth transitions, in line with the *Review to Achieve Educational Excellence in Australian Schools*. We think the Declaration should more accurately reflect the latest evidence on improving post-school pathways for young people. Effective post-school planning begins with quality career education in primary school. It is complemented by further targeted careers support and work exposure throughout high school, not just in the final one or two senior years. It is important that the Declaration reflect this approach to youth transitions, so that it can encourage improved careers support in line with the National Careers Education Strategy over the next decade.

## 6. Measuring and sharing progress towards achieving the Declaration's goals

The Smith Family believes that tracking progress towards achieving the Declaration's goals should, where possible, use existing measurement systems for educational outcomes, including national assessments such as NAPLAN, and international assessments such as PISA, TIMSS and PIRLS. Measuring progress is increasingly important, including for different sub-groups over time. The Declaration should include consideration of the recommendations put forward in the final report for the current NAPLAN Review.

Additionally, the introduction of a national Unique Student Identifier (USI) would help track each student regardless of their mobility and leverage the value of longitudinal data collection. It would contribute to better understanding of individual students' educational outcomes over time, especially disadvantaged students. The introduction of a national USI could also combine NAPLAN data with other educational data collected by different jurisdictions, to formulate a more comprehensive picture of individual student performance.

## 7. Working together across the education sectors

Collaboration across sectors and jurisdictions is critical to realising the goals of the Declaration. As a starting point, the sectors needs to be convened at regular intervals for purposeful and outcomes-driven deliberation. This is best led by the Commonwealth Department of Education, in conjunction with the COAG Education Council. Deliberations should assess how well the Declaration is being implemented across Australia, including progress against the goals, areas for action as well as provide an opportunity for sharing learnings. We would recommend that the sectors be brought together at least once every three years. The stakeholder consultation process at the beginning of the Review was a valuable example in how to engage the various sectors in examining the Declaration.

## Conclusion

We support a national education declaration which sets out agreed goals and priority actions. It is crucial that as much focus is directed to implementing and achieving the goals of the Declaration over the coming decade, as there is on refining the principles, goals and areas of action to be listed. There has been considerable public policy development in the interim period regarding schools, early childhood education, and the future of the tertiary sector. Incorporating key pieces of policy with the Declaration is important if its goals are to be met and the educational outcomes for all young Australians improved.