



everyone's family

The Future of Work in Queensland to 2030

Jobs Queensland

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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 children and young people in Australia. Our vision is a better future for young Australians in need. Our mission is to create opportunities for young Australians in need by providing long-term support for their participation in education. This mission is founded on the belief that every child and young person deserves a chance.

Our mission guides every element of our work, including program development and delivery, research, advocacy and fundraising. The Smith Family delivers programs in each state and territory in Australia, in over 90 communities, including many regional and rural communities. In Queensland we are working in 16 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. In Queensland our programs annually support around 33,500 children and young people from disadvantaged backgrounds.

We have a unique longitudinal dataset of young people participating on *Learning for Life*. It includes demographic, administrative and outcomes data. We are tracking the school attendance, school completion and post-school engagement in work and/or study of all young people on the program. We are analysing this data in a systematic way in order to contribute to building the Australian educational evidence base.

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1. Introduction

The Smith Family welcomes the opportunity to provide a submission on the future of work in Queensland to 2030. We commend the Queensland Government for its commitment to a longer-term policy roadmap to ensure that Queenslanders are appropriately skilled and ready for the persistent change and disruption set to dominate the economy, labour market and society more broadly.

Any planning of the future of work in Queensland must be tailored to its distinct circumstances. The Queensland economy, and its workforce needs over time, are unique in Australia due to a range of factors. Queensland typically tracks the extremes of Australia's national income, collecting significant revenue during boom periods but also suffering more sharply during downturns. As the Discussion Paper outlines, the state has a large and dispersed number of regional centres with distinct economies and communities and a large proportion of small businesses. The sharper economic cycles and dispersed nature of the economy means there is a higher degree of mobility amongst Queensland's workers, as they identify job opportunities in different regional centres. Additionally, Queensland is particularly vulnerable to natural disasters, which are highly disruptive to the agricultural, tourism and mining sectors.¹

Our submission is particularly concerned with the children and young people from disadvantaged backgrounds who are most at risk of missing out in the future, on the benefits of work, unless they have access to quality schooling, including careers education and viable post-school pathways to further education, training and work. As the Discussion Paper states, Queensland has a lower ratio of persons with post-secondary educational qualifications, lower ratio of persons in professional occupations and lower ratio of digital literacy capabilities and slower technology take up than the national average. However, in recent years there have been significant efforts made to improve the educational achievement of young Queenslanders and this has resulted in important improvements in NAPLAN and Year 12 certification rates.²

Education is the key for ensuring that young people are able to participate in the future workforce that will be needed in 2030 and for Queensland having the workforce it needs to take advantage of the economic opportunities ahead. As Queensland prepares for a changed work landscape by 2030, it is critical that young people from disadvantaged backgrounds are supported to navigate both the education system and the labour market.

Preparing the future workforce to be ready for the 2030 economy requires rethinking the way systems interact with one another – for example education and employment. For instance, ensuring young people develop the skills to be workforce ready, or that they have sufficient knowledge and understanding about career pathways, requires thinking about young people's development across the primary, secondary and tertiary education systems. It requires thinking

¹ Wright, S. & Caldwell, F., 'Millions face high risk of natural disaster', *Brisbane Times*, 1 January 2019.

² Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority, 'Year 12 Certification Rates'.

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about how government can better collaborate with the community and business sectors to provide suitably tailored supports that meet individual student need as well as the need of key Queensland industries. It requires deliberate investment in evidence based policy that can be delivered and measured over the next decade towards 2030.

The Smith Family makes the following points in this submission:

- Improved cross-government and cross-sectoral collaboration is required in Queensland to ensure that young people acquire the range of skills needed for future employment success.
- The quality of careers education, across primary, secondary and post-school education, could be significantly improved if young people are to be adequately prepared for the future labour market.
- Vocational education and training could be strengthened as a training and career pathway that young people consider as part of their post-school plans.
- Young people from disadvantaged backgrounds could be better supported to overcome digital exclusion so that they can adequately access education, training and work opportunities.

These points are expanded upon below.

2. Building skills to be workforce ready

As the Discussion Paper flags, it is widely acknowledged that the future workforce will require a suite of skills in addition to subject knowledge. To thrive in the 21st century, young people will 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’.³ The types of capabilities required include but is not limited to:⁴

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

It is crucial that these capabilities and a life-long learning disposition are taught and acquired at school and not just in post-school study, training or work. The *Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians* established the importance of school students acquiring

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

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

such capabilities as part of core learning outcomes.⁵ Similarly, The National Careers Education Strategy endorsed by the Education Council and released in February 2019 highlights the importance of young people developing transferable skills for their post-school futures.⁶

Whilst examining school curricula lies outside of the scope of Jobs Queensland's current work, The Smith Family recommends that Jobs Queensland consider how it can further collaborate with Education Queensland in ensuring that the teaching of these capabilities is planned and appropriately sequenced through primary, secondary and tertiary education. Ensuring that these capabilities are acquired throughout the educational journey of a young person will best prepare them for the fluidity and uncertainty of the labour market. Cross-government and cross-sectoral collaboration will be key in ensuring that such skills are taught in a consistent, high-quality manner. Young people can be supported to acquire these skills not only in classroom situations but through programs and initiatives provided in partnership with non-government and business organisations, as discussed further below.

3. Delivering better careers education and support across the educational journey of young people

If Queensland is to prepare itself for the future of work, and to develop an appropriately skilled workforce, it can look to provide better careers education and sustained support throughout the educational journey of each young person at school and afterwards. Research shows that not only do young people have low levels of careers knowledge generally, but they often think they have sufficient information to make important career decisions. The volume of careers information available is extensive but dispersed across multiple sources and is hard to contextualise. This makes it challenging for young people to obtain effective and relevant careers advice.⁷ This is particularly the case for children and young people from disadvantaged backgrounds.

It is important that careers education is integrated across the educational spectrum, and delivered in a high quality, consistent manner throughout the state. This involves offering suitable, targeted careers education and activities beginning in primary school and continuing through secondary school, and into the tertiary level. The supports and programs offered across these different educational stages need to be targeted to young people's stages of development.

Despite pockets of excellence in careers support for young persons across Queensland, the quality of support within these settings is inconsistent, as it is across Australia more generally. Current approaches largely remain influenced by ideas developed for an economy markedly different from that of today, or indeed the one we'll see by 2030. The gap between current careers education practice and the economic reality is jeopardising the futures of thousands of young Queenslanders and in turn Queensland's future prosperity.

The National Careers Education Strategy, endorsed by the Education Council, is a valuable overarching framework for Queensland to utilise in improving its own delivery of careers

⁵ Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs, *Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians*, December 2008, p 13.

⁶ Australian Government, *National Careers Education Strategy*, February 2019.

⁷ Behavioural Insights Team, *Moments of choice: Final report*, 2016.

education, and to help prepare young Queenslanders for the future world of work. The Smith Family supports Queensland using this Strategy as it develops a tailored approach accommodating the state's distinct industry needs, workforce characteristics and regional variances, such as those identified in the Discussion Paper. Improved careers education can support the development of resilient individuals able to both adapt to the evolving nature of work, and manage multiple careers in their lifetime, according to their circumstances and needs.⁸ Delivery of careers education should draw on the latest Australian and international evidence on effective career education initiatives and practices across primary, secondary and tertiary education levels, examples of which are outlined below.

Careers education in primary school

There is a growing body of research about the importance of starting careers education activities and discussions early in the educational journey, indeed in primary school. This is because children begin to form stereotypes about occupations, careers and participation in post-school education from an early age for a range of reasons, including the unconscious influences of parents, friends and others they engage with.⁹ Once these limits are set, individuals will rarely consider broader alternatives. Helping primary school 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.

The Smith Family has drawn on this latest evidence in its recent pilot of the Primary Careers Program. It focuses on students in Years 4 to 6, with the aim of supporting them to increase their understanding of the 'world of work' by introducing them to a wide variety of jobs and the skill sets needed now and in the future. The program aims to broaden students' aspirations about their future and encourages them to remain engaged at school and prepare them for future careers. It is one example of the work emerging at the primary school level regarding careers education.

Careers education in secondary school

It is important that careers education is available to students throughout secondary school, not just as they approach Year 12. The latest evidence demonstrates that there is a strong relationship between student participation in career development activities, including direct exposure to the world of work, and positive attitudes to schooling and post-school involvement in work and study. Young people who can recall four or more structured career activities across their school life, are five times less likely to be unemployed or disengaged from education or training in early adulthood.¹⁰ Engagement with employers helps young people, especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds, find out about a wide range of jobs and understand how their learning at school connects to their future. This contributes to them completing school.

⁸ Australian Government, National Careers Education Strategy, February 2019.

⁹ NSW Education and Communities, *The case for career-related learning in primary schools: An introduction to primary school principals*, 2014.

¹⁰ Kashefpakdel, E., Mann, A., and Schleicher, M, *The impact of career development activities on student attitudes towards school utility: an analysis of data from the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development's Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA)*. UK: Education and Employers Research, 2017.

An example of a program introducing young people to the world of work whilst still at school is *Work Inspiration*, which The Smith Family has partnered with businesses to deliver since 2013. This program is delivered in schools to students from Years 9 to 12. It offers them a meaningful, practical opportunity to engage with the world of work, across different industries. Students spend time in various workplaces, interacting with employees, and learning more about the skillsets required for the particular industry. It helps create pathways for young people within and beyond school. It helps young people in the transition between school, work and/or further study, and helps keep them attached to education and the labour force. Current employers involved in the program include Microsoft, SAP, McDonalds, Hilton Hotels, Arup Engineering, DLA Piper, Audi, Kain Foundation and Flight Centre. Annually around 1,000 students from The Smith Family's partner schools participate in *Work Inspiration*.

Additionally, many students in secondary school are not fully aware of the post-school opportunities available to them. Timely high quality careers advice supports young people to develop ambitious and realistic aspirations and helps them put in place plans to achieve them. This is especially so for disadvantaged students who often lack the social capital and networks of more advantaged students in planning post-school futures. The Smith Family's *iTrack* online mentoring program is an example of an initiative that provides students with better assistance to understand the full range of available post-school pathways. *iTrack* is delivered to Year 9 to 11 students, including many from regional communities. It is an online mentoring program that matches students with a supportive adult, who provides practical advice and guidance about workplace, study and career opportunities. The program helps students extend the networks of advice that they can draw on, at a key point in their lives. The conversations between the mentor and student encourage the student to do their own research into post-school-pathways and to begin formulating a plan for pursuing specific post-school opportunities. This also encourages better ownership of the discussions by the student as they identify the steps needed to implement their post-school plan.

To maximise the value of Queensland's future workforce, it is also important that young people at risk of leaving school early are supported to stay engaged in school, and at the very least create viable post-school pathways. As demographic and economic changes occur, it is essential that all young people are able to participate in the world of work and the completion of Year 12 or equivalent is a fundamental component of that. The Smith Family has designed The Early School Leavers initiative, to identify those at risk of leaving school early. Specialist Careers Coaches provide individual career advice and guidance to support these students to stay at school and complete Year 12. To avoid early school leavers becoming 'lost' in the system, we also use our existing relationships with these young people, to connect them with post-school services and employment opportunities, increasing the likelihood of them successfully bridging the school to post-school transition. Tailored and structured post-school pathways that participants may access include cadetships, such as a Hilton Hotels cadetship program, (specifically designed for these students, which combines 12 months paid work with a Certificate III in Hospitality); work placements; and government-funded transition programs.

Careers education and support post-school

After secondary school, many young people, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds, will still require assistance to establish their careers. The Smith Family's *Cadetship to Career*

program is a joint initiative with the Business Council of Australia (BCA). This program offers professional cadetship opportunities for around 85 disadvantaged students who are currently part of The Smith Family's Tertiary Scholarship Scheme. A cadetship runs for typically two to four years. During this time, cadets receive eight weeks of paid full-time employment per year with a BCA member company, workforce-focused training and skills development, as well as continuing financial support via the Tertiary Scholarship Scheme. By participating in the program, cadets improve their job readiness, hone their own career aspirations, develop new professional networks, and potentially access graduate-level employment positions. It is a promising example of how not-for-profit organisations and business can collaborate and achieve shared outcomes which benefit the community.

Across all stages of young people's development, careers education cannot just be aimed at the individual student. It is best delivered via an integrated model incorporating individual support, parental and guardian involvement and partnerships with community organisations to support the diverse needs and aspirations of young people as they contemplate, and get ready, for the post-school future.¹¹ An important component of all of The Smith Family's career education initiatives is engagement with the parent/carer of the young person participating, so they can also acquire the knowledge to better support their child's career planning.

In summary, a model of evidence-based careers support for young Queenslanders would do the following:

- connect the worlds of education and employment as young people move through school, including direct exposure to the world of work and opportunities to engage with education and training providers;
- support students in their education and post-school planning so they are fully informed about the pathways that match their interests and passions;
- provide personal guidance, mentoring, skills development and targeted support, particularly for those at risk of leaving school early; and
- support parents/carers' engagement in their child's educational and post-school planning.

This is particularly important for young people from disadvantaged backgrounds, given they are less likely to complete Year 12 and have much more limited access to critical social and cultural capital.

Building on the National Careers Education Strategy, Queensland can strengthen its support of young people in developing the skills, knowledge, attitudes and behaviours to succeed as its economy continues to evolve. Delivering tailored careers education across Queensland should involve investment in evidence-based models across the spectrum of education, and as well as priority support for disadvantaged young Queenslanders. Given the dispersed nature of Queensland's economic hubs, delivery should also accommodate regional variances on key issues such as industry need and local workforce skills and characteristics.

Presently, the importance of careers education, and planning for post-school transitions, are mentioned in a range of key documents such as the Department of Education's Strategic Plan

¹¹ Youth Action, *Career Guidance: The missing link in school to work transitions*, Youth Action Policy Paper, July 2017, p 9.

2018-22,¹² the Advancing Education Action Plan,¹³ the State Schools Strategy,¹⁴ the Youth Engagement Plan¹⁵ and the Senior Education and Training Plan.¹⁶ The objectives of the National Careers Education Strategy provides a cohesive framework for achieving the aim of young people in Queensland being ready for all the possibilities available to them in the future.

4. Revitalising vocational education and training

The Discussion Paper identifies the future of VET as an area of contention, with a lack of consensus around its role in skills development for workers and in how the system offers qualifications. There are currently significant numbers of Queenslanders participating in VET courses, including at TAFE, through private providers and in schools. In 2017, there were approximately 290,000 VET students in Queensland aged 24 years or younger.¹⁷ There were also approximately 84,200 young people participating in VET in Schools (VETiS) courses in Queensland.¹⁸ TAFE Queensland is the largest provider of VET services in Queensland.¹⁹ In 2017-18, TAFE Queensland delivered VET services to over 113,000 Queensland students across 50 state locations.²⁰ Whilst TAFE is the largest provider, there is a range of private providers offering VET services across the state, with an estimated 625,000 Queenslanders undertaking private courses in 2017.²¹

The question is not so much, does VET have a role to play in developing Queensland's future workforce, but rather how can the sector's contribution be enhanced. In order to ensure that VET can best produce a skilled, job ready workforce as Queensland looks towards 2030, the VET curricula should be reframed and updated to better reflect industry workforce demands, persistent misconceptions about the benefit or value of VET should be addressed, and more support should be offered to disadvantaged students to effectively navigate the VET system.

The VET curricula should be reframed to more accurately reflect 21st century workforce needs. The types of competencies taught across the various training packages must include relevant technical vocational skills to be applied in individual employment positions, as well as non-cognitive skillsets that help students succeed in a rapidly changing economy. It is still seldom recognised that over time, VET graduates often undertake work that has high cognitive and non-cognitive skill content.²² Throughout a career, an apprentice or a trainee will need to draw on a variety of skills such as

¹²Queensland Department of Education, Strategic Plan: 2018-22, 2018, p 11.

¹³ Queensland Department of Education, Advancing Education: An action plan for education in Queensland, 2016, p 15, 22

¹⁴ Queensland Department of Education, Every student succeeding: State Schools Strategy 2019-2023, p 2.

¹⁵ Queensland Department of Education, Youth Engagement Plan.

¹⁶ Queensland Curriculum and Assessment Authority, 'Your Senior Education and Training Plan', February 2019.

¹⁷ National Centre for Vocational Education Research, Total VET students and courses 2017, p 12.

¹⁸ National Centre for Vocational Education Research, VET in Schools 2017, 2018, p 2.

¹⁹ TAFE Queensland, Annual Report 2017-18, September 2018, p 32.

²⁰ TAFE Queensland, Annual Report 2017-18, September 2018, p 5.

²¹ National Centre for Vocational Education Research, Total VET students and courses 2017.

²² Buchanan, J. et al, Preparing for the best and worst of times: Future Frontiers Analytical Report, already cited, p 36.

problem solving, project management and collaboration in addition to applying their technical expertise.²³ The VET sector should be able to support the acquisition of these skills.

Further, the VET courses system is overly complex, and can be incredibly difficult for young people (and their parents/carers) to navigate to find the course best suited for them. The structure by which competency standards and qualifications are set is rigid, and some of the delineations between similar qualifications and vocational fields is now outdated. This is a problem considering VET graduates today will likely move between related and unrelated vocational fields over the course of their career. For example, in 2018, 31.5 per cent of VET graduates nationally were employed in different occupations to their training course, but their training remained relevant to their current job.²⁴ Queensland should consider how the qualifications structure could be streamlined, and made more navigable. Qualifications could be reorganised according to industry clusters or vocational streams, recognising that common learning and areas and skillsets exist in similar areas.²⁵ For instance, a key industry cluster that could be streamlined is care services, with the Discussion Paper identifying that health care and social assistance is one of the largest and fastest growing employment sectors in Queensland.

Many young people and their parents have a limited or inaccurate understanding of VET. Students often do not understand the education and employment pathways on offer via VET, and how to access them. Their post-school choices are influenced by family, carers, friends, teachers, or referral agencies – each of whom may have misconceptions about the value of VET pathways.²⁶

Current research suggests that VET graduates have higher employment rates than undergraduates, as well as earning wages comparable to, if not exceeding, their university educated peers.²⁷ Similarly, VET is more relevant than ever when it comes to ensuring Queensland has an appropriately skilled workforce. The sector currently provides training courses for nine out of ten occupations predicted to have the greatest national growth of new jobs to 2022.²⁸ The idea that VET mostly accommodates those learning a traditional trade is a thing of the past.

Addressing these misconceptions requires better education and exposure to VET pathways in school for students, parents and carers. This includes better awareness of VETiS, which at times is viewed as a second-rate option for low-performing students, rather than as a viable alternative

²³ Jones, Anne, 'Vocational education for the twenty-first century', August 2018, University of Melbourne, p 4.

²⁴ National Centre for Vocational Education Research, Australian vocational education and training statistics: VET student outcomes 2018, 2018, Table 13, p 29.

²⁵ Buchanan, J. et al, Preparing for the best and worst of times: Future Frontiers Analytical Report, already cited, p 38.

²⁶ Myconos, G., Dommers, E. & Clarke, K., Viewed from the margins: navigating disadvantage and VET, Brotherhood of St Laurence and University of Melbourne, August 2018, p 6.

²⁷ Wyman, N., et al, Perceptions are not reality: myths, realities & the critical role of vocational education & training in Australia, Skilling Australia Foundation, 2017.

²⁸ Wyman, N., et al, Perceptions are not reality: myths, realities & the critical role of vocational education & training in Australia, Skilling Australia Foundation, 2017.

pathway.²⁹ Disadvantaged students, who may have very limited understanding of learning opportunities at school and career options afterwards, are especially affected.

The VET sector can also strengthen its capacity to support disadvantaged students to engage with vocational and education training and complete their qualifications. Students from disadvantaged backgrounds often have additional learning needs and often require extra assistance to remain engaged in their education. Students experiencing disadvantage and hardship may be from low-income households where neither parent or carer works, from families experiencing problems with inter-generational disadvantage. They may identify as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander or have culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, experience serious health or disability issues, or be from regional or remote communities. Many of these students experience multiple and compounding disadvantage.

Disadvantaged students are an important and large equity cohort for the VET sector. Yet the sector tends to struggle in supporting disadvantaged students to enrol, engage and complete in VET courses.³⁰ As mentioned, the sector is complex, fragmented and difficult to navigate. For those students intending to pursue VET, they can feel daunted by trying to select a suitable training provider, and enrolling in a course. This can be particularly stressful for disadvantaged students without any additional support from school counsellors or families who solely rely on marketing information from individual training providers. Once participating in VET courses, the capacity of different training providers to assist with the extra learning needs of disadvantaged students is highly variable.³¹ The Smith Family has witnessed these difficulties via students in our Tertiary Scholarship Scheme who have interacted with the VET sector. Overall, this makes the learning experience for disadvantaged students in VET challenging and problematic.

The Smith Family recommends greater support for disadvantaged students to access VET opportunities and complete qualifications. Research suggests that providing help with course choices may help increase course completion rates for disadvantaged students.³² An important policy objective should be to improve the rate of qualification completion by disadvantaged students. Notwithstanding the current challenges with VET, The Smith Family's experience, working with thousands of disadvantaged young people and their families each year is that with the right support at the right time, these young people can be supported to complete their education and establish careers post-school.

²⁹ Dempsey, M., *Impacts of the changing nature of the Vocational Education and Training (VET) system on educators within the VET system in Australia*, Edith Cowan University, p 21; Buchanan, J. et al, *Preparing for the best and worst of times: Future Frontiers Analytical Report*, already cited, p 42.

³⁰ Myconos, G., Dommers, E. & Clarke, K., *Viewed from the margins: navigating disadvantage and VET*, Brotherhood of St Laurence and University of Melbourne, August 2018, p 6.

³¹ Myconos, G., Dommers, E. & Clarke, K., *Viewed from the margins: navigating disadvantage and VET*, Brotherhood of St Laurence and University of Melbourne, August 2018, p 7.

³² McVicar, D & Tabasso, D, *The impact of disadvantage on VET completion and employment gaps*, National Centre for Vocational Education Research, 2016, p 9.

5. Supporting young people from disadvantaged backgrounds overcome digital exclusion

In planning the future workforce for Queensland, it is important to be cognisant of the persistent challenges experienced by disadvantaged young people regarding digital technology. Given Queensland's geography and dispersed regional centres, access to digital technology is crucial to participate in education, training and work. However, many disadvantaged young people have limited or no ongoing access to the internet in their daily lives. For instance, in The Smith Family's *Learning for Life* scholarship program, three in ten students do not have a computer or other device connected to the internet at home.

Recent research in New South Wales (and likely to hold true for Queensland) provides further insight to digital exclusion at the school level. The research led by Professor Peter Saunders from the Social Policy Research Centre at the University of NSW and undertaken in partnership with the NSW Department of Education, The NSW Advocate for Children and Young People and The Smith Family explored what poverty, material deprivation and social exclusion looks like from the perspective of young people in NSW.³³ The *Material deprivation and social exclusion among young Australians: a child focused approach* research showed that students in government high schools and on The Smith Family's *Learning for Life* program³⁴ agreed 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.³⁵ These items were identified by young people as supporting their participation and engagement in school.³⁶

The lack of a computer was seen as potentially impacting on 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.³⁷ Whilst the importance of access to digital technology and development of requisite skills is widely acknowledged, including in the Discussion Paper, young people from disadvantaged backgrounds are at significant risk of digital exclusion without direct and 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. This issue will further grow in relevance given that digital skills will be core to most jobs in 2030.

³³ Saunders, P., Bedford, M., Brown, Judith, Naidoo, Y., Adamson, E., *Material Deprivation and Social Exclusion Among Young Australians: A child-focussed approach*, November 2018.

³⁴ Young people on this program are living in financially disadvantaged families.

³⁵ 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.

³⁶ 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 34-35.

³⁷ ACARA, *National Assessment Program – ICT Literacy*, Years 6 &10, 2015.

6. Conclusion

If Queensland is to develop a suitably skilled workforce that meets the future economic and social needs of the state, it should consider the most effective way to train and prepare the current generations of children and young people, who will largely comprise its future pipeline of workers. This requires an enhanced level of long-term policy planning, program delivery and cross-government and cross-sectoral collaboration. It must involve leveraging the experience and expertise of stakeholders outside government, including those in the community and business sectors, who can play a valuable role in preparing young people for post-school pathways. It is crucial that students from a disadvantaged background are properly supported and given additional assistance to succeed, to ensure they have a positive future and are not forgotten in the rush to transition to a new changing economy and even more fluid labour market.