



everyone's family

Response to National Regional, Rural and Remote Education Strategy – Issues Paper

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1 Response to National Regional, Rural and Remote Education Strategy - Issues Paper

1.1 Careers advice and aspirations

The Smith Family strongly supports the Advisory Group prioritising the improvement of careers advice for students in regional, rural and remote areas, including the use of the framework of the National Career Education Strategy (Paper 1). In particular, we commend the commitment to engaging the community and local business, as well as parents and carers. This is crucial in helping young people develop the knowledge, skills, attitudes and behaviours to have positive post-school pathways.

Research shows it is important to start developing career aspirations from primary school onwards, not just as young people approach the later years of school. This is because children begin to form stereotypes about occupations, careers and participation in post-school education from an early age.¹ Suitable careers advice from primary school helps children to see the relationship between what they are learning and the possibilities it opens up for them in later life, helps motivate them to achieve and supports their ongoing engagement in education. Exposing primary school children to a wide range of people undertaking different jobs is particularly important for those from disadvantaged backgrounds, who may be exposed to fewer role models. Our Primary Careers program, referenced in our previous submission, is an example of this emerging approach.

Young people should continue to be introduced to the world of work throughout secondary school, and have opportunities for work experience and to connect with mentors in fields relevant to their post-school aspirations. For disadvantaged students, this allows them to build social capital and networks that they may otherwise lack. These opportunities are very important in regional, rural and remote areas. We note that improvements to online portals providing career information is proposed. Information is only a part of what is required, and needs to be complemented by supports that help young people understand and utilise the information being provided. Programs such as The Smith Family's *iTrack* online mentoring program (referenced in Existing Initiatives Paper) would strongly align with and strengthen this proposal.

1.2 VET in Schools mapping

We note that mapping good practice in the delivery of VET in Schools in regional, rural and remote areas is proposed (Paper 1). To ensure this is a valuable exercise, it is important to determine key criteria for good practice. Without this, the ability to identify good practice to scale up or adapt in other communities will be limited. Such criteria could include how non-cognitive skills are taught, whether suitable post-school pathways are actively canvassed with students and whether students connect with local employers for proper work experience.

1.3 Better support for equity cohorts

¹ NSW Education and Communities (2014) *The case for career-related learning in primary schools: An introduction to primary school principals.*

We note that ensuring better support for certain equity cohorts in the tertiary system is proposed (Paper 5). The Smith Family strongly endorses all efforts to ensure disadvantaged students receive more tailored and sustained support to create suitable post-school pathways. This includes access to mentors in relevant industries, such as those provided via the Career Mentoring Program referenced in our previous submission.

1.4 Digital exclusion

Additionally, delivering access to 21st century internet services is proposed as part of increasing access to post-secondary education options (Paper 2 and Paper 5). It is important that in addition to providing better quality internet services, greater assistance should be made to improve the digital *capability* of regional, rural and remote students, especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds. Digital capability should be developed throughout a young person's journey through primary and secondary school. Digital inclusion is a significant issue, and the transition from secondary to tertiary education is a crucial point to ensure these students have requisite digital skills to succeed in further training, study or work. If there are skill gaps that have gone unidentified until the end of secondary school, this is a crucial time to address them urgently. As mentioned, these skills should be built up over a young person's entire educational journey.

1.5 Regional Education Commissioner

The Smith Family believes that the concept of a Regional Education Commissioner (Paper 6) is worth refining further. The role of Commissioner is likely to have more impact if it is both tasked with a specific mission, measurable indicators of success, and is sufficiently resourced. Critical to further considerations of such a role is how it would contribute to better inter-governmental cooperation across jurisdictions, including an exchange of information on leading practice and access to data. While there may be some symbolic value in such a Commissioner, one with a broad mandate and limited resources risks being ineffective in navigating the challenges of a Federated model, and risks undertaking a range of activities with questionable impact. Other options that may potentially be worth considering are Regional, Rural and Remote Impact Statements, and Interdepartmental/Inter-jurisdictions Officers Groups. The latter would need to have clear Terms of References, and performance measures.

1.6 Targets

We note that the proposed high-level targets focus on reducing the disparity in attainment between regional, rural and remote areas versus metropolitan areas. The proposed targets, as written, would be met if, for example, there was a decrease in attainment in metropolitan areas, and no change in attainment in regional, rural and remote areas. Similarly, gains may be made by those from regional, rural and remote areas over a particular timeframe, but these gains may not be as great as those from metropolitan areas, and hence the disparity is exacerbated. It is important that in the first instance targets focus on delivering tangible *improvements* through a focus on increased attainment by students from regional, rural and remote areas.

Data collected on these targets should also capture key demographic information such as Indigeneity, age, gender, socio-economic status, location, and disability. The Smith Family believes it would be useful for The Advisory Group to consider ways it could also collect and analyse qualitative measures relating to the regional, rural and remote students' experience of the tertiary education system, such as through annual surveys with select students from regional communities.

2 Summary

The Smith Family strongly supports an emphasis on careers advice and aspirations as a priority in preparing regional, rural and remote learners for success in tertiary education (Paper 1), but also notes that effective careers education is delivered in primary and secondary school, not just as students approach Year 12. This is important to ensure young people have a solid understanding of the post-school opportunities available to them and how to pursue them. We commend the Advisory Group for its emphasis on ensuring strong local community and parental engagement in careers advice.

In any mapping of good practice in delivery of VET in Schools (Paper 1) key criteria should be established to help determine how best to scale up or adapt good practice to other relevant communities.

The Smith Family strongly endorses all efforts to ensure disadvantaged students receive more tailored and sustained support to create suitable post-school pathways (Paper 5) which should include career mentoring support during tertiary education.

As well as focusing on improving internet services (Paper 2 and Paper 5), students from regional, rural and remote areas also need support to ensure their digital capability skills are appropriate for post-school education and employment.

The Regional Education Commissioner (Paper 6) is a concept worth refining, which could be effective if it is properly resourced and has a specific, measurable mission.

The high-level targets (Paper 6) must ensure that in measuring reduced disparity of attainment the emphasis is on increased attainment by students in regional, rural and remote areas. Demographic information on students should also be collected, and ways to collect qualitative information on students' experience of the tertiary sector explored.