ABCN
Business Partnering with Education

PREPARING YOUNG PEOPLE FOR DIGITAL FUTURES

OVERVIEW

PREPARING YOUNG PEOPLE FOR DIGITAL FUTURES

This report sets out findings from research undertaken by ABCN in March-April 2021. The purpose of the research was to understand the preparedness for digital futures of young people from disadvantaged backgrounds, including the impact of the digital divide, with a lens on how this has changed through COVID.

The research highlights the substantial disparities in access to technology to support learning, pre-COVID. Encouragingly, there has been a significant digital upskilling of students and educators through the pandemic. Notably, both students and teachers have evidenced stronger interest in digital skills since the pandemic began. However, shortfalls in digital access and teaching skills remain key barriers to ongoing development of digital capabilities.

While the research has uncovered acute gaps in digital access, it also points to far-reaching consequences for digitally disadvantaged young people, that extend into their working lives.

The clear message to emerge from schools in this research is that there are three dimensions to supporting students' and teachers' participation in digital learning and work:

- ▸ devices/connectivity (primarily affecting students)

- ▸ digital proficiency (affecting both educators and students)

- ▸ digital context (understanding of the application of digital skills, affecting both educators and students)

As students and schools continue to adapt to an online environment, research on mitigating the impacts of digital disadvantage is timely. In this light, the growing digital aspirations of students and teachers, captured in ABCN's research, are encouraging. This motivation suggests an opportunity for partnership between schools, government and business sectors in preparing disadvantaged young people for the increasingly digitised worlds of education and work.

In this report we discuss how best to prepare young people for digital futures, particularly in light of shifts in educational delivery since COVID.

We consider the role of educators as the gateway to students' technological skills and outline a role for external partners to support schools in adapting to an increasingly digitised world.

The top three methods of support from business that schools identified were[1]:

- ▸ Building student engagement with opportunities in technology, from school to the future world of work

- ▸ Ensuring equitable digital access

- ▸ Supporting educators to build digital capabilities

INTRODUCTION

ONLY A QUARTER OF ABCN PARTNER SCHOOLS (27%) REPORTED STUDENTS HAD ADEQUATE ACCESS TO COMPUTERS WHEN THE PANDEMIC STRUCK[2]

The pandemic school closures in March 2020 were unprecedented and required a rapid, profound shift in educational delivery in schools across Australia.

The closures forced schools and students to operate remotely in circumstances for which few were prepared – or equipped. Remote schooling also exposed the wide gap between students' home-learning environments. Gaps in digital access in Australia are well-documented; as few as 33% of the most disadvantaged households have a fixed internet connection, compared to over 95% of advantaged households.[3]

The shift to online platforms amplified the effects of unequal access to digital technology for those from low socio-economic (SES) backgrounds.

Overnight, use of, and engagement with, technology became fundamental to continuity of learning. For young people from poorer families, lack of digital access often reflects a combination of barriers, including devices, connectivity, space to work, and parental support with technology.

Schools in ABCN's network are typically low-SES. In our experience, and that of our schools and partners, students completing school often lack the basic digital skills required by the workplace.

With the digital transformation of education, and a projected 90% of future jobs requiring digital literacy skills[4], understanding the barriers to building digital capabilities across all Australian young people, and how to overcome these, is crucial.

'Access to both devices and data for disadvantaged students removes one of the obstacles that hinders their capacity to raise themselves from their position of disadvantage.'
Educator

KEY FINDINGS

METHODOLOGY

ABCN's DIGITAL FUTURES SURVEY

In March and April 2021, ABCN carried out research with the purpose of understanding the effects of the digital divide pre- and since COVID for schools and students in our network.

The survey was conducted online and sent to principals and technology teachers at over 500 schools, covering each state and territory where ABCN has a footprint. The response rate was just under 10%.

The survey contained mainly quantitative responses, although there were opportunities for some open-ended responses. Quantitative data from this survey has been analysed using Excel. The qualitative data has been coded using a thematic analysis approach.

For reporting purposes those who *strongly disagreed* or *disagreed* have been aggregated and reported as *disagreed*. Likewise, those who *strongly agreed* or *agreed* have been aggregated and reported as *agreed*.

In this report, *pre-COVID* refers to the point in time preceding the March 2020 pandemic school closures. *Since COVID* refers to the point at which the research was carried out, in March and April 2021, at which time, schools had largely returned to face-to-face teaching.

BACKGROUND TO THE RESEARCH

ABCN first sought the views of principals at our partner schools in March 2020 to investigate how students were affected by the rapid digitisation of schooling catalysed by COVID, and how our partners could help. The valuable insight partner schools generated informed our response, co-ordinated with our member companies network, to address the digital divide in low-income schools.

This response included the 2021 Digital Futures survey (reported here) and the formation of the CEO Council Digital Sub-group. ABCN also expanded our Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) review submission project to include business perceptions of digital skills gaps for high school students. Selected findings from our consultation with member companies are included in this report where relevant.[3]

KEY FINDINGS

COVID EXPOSED DISPARITIES IN DIGITAL ACCESS, SKILLS AND ATTITUDES FOR DISADVANTAGED YOUNG PEOPLE

▸ Only a quarter (27%) of schools surveyed considered student access to devices adequate pre-COVID. This estimate has grown to 60% since COVID.

▸ Student access to data/internet for education was considered adequate by 31% of schools pre-COVID, rising to 58% since COVID.

▸ Schools are more positive overall about students' digital skills since COVID: 84% believe students recognise the value of digital skills, and 75% agree students are developing digital skills for the workplace.

▸ Schools saw significant growth in teachers' digital skills and attitudes since COVID; motivation to improve their technological capabilities has risen sharply, reported by 96% of those surveyed, up from 58%.

▸ Schools' understanding of digital skills required for the workplace still lags some way behind other measures, despite growth; 58% report having current knowledge in this area.

▸ Only half of schools surveyed (50%) express confidence in their ability to attract digital educators, a significant constraint to schools' and teachers' reported aspirations to lift their digital capabilities.

ABCN'S OWN EXPERIENCE

The shift to digital learning forced a rethink of how ABCN delivered its services, and what services it provided.

To participate in online learning, students needed both digital hardware and access to the internet - a barrier for many of ABCN's students. ABCN responded with Laptops4Learning, an emergency initiative that has provided 1976 devices to date from member companies, distributing these in schools participating in our programs.

ABCN also facilitated the provision of data through a partnership with Optus, to equip students in low-SES areas with internet and data access, allowing them to learn remotely.

Our transition to digital delivery of many of our programs supported young people to continue building digital capabilities – while highlighting the stark disparities in digital access and capabilities within schools.

BACKGROUND EVIDENCE 1

HOW DOES REMOTE LEARNING AFFECT DISADVANTAGED STUDENTS?

> 'Being in a low socio-economic area, highest priority is access to relevant technology (not phones) so students can access skills development for digital literacy.'
>
> **Educator**

> 'In the school I work at, students generally don't have access to technology at home for learning beyond perhaps a phone or one shared device for the whole family.'
>
> **Educator**

When schools closed in March 2020, it was broadly anticipated that the shift would be detrimental to learning.

Of particular concern was the impact on learners from disadvantaged backgrounds, following the rationale that these students are likely to be less well equipped for learning online and more heavily affected by multiple negative impacts of the outbreak. Notably, the economic impacts of the pandemic disproportionately affected the less well-off, deepening financial hardship for families facing insecure jobs and incomes.[5]

Research commissioned by the Australian Government concluded that COVID is likely to have significantly greater impact on low-income students, compared to the better off, due to gaps in basic resources needed to support learning.[6]

A rapid evidence review for the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) in the UK estimated that the school closures could reverse a decade's progress made in closing the attainment gap between disadvantaged children and their peers.[7]

Effective remote learning requires broad digital inclusion. Yet an estimated 31% of low-income families have no more than one device per household.[8] Those with only mobile access to the internet, or in households in the bottom quintile, have the lowest digital inclusion rates in Australia.[9]

COVID highlighted digital disparities among young people; for example, NSW Education estimated 10% of students across the state lacked access to data and devices to participate in online learning.[10] Among the schools in ABCN's network, this shortage affected up to 50% of students.

BACKGROUND EVIDENCE 2

HOW DOES DIGITAL DISADVANTAGE AFFECT STUDENTS?

'Young people living in low-income households have...more limited access to support and resources that help form a foundation for learning.'

CIRES/Mitchell Institute

'Access - great inequity due to financial situations. Students know it is important to have digital skills, but they are still not really aware of what these skills are.'

Educator

Continuity of learning during school closures is highly reliant on the technological proficiency of both students and families. Yet not all parents possess the resources, knowledge or digital skills needed to support their children with the challenges of remote learning.

Research by The Mitchell Institute estimates the parental support divide is a significant additional factor in the disruption to learning faced by poorer students.[11] Young people from the lowest-SES backgrounds already face significantly worse educational outcomes than their better-off peers; 33.2% leave school without attaining a Year 12 or equivalent qualification, compared with 8.2% of the most advantaged.[12]

Evidence on the longer-term impacts of COVID school closures on students is only emerging. Existing evidence, however, points to digital disadvantage arising not only from lack of access to hardware and connectivity, but from low confidence and engagement.

Data from PISA 2018 showed a correlation between students from low-income families and low levels of interest and ability in, and capacity for, working independently with technology.

With an estimated 90% of future jobs requiring digital literacy skills[13], young people who are left behind the digital transformation are at significant risk of exclusion when it comes to long-term employment prospects.

FINDINGS: STUDENTS 1
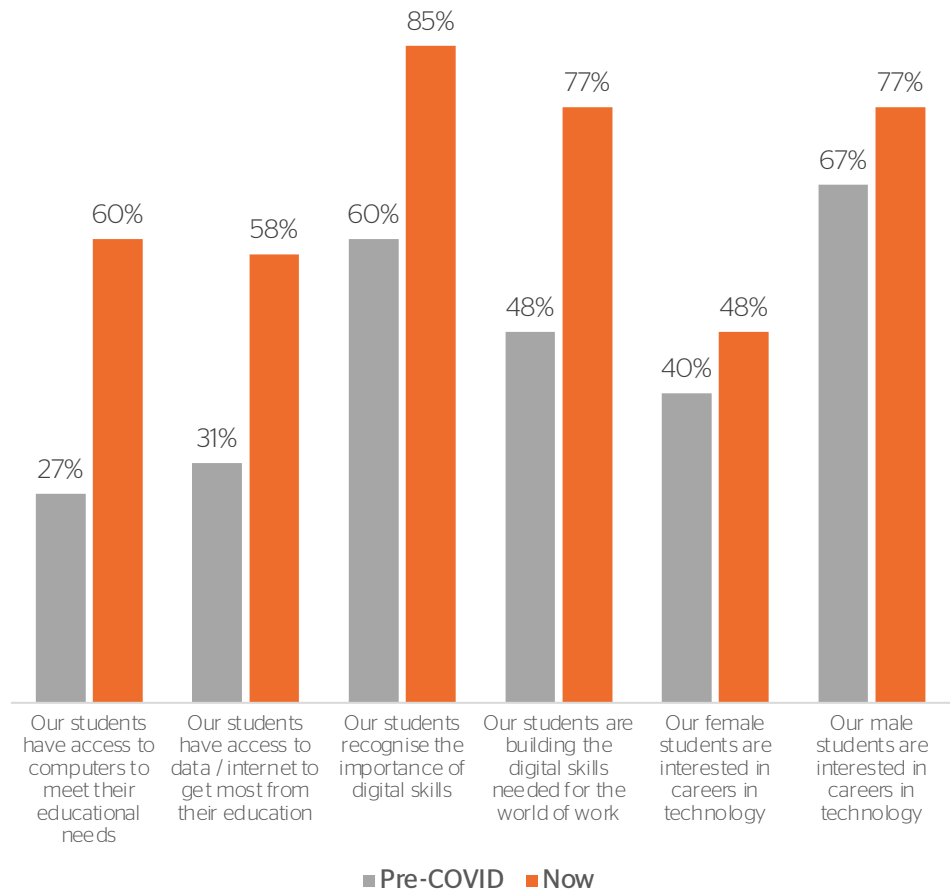
HOW HAVE DIGITAL CAPABILITIES CHANGED SINCE COVID?

ABCN'S research indicates there has been a significant shift in access to, and proficiency in, technology among students since the start of the pandemic. Notably, the perceived value of digital skills now outstrips all other measures surveyed.

However, significant shortfalls in digital access remain a key barrier to developing student capabilities further. Gaps remain too in understanding how digital skills are applied in the world of work and careers, and in supporting teachers to build students' technology proficiency (see **Findings: Teachers**).

‣ While schools reported the greatest growth in levels of student access to devices to meet their educational needs, two-fifths were not confident students have sufficient device access.

‣ Student access to data/internet for remote learning is estimated to have increased nearly two-fold, though two in five schools do not consider students are adequately equipped

‣ Significant growth was reported in how students value digital skills – the highest ranked measure overall.

‣ Schools were markedly more confident about students' digital skills: over three-quarters reported students were developing digital skills for the workplace.

‣ Students' interest in technology careers showed only modest growth, with a sizeable - and sustained - gulf between male and female students.

% of schools who agreed / strongly agreed with statements

Legend: ■ Pre-COVID ■ Now

Statement	Pre-COVID	Now
Our students have access to computers to meet their educational needs	27%	60%
Our students have access to data / internet to get most from their education	31%	58%
Our students recognise the importance of digital skills	60%	85%
Our students are building the digital skills needed for the world of work	48%	77%
Our female students are interested in careers in technology	40%	48%
Our male students are interested in careers in technology	67%	77%

FINDINGS: STUDENTS 2

WHAT ARE THE IMPLICATIONS FOR STUDENTS' DIGITAL FUTURES?

'I believe that unless the basics are covered then there is no point in going any further. Technology teaching is hampered by the fact that the students do not have access at home to computers and therefore struggle with even the basic skills.'

Educator

'The shift in perspective for students has been huge. This is an opportunity to really highlight the need for digital skills in the future.'

Educator

Students from low-SES schools face particular barriers in building digital skills and competencies. These start with, but are not limited to, access to technology at home and school.

The survey showed that only 48% of schools considered students were building digital skills relevant to employment pre-COVID. In ABCN's experience, and that of our schools and partners, students completing school often lack the digital skills required for successful workplace entry in general roles.

These gaps persist despite the competencies currently outlined in the current ICT Curriculum. ABCN's consultations with partners also identified gaps in students' understanding of technology norms, basic software operation, data, and in attitudes to technology.[14]

While the pandemic school closures have exposed stark disparities in students' resources, they have also contributed to a marked growth in digital proficiency and dispositions. The upswing in students' digital skills, evident from the survey, and the value students attach to these capabilities, reflect this positive shift.

Yet despite modest growth in aspirations to technology careers overall, the sustained gulf between females and males suggests that technology use alone does not translate into aspiration. Research into the drivers for male and female occupational choices illuminates the divergence here; altruism is cited as a career motivation by a significant proportion of girls.[15] Career-related education that emphasises, and exposes students to, the breadth of technology careers that 'fit' this motivation could meaningfully address the imbalance.
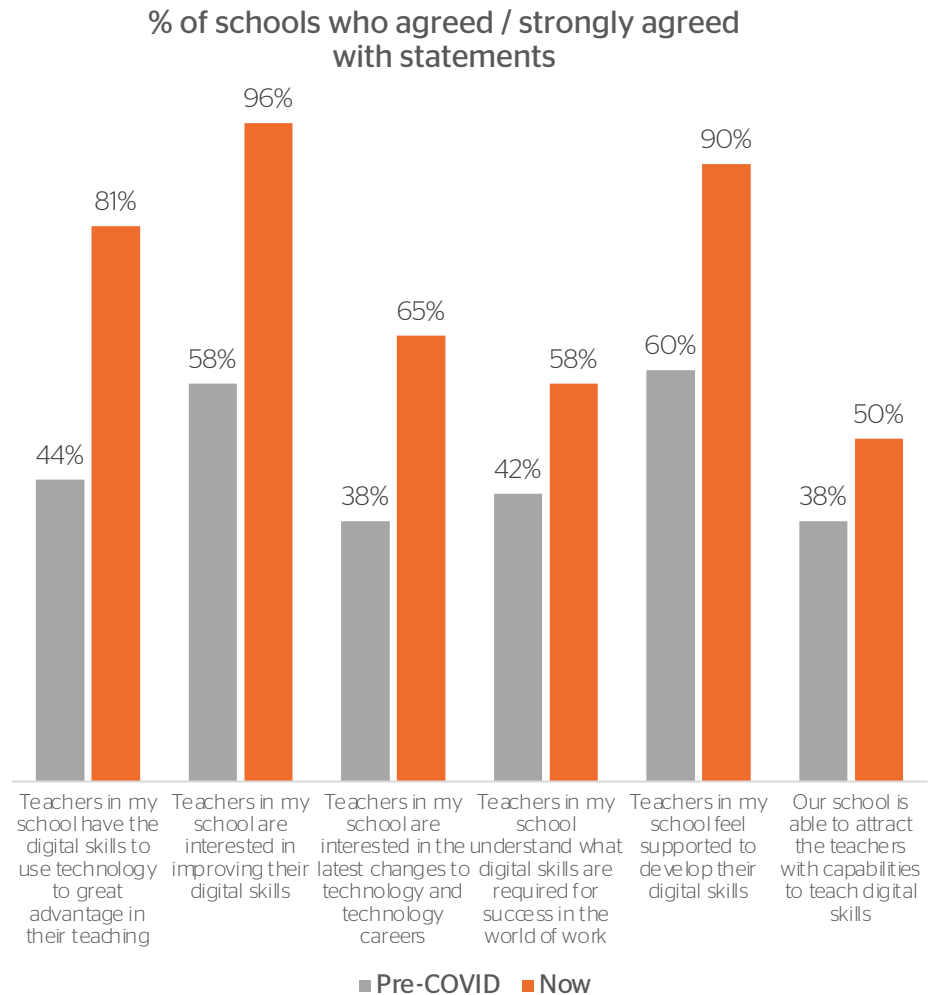
FINDINGS: TEACHERS 1

HOW HAVE DIGITAL CAPABILITIES CHANGED SINCE COVID?

Schools reported a substantial digital upskilling among teachers through the 2020 wave of the pandemic, with considerable shifts in teachers' digital proficiency and motivation to extend their skills further.

However, schools' digital capacity is limited by their ability to attract appropriately skilled staff. Significantly, teachers' motivation is often unmatched by an equivalent understanding of technology requirements for the workplace, which is likely to constrain students' development of digital capabilities.

‣ Schools reported the greatest growth in teachers' ability to implement technology skills in the classroom; over 80% of those surveyed gave a positive rating of teachers' digital proficiency.

‣ Teacher motivation to improve digital skills - the highest ranked measure – was estimated to be almost universal, at 96% (up from 58%), perhaps reflecting their nascent experience of delivering online classes.

‣ Estimates of teachers' interest in, and understanding of, technology for the workplace, despite growth, still lag some way behind most measures. This may reflect the relatively recent adoption of digital ways of working for many teachers.

‣ Only half of schools surveyed were confident of being able to attract digital educators; a significant constraint to schools' ability to lift their digital capabilities.

% of schools who agreed / strongly agreed with statements

Bar chart comparing Pre-COVID and Now:

Statement	Pre-COVID	Now
Teachers in my school have the digital skills to use technology to great advantage in their teaching	44%	81%
Teachers in my school are interested in improving their digital skills	58%	96%
Teachers in my school are interested in the latest changes to technology and technology careers	38%	65%
Teachers in my school understand what digital skills are required for success in the world of work	42%	58%
Teachers in my school feel supported to develop their digital skills	60%	90%
Our school is able to attract the teachers with capabilities to teach digital skills	38%	50%

■ Pre-COVID ■ Now

FINDINGS: TEACHERS 2

WHAT ARE THE IMPLICATIONS FOR TEACHERS AS DIGITAL GATEKEEPERS?

'To teach these skills our staff first have to have an understanding and willingness to become tech-savvy.'

Educator

'COVID has meant that a lot of staff came to the realisation that at the school I work at, we don't teach enough basic ICT knowledge.'

Educator

'I think access to tech is our greatest issue. From there, by upskilling staff, they can continue to embed technology in their teaching programs.'

Educator

The shift to online schooling in March 2020 confronted teachers with a wide-ranging and urgent need for digital upskilling to effect the transition. Teachers met the substantial extra demands by working longer hours, often collaborating to master the demands of new digital platforms and practices. Our research and that of others reflects this effort.[16] Schools report, however, that significant barriers inhibit their continued digital development.

Successful integration of technology into education assumes not only access to devices and connectivity, but a corresponding level of digital capability that schools often struggle to build, despite strong motivation. Difficulties in attracting technology educators are still widespread - and may be more acutely felt in hard-to-staff schools.

How schools are to match their digital aspirations with the resources to achieve them is an ongoing challenge.

Simultaneously, the rapid adjustment to new modes of learning, and the increased visibility of teachers at work during periods of remote learning, have raised recognition of the skills and expertise of the profession.[17] The shift has arguably consolidated teachers' role as both technology users *and* educators.

If teachers are at the gateway to students' technology capabilities for future study and work, their engagement with digital technologies is foundational. What has become self-evident through this period of flux is the compelling need to support educators to make the most effective use of technology in their classrooms, virtual or face-to-face, through continuous upskilling.
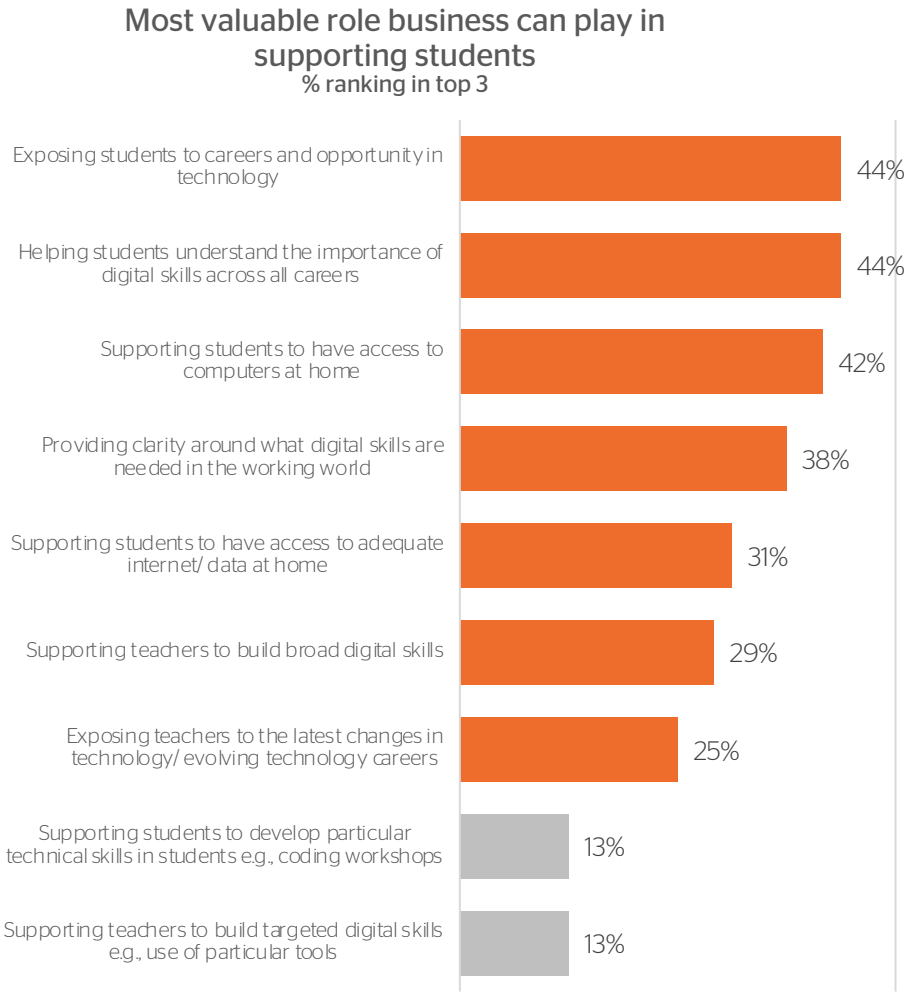
FINDINGS: BUSINESS COMMUNITY 1

WHAT SUPPORT DO SCHOOLS VALUE MOST?

Schools were asked to rank their top three ways in which the business community can best support young people to gain digital access and skills for future work pathways.

The most valued approaches centred on promoting technology or workplace exposure and engagement rather than the acquisition of specific digital skills.

▸ Nearly half of schools (44%) saw a significant role for business in exposing students to career opportunities in technology and embedding students' understanding of digital skills across a range of career pathways.

▸ Providing access to devices for remote learning is considered a priority by 42%, reflecting both the shortfall for many students and the role that ABCN businesses have played to bridge this.

▸ Clarifying workplace requirements for digital skills is a key area where business can support students in developing work-readiness.

Most valuable role business can play in supporting students
% ranking in top 3

Role	%
Exposing students to careers and opportunity in technology	44%
Helping students understand the importance of digital skills across all careers	44%
Supporting students to have access to computers at home	42%
Providing clarity around what digital skills are needed in the working world	38%
Supporting students to have access to adequate internet/data at home	31%
Supporting teachers to build broad digital skills	29%
Exposing teachers to the latest changes in technology/evolving technology careers	25%
Supporting students to develop particular technical skills in students e.g., coding workshops	13%
Supporting teachers to build targeted digital skills e.g., use of particular tools	13%

FINDINGS: BUSINESS COMMUNITY 2

WHAT ARE THE IMPLICATIONS FOR SUPPORTING SCHOOLS?

'Students need to know what is current and where this technology may be by the time they leave school. Teachers also need to be across changes.'

Educator

'Making it clear to everyone what digital skills are valued in the workplace puts both students and teachers in a position of strength when it comes to improving digital literacy.'

Educator

'Students are really engaged when they see skills in action – we can discuss what is important in their working futures, but seeing it in action is what they remember.'

Educator

The school responses presented here highlight a pivotal role for community partners, including business, in building the technology pathway between schools, students and the world of work.

Schools see real value in partnering with business, through experiential learning opportunities, to make visible to students what may seem of little relevance to them, translating technological capabilities into real-world settings.

Confidence among schools is relatively modest when it comes to the digital capabilities students require for successful transitions to work. There is an opportunity for business to build a sustained dialogue with educators about the value of digital capabilities – including both literacy and mindset – and how they are applied in the world of work. Programs that complement the school curriculum, embedding digital literacy, mindset, work-readiness skills, and providing opportunities for engagement with employers can meet schools at their point of need.

Accelerating demand for digital capabilities in the workplace underscores the need for technology capabilities to be continuously addressed within education. Schools tell us that business has a unique role to fulfil here, fostering students' understanding of digital capabilities in a workplace context, and laying the foundations for adulthood in an increasingly skills-based economy. ABCN's member companies echo this viewpoint, stressing the importance of embedding the working world context into the digital curriculum.

Schools continue to look to the business community for support in mitigating the gap faced by disadvantaged students in access to devices and connectivity, without which they will struggle to progress in capability. However, addressing data and devices needs to be systematic and sustainable, which suggests a policy response needs to be at the heart of addressing this.

'Students understanding the importance of digital skills across careers is vital if they are to function in the world of work. Teachers also need to be kept abreast of the changes in technology.'
Educator

CONCLUSIONS

CONCLUSIONS 1

PREPARING YOUNG PEOPLE FOR DIGITAL FUTURES: WHERE TO FROM HERE?

'Schools need to partner with industry to be sure we are preparing students for the workforce and then we need the best resources we can access to achieve this target.'

Educator

'Students understanding the importance of digital skills across careers is vital if they are to function in the world of work. Teachers need to be kept abreast of the continual changes in technology.

Educator

The challenges and experiences of online schooling have catalysed changes in digital skills, attitudes and aspirations for both students and educators.

For students, remote learning has contributed to a marked growth in digital capability, and the value attached to technological know-how. Yet a residual lack of access to both devices and connectivity limits how well young people from disadvantaged backgrounds are equipped for future learning and work. Access to data and devices must be a priority for the government and education systems in preparing young people for the future.

For teachers, the rapid digitisation of classrooms has been accompanied by an appetite for further upskilling. This digital transformation, together with accelerating demand for technology capabilities in the workplace, increasingly places teachers at the gateway to students' technological capabilities. Key to enabling this role is ongoing professional development for teachers to meet their digital aspirations, and again, this needs to be a priority for policy, as well as those in the sector who support education and educators.

CONCLUSIONS 2

PREPARING YOUNG PEOPLE FOR DIGITAL FUTURES: WHERE TO FROM HERE?

ABCN's research has identified significant ways in which external partners can support schools to develop digital capabilities.

Dialogue between education and industry about the career opportunities in technology, and the importance and breadth of use of digital capabilities, is an essential part of any strategy to prepare young people for digital futures. This is acutely important for those from low SES backgrounds and those without STEM professionals in their family networks.

In practical terms, industry is ideally placed to help schools build digital skills, mindsets, aspirations and motivation. This includes addressing persistent gaps in understanding of technology's application in the workplace.

Supporting STEM programs, in particular, and widening students' awareness of related career options can effectively target the enduring gender imbalance in students' work aspirations, as well as the continuing low proportions of disadvantaged young people pursuing these high-potential careers.

Industry-education partnerships, as outlined here, can play a central role in building digital foundations for disadvantaged young people, enabling them to navigate and thrive in a digital world.

This report has highlighted key challenges that face disadvantaged young people in adapting to an increasingly digitised world. Our findings point to three key approaches to supporting them:

▸ Business is uniquely positioned to build young people's understanding of digital capabilities in a workplace context, and to provide opportunities that support this aim.

▸ Provision of devices and data in a sustained way must be a priority for the government and education systems to ensure all young people are equipped to learn effectively.

▸ Meeting educators at their point of need for technology upskilling is essential for policy, as well as those in the sector who support education and educators.

Research reported in this paper also formed part of ABCN's advocacy on changes to the national digital curriculum. We expanded our Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) review submission project to include business perceptions of digital skills gaps for high school students. In July 2021 ABCN made a submission to ACARA's 2021 Australian Curriculum Review Consultation, relating to the Digital Literacy Learning Area and Digital Literacy General Capability.

THE DIGITAL CURRICULUM

## ABCN'S CONTRIBUTION TO ACARA'S CURRICULUM REVIEW

The aim of the submission was to ensure the curriculum builds the capabilities young people need to transition to work, and to ensure the curriculum supports disadvantaged young people who face multiple barriers in early career entry.

Our consultation process included the Digital Futures survey reported here (48 schools), eight consultation sessions with our member companies (66 volunteer mentors from 18 companies), and, separately, consultation sessions with our Principals Reference Council.

Our submission itemised eight recommendations, including:

1. Extending compulsory Digital Technologies education until the end of Year 10

2. Greater specificity in how the Digital Technologies are to be developed as a general capability

3. Ensuring the Digital Technologies are expressed in real-world terms that are meaningful to students, educators, and professionals

4. Embedding the working world context into the digital curriculum

In addition to our response to the outlined curriculum, our consultation identified persistent gaps in how some digital capabilities are addressed and understood. These capabilities included technology norms at work, competence with software, data analysis, management and presentation, and attitudes to technology.
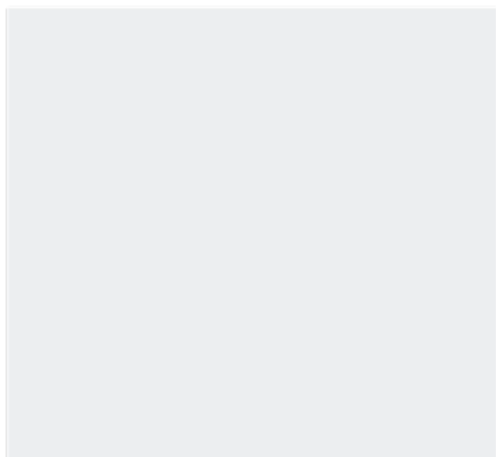
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ABOUT ABCN

GROW ▶ CONNECT ▶ INSPIRE

The Australian Business and Community Network (ABCN) is a purpose-led, not-for-profit organisation that brings businesses and schools together to address educational disadvantage.

Our vision is for all young Australians to reach their potential in the future world of work, regardless of socio-economic background.

We connect volunteers from our member companies with students from low socio-economic status (SES) backgrounds to provide fun, workplace-based or online mentoring programs that develop students' confidence, skills and aspirations vital for thriving in the workplace of the future.

Established in 2005, ABCN is a network of 43 company partners from corporate Australia and more than 200 partner schools that, together, deliver mentoring programs to students. More than 200,000 students and 50,000 corporate volunteers have participated in our mentoring and other initiatives since inception. Of these, 50,000 students were mentored directly by almost 40,000 volunteer mentors.

The ABCN Foundation was established in 2013 to award mentoring and financial scholarships to high-potential students whose disadvantage impacts their ability to complete school and pursue tertiary pathways. Almost 200 students have benefited from this initiative since inception.

[1] *Educational opportunity in Australia 2020: Who succeeds and who misses out* (Lamb et al. 2020)
[2] Program for International School Assessment (2016, 2019)
[3] McKinsey & Company, in partnership with Oxford Economics (2020)

The schools and students we work with

The schools we work with are located in low SES communities. They typically sit significantly below the national Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage (ICSEA) average of 1000 and have high levels of educational disadvantage.

Students from these schools experience a range of difficulties. Many have parents who have not completed their own schooling and/or gained tertiary qualifications and have little or no access to professional role models. They may also have overcome language and cultural barriers or suffered trauma and loss as newly arrived immigrants or refugees. They may have significant carer responsibilities and/or need to contribute to family finances due to limited household income. They may be experiencing significant poverty, overcrowding in the home, limited access to educational resources or even homelessness in the most extreme cases.

The challenge

Research consistently shows the impact of social background as a key predictor of educational and future success. In Australia, the gap between advantaged and disadvantaged schools is unusually wide, existing across all domains and skills both at school and into adulthood.[1]

By the age of 15, students from low SES areas in Australia are on average three years behind their counterparts from more advantaged areas in mathematics and science.[2] Adding to this is the economic and social fallout of COVID-19, which has disproportionately impacted disadvantaged communities. Research indicates that it

will take women, minorities, and low-income workers up to two years longer than their peers to recover from the effects of the crisis.[3]

⚑ 32% do not complete school

Almost one third of students from the lowest SES backgrounds do not complete Year 12 or its equivalent by age 19, compared with less than 10% from the highest SES backgrounds.[1]

⚑ Less likely to be employed

Only 51% of 24-year-olds from the lowest SES backgrounds are fully engaged in employment, education or training, compared with 82% of their most advantaged counterparts.[1]

'Few people realise how little control these kids have on how their life pans out. It is cyclical. ABCN helps us show these students that there is another way.'

Teacher, Western Australia, 2020

CONTACT US

Australian Business and Community Network
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