



CENTRE
for **SOCIAL**
IMPACT



ABCN

Business Partnering with Education

BUILDING FUTURE PATHWAYS: HOW ABCN MENTORING PROGRAMS BOOST STUDENT OUTCOMES

**AN EVALUATION OF THE MEDIUM-TO LONG-TERM
IMPACT OF ABCN MENTORING PROGRAMS**

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY 1

ABCN STUDENTS SHOWED SUBSTANTIAL AND SUSTAINED BENEFITS ACROSS A RANGE OF SKILLS AND CAPABILITIES.

One in three Australian students from low-socio-economic status* backgrounds does not complete Year 12.¹ They are also twice as likely to be unemployed at age 24 compared to their better-off counterparts.² Since 2005, ABCN has connected low-SES schools with business, delivering innovative mentoring programs to develop students' skills and mindsets, aspirations and networks, reaching over 56,000 young people to date.

This report explores the medium- to long-term impact of ABCN's work.

KEY FINDINGS

The findings presented here provide compelling evidence to support the medium to long-term impact of ABCN's programs. Young people who shared their views through a survey (n=329) and interviews reported significant, sustained improvements in aspirations, post-school planning,

attitudes towards the future, and connection to the world of work, up to three years after participating in ABCN programs.

Benefits were evident across three key domains — Pathways post-school, Enterprise skills and Life skills:

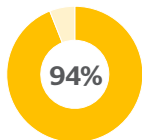
- **PATHWAYS POST-SCHOOL:** Young people enhanced their understanding of future opportunities for study, careers and flexible routes into them, facilitating their transitions to the post-school world. 93% are aiming for a good job, and 83% agreed that they knew how their strengths and interests connect to the world of work
- **ENTERPRISE SKILLS:** These transferable skills — including interpersonal skills, interview technique and teamworking — may act as 'gateway' skills, determining students' success in forging their early careers. Students who participated in ABCN programs rated

themselves proficient across a range of work-readiness skills; over 90% were confident in their teamworking skills and knowledge of workplace behaviour

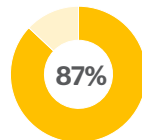
- **LIFE SKILLS:** Non-cognitive personal qualities — including confidence, goal-setting, motivation, resilience and self-awareness — may be powerful predictors of young people's attainment in education and work. Over 80% agreed that ABCN helped them feel more confident about their career goals, and 82% use goal-setting techniques.

These key impact areas closely match the core skillsets and personal capabilities employers consider essential for young people if they are to make successful transitions into a fast-transforming workplace.

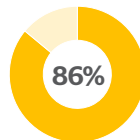
Intend to complete Year 12



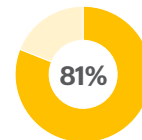
Plan to go to university



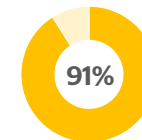
Have career aspirations



Confident in pursuing career aspirations



It's ok to be flexible



* Low-SES refers to those students in the lowest quintile.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY 2

Key factors that influenced students' lasting outcomes were:

- **PARTICIPATING IN MULTIPLE PROGRAMS:** Students were significantly more confident in their future pathways after two or more programs, and more resilient to self-doubt
- **FORMING A STRONG CONNECTION WITH MENTORS:** The direct, lived experience offered by mentors underpins the longevity of students' learning.

In the context of rapid workplace transformation driven by digitisation, globalisation and labour insecurity, ABCN's broader focus on **ENTERPRISE** and **LIFE SKILLS** rather than employability skills alone positions students to better cope with a challenging landscape. The impacts of mentoring reported here are frequently overlapping and co-dependent, reflecting the reality of how skills are combined and utilised in the world of work.

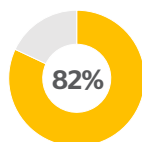
As members of a cohort of young people facing the uncertainties of the post-school world in a pandemic era, ABCN students showed a buoyant self-belief. Over 90% of ABCN students were confident in reaching their post-school study or work goals; 56% highly confident, compared with 46% of young people nationally³. 81% expressed confidence in reaching their longer-term career aspirations. Confidence in work-readiness was lower, highlighting the need for continuous development of skills to support young people's transition into early careers.

Supporting young people through structured business mentoring at key points in the formation of their post-school plans demonstrably boosts their confidence, their preparedness for the future, and exposes them to a broader range of careers than they otherwise would consider.

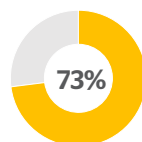
These findings confirm the real and lasting benefits of ABCN's mentoring programs. Further, they point to the pivotal role for the business sector in bridging the persistent gap in opportunities and outcomes experienced by some young Australians, through:

- Business engaging with schools to strengthen engagement, aspiration and transferable skills
- ABCN continuing to develop its mentoring programs to offer young people from low socio-economic backgrounds:
 - A grounded, broader understanding of the world of work, particularly STEM opportunities
 - Clarity about how their developing skills have real-world applicability and value
 - A toolset of capabilities and attitudes necessary for negotiating a rapidly transforming workforce.

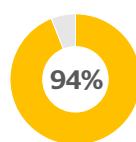
Set goals and work towards them



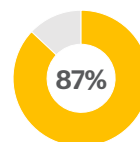
Know how to pursue career options



Confident in attaining post-school goals



Understand the world of work





BACKGROUND

TRANSITIONING TO THE POST-SCHOOL WORLD

Young people require a wide range of skills to successfully navigate their post-school transition. This includes capacity, abilities, knowledge, and support (financial, emotional and social) to help them make informed, intentional choices about the options available to them. The education-to-work transition is acknowledged to be an increasingly complex, prolonged and fractured one.

Research consistently shows the impact of social background as a key predictor of educational and future success. In Australia, the gap between students from low- and high-SES backgrounds is wide and persistent, existing across attainment and skills both at school and into adulthood.⁴ 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 maths and science.⁵

Research has shown that well implemented youth mentoring programs can improve young people's educational and employment outcomes.⁶ They are a particularly important resource for low-SES students who are the most likely to benefit.

However, limited research has explored the longer-term benefits of youth mentoring programs for these young people.

BUSINESS MENTORING

The relationships between schools and businesses are becoming an increasingly important means of improving educational outcomes, particularly for young people from low-SES backgrounds.

Exposure to business has been shown to have multiple impacts on young people including:

- Improved attendance, motivation, and achievement in education
- A positive effect on aspirations, careers awareness and attitudes to studying
- The development of work-ready and social skills
- Improved confidence, maturity, and sense of personal agency.

In Australia, young people from low-SES communities are often excluded from educational opportunities. Around one third of Australian students from the lowest SES backgrounds do not complete Year 12⁷ and fewer than half enter university by age 22.⁸ They are also twice as likely to be unemployed at age 24 compared to those from higher SES backgrounds.⁹ Young people who do not enter employment, education or training post-school are at significant risk of experiencing long-term negative economic, social, health and wellbeing outcomes. Mentoring provides a proven means to mitigate the entrenched inequalities in opportunities and outcomes for our vulnerable youth.

ABOUT ABCN

ABCN PARTNER SCHOOLS ARE FROM THE LEAST ADVANTAGED SCHOOLS

ABCN offers a range of programs connecting corporate volunteers with students through business mentoring. Building on evidence and over 15 years of practice experience, the design and delivery of programs are aligned with best practice and take place in the workplace, online, or a blend of the two.

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 1,000 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.

The school's leadership is involved with the delivery of the programs to ensure they complement the curriculum and other activities. ABCN offers a depth of experience through targeted interventions, complementary to broader approaches, such as career workshops and careers days. ABCN also offers financial scholarships and mentoring during Years 11, 12 and post-school, to exceptional students with a background of disadvantage.

ABCN'S PROGRAMS AIM TO:

- Build critical thinking skills, communication skills, confidence and self-esteem which are essential in the contemporary job market
- Increase employability by enhancing young people's understanding of the job market, opening up opportunities for them and introducing them to careers which they may otherwise have no exposure to
- Develop leadership skills.

ABCN'S PROGRAMS

Innovate: Years 7-8 Encourages uptake of STEM subjects

GOALS Year 9 Develop self-management skills

Future Thinkers Years 9-10 Builds innovative problem-solving skills

My Career Rules Years 8-12 Online careers panel. Q&A

Empower Years 9-12 Builds confidence, skills & mindsets for work

Interview2Impress Years 10-11 Interactive interview skills workshop

Focus/Focus2 Years 10-11 Leadership skills for female students

Aspirations Years 10-11 Builds awareness of post-school pathways

Accelerate Years 11-13 Mentoring & financial scholarship over three years

ABCN'S THEORY OF CHANGE

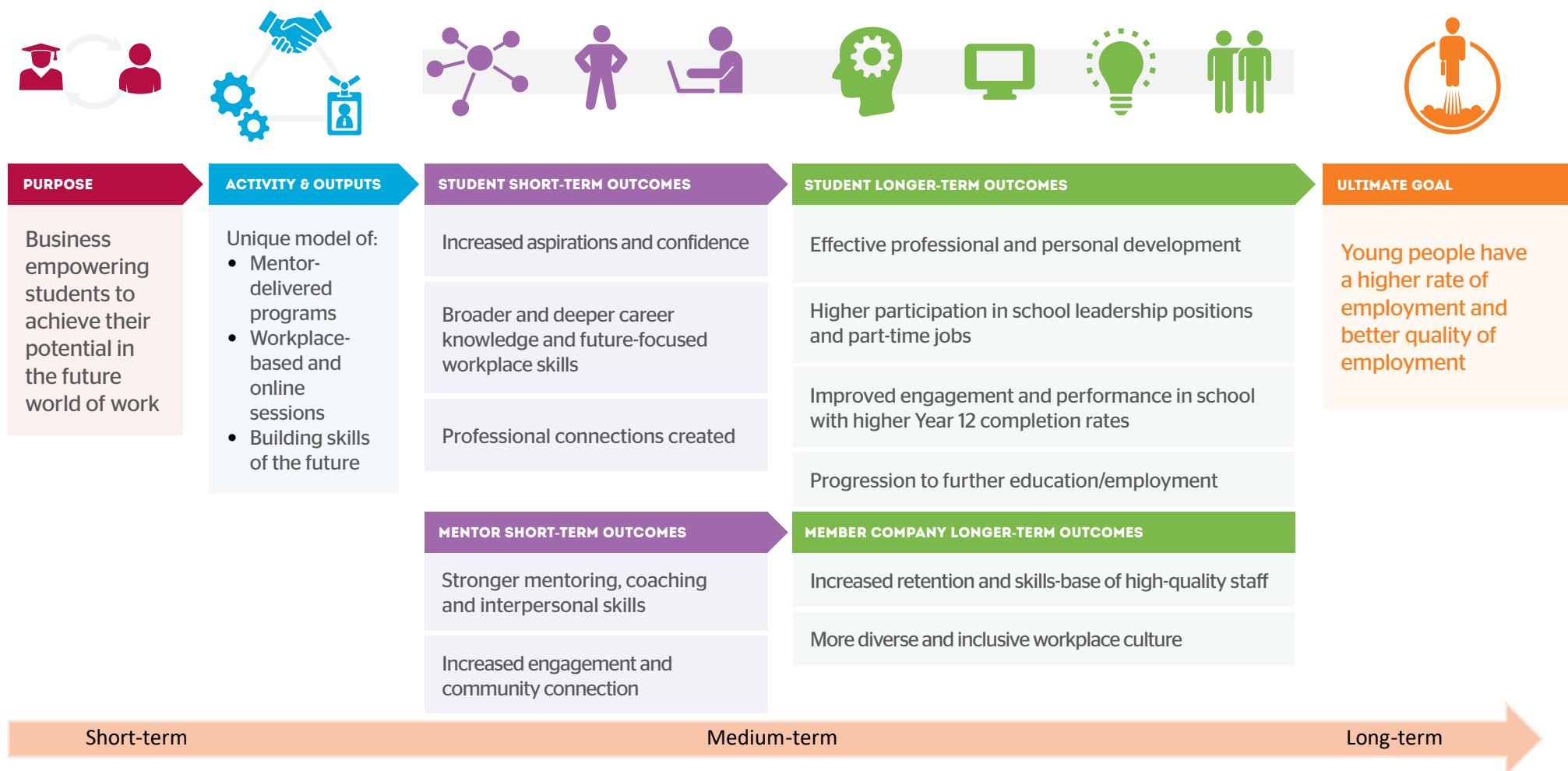
A theory of change is an explicit theory or model of how a program or policy causes the intended or observed outcomes. It is comprised of an intervention model (what activities are implemented to achieve change) and a change model (what is expected to change due to these activities).

ABCN's horizon of change is expected to be long and it is anticipated that many of the outcomes will be ongoing or occur months or even years after students have participated in our programs.

THE START OF A CAREER JOURNEY

By participating in ABCN programs, students gain confidence in, and understanding of the world of professional work, and know how to enter it.

They build career aspirations and are confident to pursue them. Students make progress towards, and are ready for, their careers.



METHODOLOGY

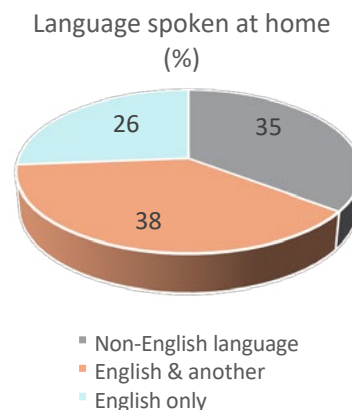
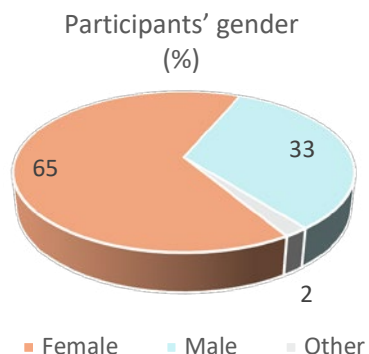
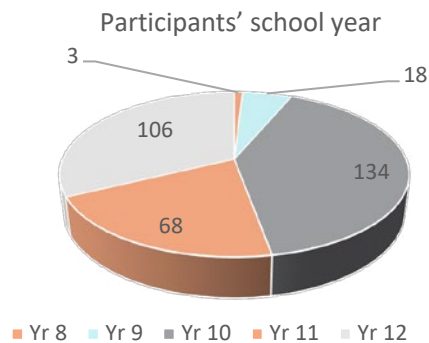
DATA COLLECTION

In October–December 2021, ABCN carried out research with the Centre for Social Impact (CSI) to explore the outcomes for students who had participated in ABCN programs between 2018–2021. Students included in the research ranged from Year 8 to Year 12.

ABCN conducted an online survey that was sent to students who had participated in one or more of ABCN's programs. The survey contained mainly quantitative responses, although there were opportunities for some open-ended responses. 329 students participated in the survey. For

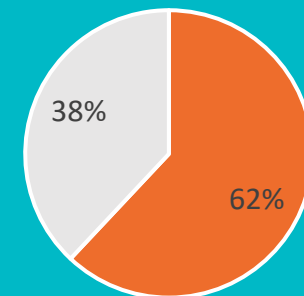
reporting purposes those who strongly agreed/agreed have been aggregated and reported as agreed, and those who strongly disagreed/disagreed have been reported here as disagreed.

A smaller sample of nine students from two schools also took part in qualitative interviews. Semi-structured interviews were conducted online by CSI in December 2021, and lasted between 20–45 minutes. Questions explored the experience and impact of ABCN programs. Students were young people in Years 11–12 who had engaged with at least one ABCN program in the past. The qualitative data has been coded using a thematic analysis approach.



ENGAGING WITH FOUR OR MORE EMPLOYER-LED EPISODES* AT SCHOOL REDUCES THE LIKELIHOOD OF UNEMPLOYMENT IN EARLY ADULthood.¹⁰

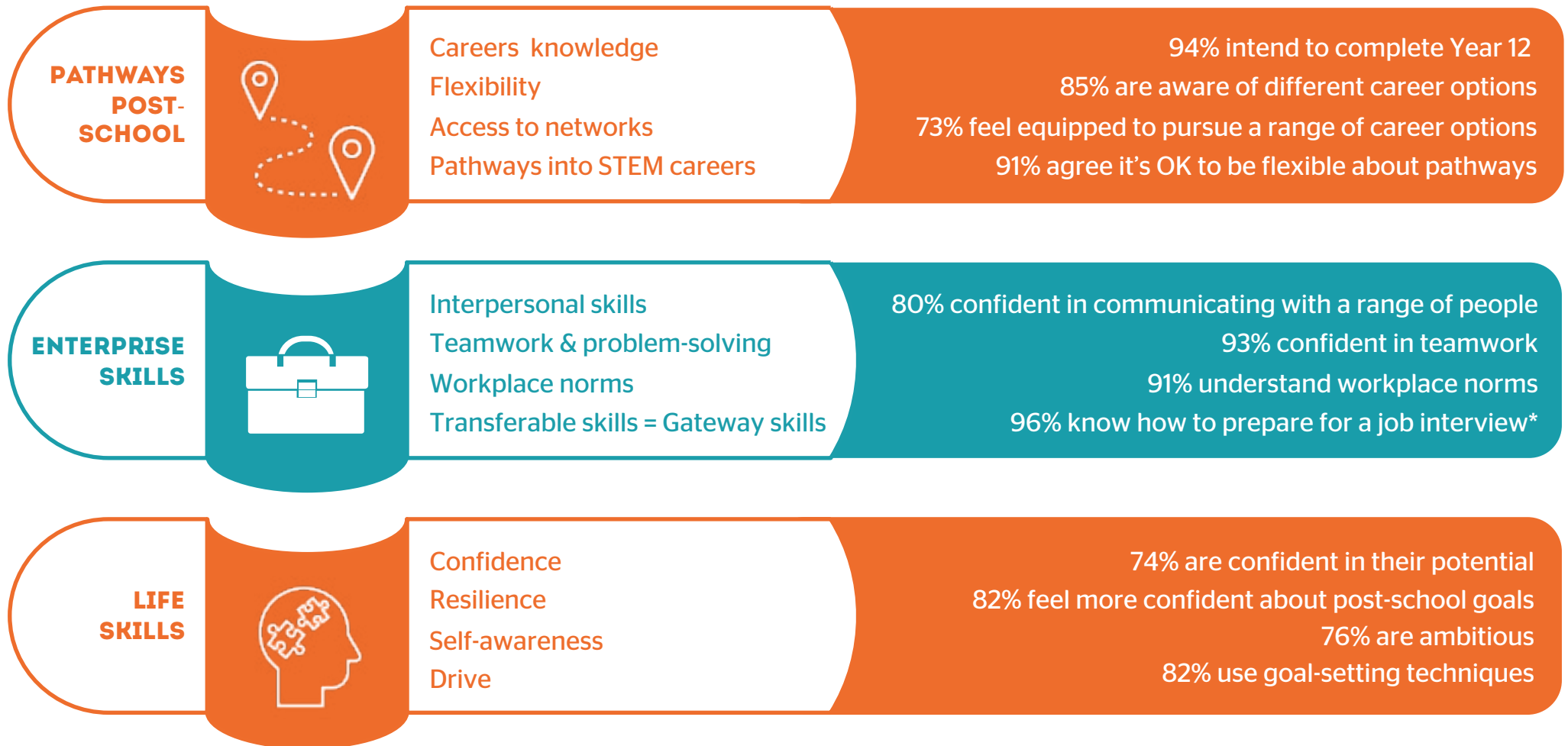
How many ABCN programs did students do?




Single Multiple

* Episodes defined as one-time events, e.g. a careers talk or workplace visit

THREE DOMAINS OF IMPACT: HOW STUDENTS BENEFIT LONG-TERM



Across all impact domains, students established a strong connection with mentors, as trusted sources of advice and information, lived experience and modelling of skills.



'I know how to change and access different opportunities — I no longer look for the 'right' path, I look for the path that's right for me by achieving a career that I enjoy.'

Year 12 student

IMPACT 1:
PATHWAYS POST-SCHOOL

IMPACT 1: PATHWAYS POST-SCHOOL

EQUIPPING STUDENTS TO NAVIGATE THE UNCERTAINTIES OF THE POST-SCHOOL WORLD

Young people in Australia face increasing challenges in transitioning from school to early careers. An insecure job-market, fewer entry-level jobs¹¹ and longer, fractured transitions into full-time work¹² contribute to:

- an unemployment rate of 11% among young people
- an underemployment rate of 16% among young people.¹³

Pathways from age 15 to 24 vary considerably: no single pathway from Year 10 to employment is taken by more than 5% of students¹⁴, underlining the value of current, credible careers education at key decision-making stages in school.¹⁰ to employment is taken by more than 5% of students¹⁴, underlining the value of current, credible careers education at key decision-making stages in school.

Students who participated in ABCN programs showed improved understanding and attitudes relating to their future study and work pathways. Among ABCN participants, 94% intended to complete Year 12, and 85% were aware of different career options, an enduring impact of participation.*

Broadened and deepened knowledge of the post-school world of jobs, careers, and pathways into them, emerged as a significant benefit of participating in ABCN programs. Exposure to both unfamiliar careers and the people in them provided inspiration for many students:

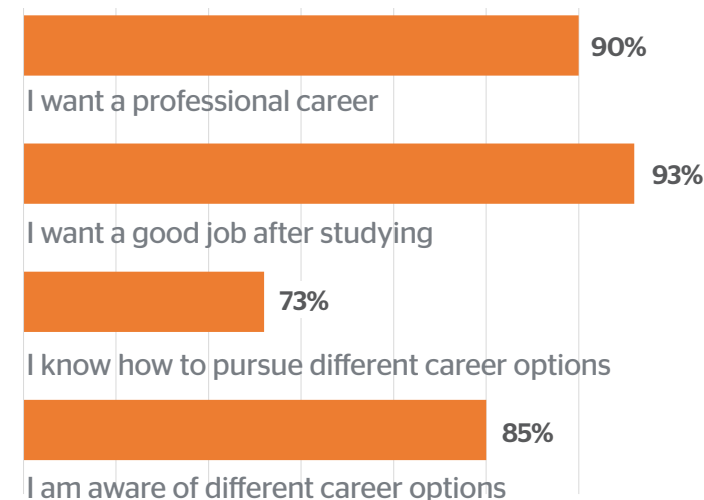
'The most useful thing I learnt from my mentors and the programs would be a glimpse of how the workforce works and possible routes to the future...meeting successful people becomes inspirational and motivating.' Year 12 student

The notion of flexibility in career paths was a prominent lesson that students carried forward; **91% agreed 'it's ok to be flexible'**. This adaptability was a lesson students applied to how they approach their own futures: *'I learned about the different opportunities that are available, as well as having the flexibility to change your paths at any given time.'* Year 12 student

A further key benefit to young people deciding their post-school pathway is the **growth of their networks** – conduits of information, advice, personal experience and connection – to include first-hand interaction with professionals from the business world.

Students' post-school aspirations

% agreeing



*55% agreed they were aware of a wide variety of career options pre-program

Pre-ABCN baseline measures are given as aggregated ABCN 2021 program averages, where these measures were included in program surveys. Post-ABCN point in time ranges from 6 months – 3 years post-program. *not asked in any program surveys

IMPACT 1: PATHWAYS POST-SCHOOL

FOSTERING A SENSE OF OPPORTUNITY THROUGH BETTER KNOWLEDGE OF CAREERS AND ROUTES INTO THEM

73% OF STUDENTS FELT EQUIPPED TO PURSUE A RANGE OF FUTURE CAREER OPTIONS.

‘I think hearing that career aspirations and the pathways taken to achieve them can take all shapes, forms and chance over time, was reassuring because coming from a low-SES area, there really is always that concern about finding a job and anxiety over financial stability is rather present.’

Year 12 student

Working with ABCN mentors, students expanded their sources of careers information and knowledge. Nearly three-quarters of students surveyed were confident they knew how to pursue different career options. For students from low-SES backgrounds who are likely to have limited opportunity for formal and informal careers education, business mentoring can directly influence decisions about routes into future employment, especially roles that are not visible in their own community.¹⁵

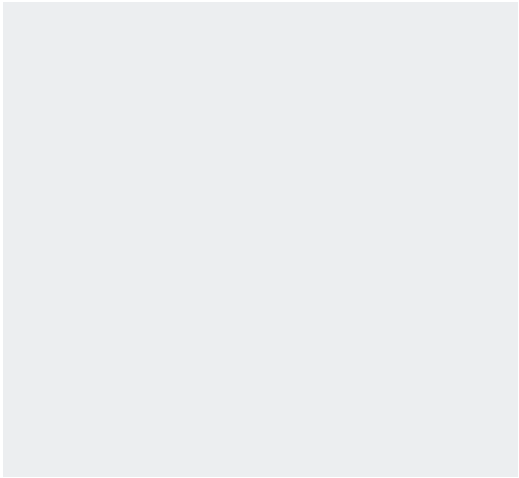
Direct access to a range of professionals during ABCN programs broadened students’ awareness of and aspirations towards a range of educational and career pathways: *‘I have wider knowledge on different careers – insight on what people with different jobs actually do, and how they make solutions.’* Year 10 student

In interviews, students discussed how gaining knowledge of wider opportunities and new sectors within the business world expanded their own post-school career goals.

Students gained a valuable understanding of the multiple and non-linear routes into future careers

from their mentors. In particular, the real-world perspective gained from the programs shows students **alternative means of achieving** their career goals, beyond the conventional ATAR-to-university route. For less confident students, this learning had significant impact on their understanding of life beyond school: *‘Even if I don’t get into the course I want to, there are many other pathways that I can take.’* Year 11 student

This notion of flexibility informed not just students’ initial steps into early careers, but, for many, shifted their thinking about career trajectories over the longer term. A recurrent theme of students’ responses was, ‘There are always options.’ This agility of mindset is considered a key attribute for young people entering an increasingly mobile workforce, where average tenure in a job is 1.7 years for those under 25.¹⁶



IMPACT 1: PATHWAYS POST-SCHOOL

EXPANDING NETWORKS TO BRIDGE THE OPPORTUNITY GAP

BRIDGING NETWORKS THAT CONNECT STUDENTS TO INDIVIDUALS AND PROFESSIONS BEYOND THEIR COMMUNITY CAN BE CRUCIAL TO YOUNG PEOPLE SEEKING EMPLOYMENT,¹⁷ PARTICULARLY AT KEY TRANSITION POINTS ON THEIR JOURNEY.¹⁸

‘Interacting with mentors from the real world has allowed me to gauge what life beyond school would be like. It has been incredibly useful to understand and discuss the challenges that may be faced along the way and to know that things will still work out even if it doesn’t follow what was originally planned.’

Year 11 student

Among the students ABCN surveyed, 90% were aiming for a career in a professional setting. Students outlined plans for careers in law, teaching, software engineering, medicine and business, among others. Broadening young people’s personal networks, including access to a larger pool of professionals with more varied types of experience, has been demonstrated to have positive impacts on future career pathways.

Social capital theory links individuals’ stock of social relations, including personal, formal and professional connections and resources, to their economic outcomes. Previous research suggests it is young people from lower-SES groups who have most to gain from participation in school-mediated careers education and that it is this gain in access to, and understanding of, the workplace, rather than specific skills, that drives positive effects on later earnings.¹⁹

Through engaging with ABCN mentors as trusted sources of knowledge, students gained benefits consistent with social capital theory. A stronger sense of connection to the world of work, and more positive orientation towards their future, featured prominently as outcomes stemming from

students’ participation. Students also showed evidence of a more grounded understanding of pathways into work, the current job market, and the kinds of skills employers seek, enabling them to better plan their future pathway:

‘The most useful things are to communicate with mentors, get to know the future plane, about their personal experience, do group work and get to ask questions about your future career.’

Year 12 student

The bridging effect of strengthened work connections operates not only by expanding available networks of information, but also by bringing students into direct contact with professionals whose own experience can be illuminating: ‘*Learning from the mentors how they found out what they wanted to do.*’ Year 12 student

‘*Understanding the paths and the stress upon HSC...there are more paths and different leads and tips to take you there. Connections matter more after high school.*’ Year 10 student.

IMPACT 1: PATHWAYS POST-SCHOOL

BUILDING PATHWAYS INTO STEM CAREERS

STEM OCCUPATIONS ARE GROWING AT NEARLY TWICE THE RATE OF ALL OTHER JOBS, WITH 75% OF STEM OCCUPATIONS REQUIRING A DEGREE OR HIGHER QUALIFICATION.²⁰

‘The *Full STEAM Ahead* program really made me want to pursue a career in robotics or coding and I became more confident in problem-solving and presenting ideas.’

Year 10 student

‘STEM isn’t just for guys and there may be career options in that field.’

Year 10 student

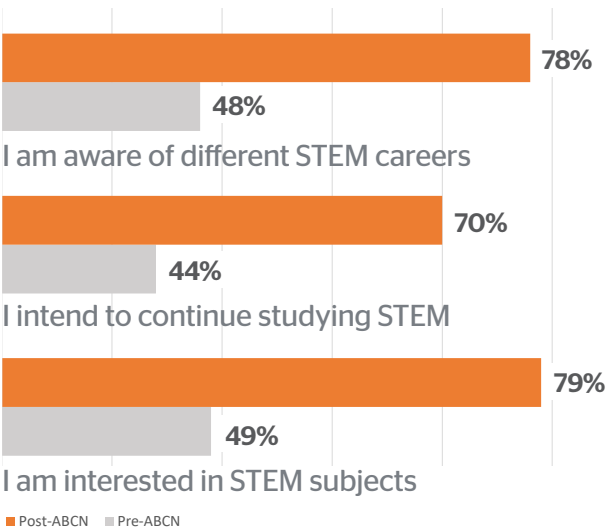
‘I never thought that I could do STEM-related stuff before. I didn’t know how fun coding and robotics could be.’

Year 10 student

For students who took part in STEM-focused programs, the most pronounced effects were on their interest in STEM, and related careers knowledge: ‘*During the ABCN STEM program, I was able to thoroughly understand the various skills and the opportunity for STEM in future careers.*’ However, students’ intentions to continue STEM subjects, while significantly higher after participation, were somewhat lower.

Students’ STEM Orientation

% self-rating high (5-7)



For some female students the exposure to STEM professionals could be transformational to their aspirations: ‘*I got to see women in STEM fields which inspired me to take on and apply for a STEM career too.*’ Year 12 student

Students who completed STEM programs often gained most from the associated skills learned from the program. The value of exploring STEM for these students lay not purely in its subject-specific content but in recognising the broader set of capabilities STEM both fosters and calls upon:

‘*The program taught me that STEM isn’t just about science, technology, engineering, and maths. It uses critical thinking and problem solving.*’ Year 10 student

‘*The program has improved my knowledge of STEM and how the world works around me. After the program, my problem-solving skills and quick thinking have improved immensely.*’ Year 10 student

In an increasingly knowledge-based economy, there is growing recognition that the skills and capabilities students gain from STEM programs, such as critical thinking, collaboration, and analytical skills, are among the most keenly in demand in the transforming workplace.

Pre-ABCN baseline measures are given as aggregated ABCN 2021 program averages, where measures were included in program surveys. Post-ABCN point in time ranges from 6 months - 3 years post-program.



‘Before the program I was not too aware of my own skills necessary for my portfolio. However, after ABCN’s discussion about transferable and soft skills, I have learnt not only that these were necessary in the workforce but the different places you can obtain such skills.’

Year 10 student

**IMPACT 2:
ENTERPRISE SKILLS**

IMPACT 2: ENTERPRISE SKILLS

LAYING A FOUNDATION FOR THE WORLD OF WORK

CRITICAL THINKING, PROBLEM SOLVING, ANALYTIC AND EVALUATIVE CAPABILITIES ARE REGARDED AS KEY TRANSFERABLE SKILLS, REQUIRED BY EMPLOYERS FOR HIGHLY CAPABLE, ADAPTIVE WORKFORCES.²¹

‘During the *Innovate* program I improved my communication skills as well as my ability to think outside the box. My mentors helped boost my confidence to talk and work with other people to reach a goal we set.’
Year 12 student

Developing the required knowledge, skills and qualities to thrive in the post-school world formed a key tranche of students’ outcomes following ABCN programs. Students rated themselves proficient across a range of work-readiness skills, all core measures scoring a mean in the upper end of the scale (5-7). Compared with pre-program ratings, these levels suggest students’ learnings are long-lasting.

The broad category termed Enterprise skills includes workplace or employability skills that may be soft or technical, but are largely transferable. These skills included the ability to communicate effectively, work in teams, lead them, and solve problems. Developed together, these skills support students to make the transition from school to early adulthood, operating as ‘gateway skills’ to employment. Students reported high and sustained levels of confidence in using video-call technology, in team-work and understanding the conventions of workplace behaviour. Communication skills were rated slightly lower. Substantial gains were made in students’ ability to identify their

individual strengths, and how these strengths aligned to the workplace both in terms of leadership qualities and the business world more broadly.

Work Readiness Attributes

% self-rating high (5-7)



Pre-ABCN baseline measures are given as aggregated ABCN 2021 program averages, where these measures were included in program surveys. Post-ABCN point in time ranges from 6 months – 3 years post-program. *not asked in post-program surveys

IMPACT 2: ENTERPRISE SKILLS

DEVELOPING SKILLS FOR REAL-WORLD APPLICATION

'As a student lacking confidence to go into the workforce, as my parents have only experienced low-wage paying jobs which never delved into the formal process of applying, I have gained insight to the process of applying for a career and a new-found confidence after completing the enriching program, *Aspirations*.'

Year 10 student

'The most useful thing I learnt from my mentors in the program was to be prepared for any situation, specifically a job interview. Another was to realise my gift of self-awareness, which ironically I never knew of until she told me.'

Year 12 student

Participating in ABCN programs equipped students with a range of interpersonal skills that can directly enhance their employment prospects. The capabilities and learnings students so clearly valued were often foundational ones — e.g. interview and communication skills — supporting them to enter the world of work. While 60% of students considered themselves prepared for the world of work since participating, one third were unsure, highlighting the importance of incremental and continuous development of skills to support young people's transition into early careers.

Active participation in activities such as mock interviews built awareness of, and adeptness in, work-readiness skills, particularly when facilitated by mentors. These interactions allowed students to observe the modelling of skills that were otherwise difficult to reproduce without advice, for example, introductions and interpersonal skills.

'I learned about interview skills, and I tried to apply it. And actually my manager was quite impressed, so that's why I got my job. I feel like, this is actually useful.' Year 12 student

Mentors' own experiences in particular were instrumental in enabling students both to plan for the world of work and to see themselves within it.

'So hearing from somebody who's already in that sector...what they did, and the fact that they also faced challenges as students and then as leaders in the corporate world, I was like, ah, I can do this too. The first hand conversations really do help in terms of communication.' Year 12 student



IMPACT 2: ENTERPRISE SKILLS

TRANSFERABLE SKILLS IN ACTION

'In order to achieve something, you have to start within yourself. Once you recognise your abilities and hone in on your skills, you can achieve anything.'

Year 11 student

'Before the *Focus* female leadership program, I had viewed leaders to have one type of personality and characteristic (in being extroverted, outgoing and assertive), however I realised that leadership can look and be very different and it can be cultivated within anyone.'

Year 12 student

A key area of students' development was their enhanced ability to identify their own skills and how they can be transferred to the workplace. ABCN's programs helped students to 'surface', recognise, and refine skills that have strong workplace value, including team-working, problem-solving, and leadership.

Students reported high levels of confidence in teamworking (93% rated themselves highly), problem-solving (88%) and awareness of their leadership strengths (89%*). What was often evident in students' responses was how **mentors** were instrumental in helping students to both identify and lift these capabilities: *'I learnt how to apply teamwork and creative thinking in the real world! The mentors were incredibly nice and gave me lots of advice on how to succeed in the work world and life in general.'* Year 10 student

Leadership skills recurred in students' responses as an outcome of ABCN programs. In some cases, this learning was a matter of students identifying attributes they might already possess: *'I figured out what leadership traits I already had but didn't realise I had'*. Year 11 student. Students'

understanding of leadership was also broadened. For female students, direct exposure to female mentors had potential to shift perceptions of roles for women as leaders in the workplace: *'I am now aware of the scope of opportunities presented to me and recognise the need for more female leaders in positions of authority.'* Year 12 student


An emerging area of learning among ABCN students was how skills are applied in a working context – and the complementary relationship between skills. Confidence in students' understanding of how their strengths and interests match workplace needs, while high (75% rated themselves highly), was less developed than for individual skills like teamwork. But, significantly, ABCN programs helped forge the link between skills that are valued by both young people and employers: *'I learnt how to work in a group – how to depend on people in the group to actually do the work – how to use the knowledge learned in the real world.'* Year 10 student

'I learnt the wide range of skills needed across jobs, the commonalities between them and how to be confident and outgoing with your ideas to a team.' Year 12 student

IMPACT 2: ENTERPRISE SKILLS

TRANSFERABLE SKILLS MAY ACT AS GATEWAY SKILLS

Interview skills	Communication skills
<p>Students gained from exposure to real-life situations, particularly interviews, and from practising techniques to prepare for them.</p> <p><i>'How to think fast when interviewers ask questions you weren't expecting, and what behaviour (posture, eye contact etc) are preferred in a job interview.'</i></p> <p><i>'I loved the mock job interviews as it gave me an insight to the real world and the type of questions I may be asked.'</i></p>	<p>Students acquired and practised communication skills to support their transition from school, skills directly transferable to the workplace.</p> <p><i>'Speaking and thinking on the spot, especially speaking cohesively to communicate your idea across.'</i></p> <p><i>'To collaborate with others and always speak up about my ideas.'</i></p>
Workplace norms	Skills in action
<p>Interaction with a range of professionals in work settings familiarised students with norms and conventions they would otherwise lack exposure to.</p> <p><i>'I feel more confident walking into a workplace. I know what is expected from a workplace and what is expected of me.'</i></p> <p><i>'I learnt how to do a proper handshake and behaviour in the corporate world.'</i></p> <p><i>'The ability to understand verbal and non-verbal cues. It allowed me to encounter professional settings and office etiquettes alike. The mentors were extremely supportive and encouraging.'</i></p>	<p>Seeing a range of skills in action – such as problem-solving, communication and teamwork – underpinned their value to students and demonstrated their workplace application.</p> <p><i>'I learnt to communicate my ideas and to think creatively and come up with solutions to real-life problems.'</i></p> <p><i>'The wide range of skills needed across jobs, the commonalities between them and how to be confident and outgoing with your ideas to a team.'</i></p> <p><i>'How time management, studying, public speaking and revising are ideal for becoming a female leader.'</i></p>



'I now know my strengths and weaknesses and can easily identify what works for me and what doesn't. I also now am almost certain as to the field or career path that interests me in my journey after school.'

Year 11 student

**IMPACT 3:
LIFE SKILLS**

IMPACT 3: LIFE SKILLS

EQUIPPED FOR THE FUTURE, STUDY OR WORK

Research suggests personal traits including resilience, perseverance, self-belief and self-regulation are positively linked with school attainment, and financial stability in adulthood.²²

The life skills students developed through ABCN programs closely match four competencies employers identify for successful transitions into work:²³

- Confidence
- Resilience
- Self-awareness
- Drive

Alongside the knowledge and skills necessary for successful transitions to post-school education and work, students developed core capabilities to equip them for their long-term futures. These personal qualities were primarily confidence, resilience, self-awareness, and drive. For around two-thirds of students, developing one or more of these Life skills was considered the greatest benefit of participating in ABCN programs.

Improved confidence emerged as the single most prevalent impact when students were asked the open question, 'What is different since taking part in ABCN programs?'

The research established that, alongside their high aspirations for future study and work, ABCN students identify themselves as goal-driven (82%) and ambitious both academically (74%) and beyond (76%). These aspirations may be supported, and reinforced, by the life skills that students recognise as benefits of ABCN programs.

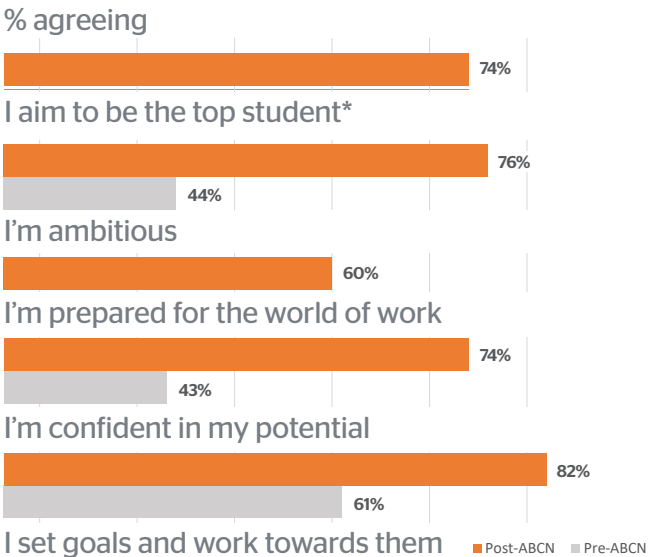
Confidence was the most widely named difference by students who participated in ABCN programs.

Resilience was often articulated as a second dimension of confidence, enabling students to reframe setbacks, or failure.

Self-awareness, encompassing a more developed sense of individual strengths, aptitudes, and how they relate to future work and study, was widely evident in students' responses.

Drive, including goal-setting, motivation and self-organisation, was identified by a significant proportion of students as a lasting difference since participating in ABCN programs.

Student motivations



Pre-ABCN baseline measures are given as aggregated ABCN 2021 program averages, where these measures were included in program surveys. Post-ABCN point in time ranges from 6 months – 3 years post-program. *not asked in any program surveys

IMPACT 3: LIFE SKILLS

BOOSTING ASPIRATION AND ATTAINMENT THROUGH CONFIDENCE

Research shows that mentoring can result in higher self-esteem and self-confidence.²⁴ ABCN's programs had a significant impact on students' confidence across a range of areas. 56% of ABCN students were highly confident in achieving their study or work goals, compared with 46% of young people nationally who were similarly confident. Female ABCN students also narrowed the confidence gap relative to male students; 54% were highly confident, compared with 42% nationally.²⁵

A significant long-term outcome of ABCN programs is that they provide students with the tools and knowledge needed to refine and achieve their already ambitious future goals, while building the confidence and self-efficacy necessary to pursue their aspirations. 82% said ABCN helped them feel more confident about achieving their post-school career goals.

Increased confidence in their abilities and futures was one of the outcomes most widely identified by students in both the survey and interviews. Confidence underpinned both the competencies students were asked to rate – teamwork, communication, problem-solving – and their sense of how likely they were to succeed on their chosen pathway post-school.

94% of ABCN students expressed a moderate-high level of confidence in achieving their study or work goals post-school, over half describing themselves as highly confident. Among ABCN students, the confidence gap between female and male students was narrower than among

their Australian peers; 54% of females described themselves as highly confident, compared with 62% of males (42% and 54% respectively among all young Australians).²⁵

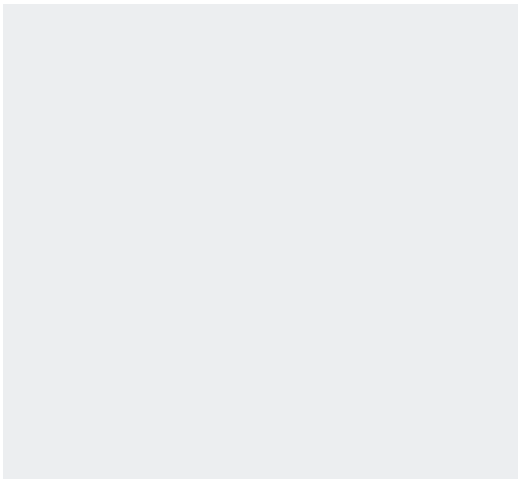
Specific skills or abilities where students saw improvements commonly related to communication: *'My mentors helped boost my confidence to talk and work with other people to reach a goal we set.'* Year 12 student

General aspiration and disposition towards the future were also boosted by growth in personal confidence:

'I feel as though the mentors have helped me unlock confidence and boosted my ego ...my goals before weren't as high and befitting of what I want to achieve right now.' Year 9 student

'I feel more confident and prepared for the future. I am more relaxed about my future as I was always stressing about what I was going to pursue and what would happen if I did not get in my courses.' Year 10 student

Notably, students who took part in interviews described improvements in their general wellbeing as a result of participating in ABCN programs. They felt less anxious and more resourceful in pursuing their ideal post-school pathway.



IMPACT: LIFE SKILLS

REFRAMING FAILURE & BOLSTERING RESILIENCE

STUDENTS WHO TOOK PART IN ABCN PROGRAMS WERE SUBSTANTIALLY LESS DAUNTED BY FEAR OF FAILURE THAN THEIR AUSTRALIAN PEERS.²⁶

'The most useful thing I learnt from my mentors was that through failure comes progress. With this I was aware that although there are consequences that come with failure, you learn and aim to do better through them.'

Year 11 student

'I am more confident in being able to make decisions about my career, regardless of outside opinion. Also, I don't let myself down when I fall short of my goals and use the opportunity to reflect instead.'

Year 12 student

In tandem with enhanced confidence, students learned that failure can be a turning point, rather than a final verdict or a destination in itself. Rethinking failure emerged as a primary learning for some students participating in ABCN programs. For students whose 'success' rests on achieving a target ATAR score or gaining entry to a competitive university course, this expansion of notions of success and failure to encompass what comes after can be transformative.

Overall, students who took part in ABCN programs showed markedly lower fear of failure compared to their peers. 48% agreed that they doubt their future plans when failing, compared with 68% of young people across Australia (OECD average=56%).²⁶ Almost half, 45%, however, to express diffidence or uncertainty about how to cope with setbacks is widespread, with only one in five ABCN students undaunted when confronting failure, and a third unsure.

Notably, students in Years 11/12, were more likely to identify this 'reframing' of failure as a lesson learnt from their mentor, perhaps reflecting their proximity to high-stakes HSC exams and their post-school futures. Some related how, rather than experiencing de-motivation, this reframing galvanised their determination to succeed:

'One of the most useful things I've learnt from the ABCN programs was that failure is only a checkpoint and you can choose how to handle it. The best way to move forward is to review that failure and ask yourself why or how did it occur.'

Year 11 student

'[The programs] taught me how important it is to just have the confidence to learn. It's something we underrate so many times, because we think it's wrong to make mistakes. To me, having this confidence to learn, despite getting something wrong, it's taught me so much. And it really improved my grades as well, to be honest.'

Year 12 student

81% expressed confidence in reaching their longer-term career aspirations, reflecting a buoyant self-belief among a cohort of young people facing the uncertainties of the post-school world in a pandemic era.

IMPACT 3: LIFE SKILLS

SETTING HABITS AND GOALS FOR THE FUTURE

STUDENTS WHO SET GOALS AT SCHOOL SHOWED HIGHER LEVELS OF ENGAGEMENT AND ASPIRATION IN RECENT RESEARCH.²⁷ OVER 80% OF ABCN STUDENTS REPORTED SETTING AND WORKING TOWARDS THEIR GOALS.

‘The most useful thing I learnt from my mentors was that through failure comes progress. With this I was aware that although there are consequences that come with failure, you learn and aim to do better through them.’

Year 11 student

‘Before I would never set small goals, I would always just think about the one big goal, but the GOALS program showed me how important smaller goals are to get you towards that big goal.’

Year 12 student

The ability to plan, set goals or regulate personal habits can help students to be explicit and intentional about the key choices confronting them in their high school years. For low-SES students in particular, goal-setting is associated with higher school attendance and intentions to complete school.²⁷ Adopting and developing these skills emerged as a key benefit of participation in ABCN’s programs.

Time-management skills were of clear value to students, assisting them to plan realistically their future direction, and to allocate the time and effort required to stay on course. These skills were readily applied to planning for the long term, i.e. post-school pathways for work and study, but equally, students referred to being better organised day-to-day. What was evident in many students’ comments was the sense of being able to distinguish between short- and long-term goals. Looking towards the long-term, improved ability to plan fostered students’ sense of progress towards an end-goal:

‘I have a better idea of what I want to do after school and am taking steps toward getting into my desired profession. I now regularly set goals and challenges for myself to achieve, ranging from getting good marks in a test to reaching an exercise target for the day.’ Year 12 student

‘In the GOALS program, the most useful (and obvious) thing I learnt was how to set achievable but ambitious goals and how to approach them. I also learnt a few things about dealing with failure.’ Year 12 student

At a day-to-day level, improved time management and self-discipline often went hand in hand with a sense of self-efficacy and motivation: *“The program has greatly improved my ability as a student, as well as fixing my incapacabilities with time management, which I had greatly struggled with.”* Year 12 student

‘I make small goals now which lead to the bigger goals. The same task can be completed by me quicker when I am not stressed.’ Year 10 student

IMPACT 3: LIFE SKILLS

HARNESSING SELF-AWARENESS TO DEVELOPING SKILLS

RESEARCH HAS REPEATEDLY SHOWN AN ASSOCIATION BETWEEN YOUNG PEOPLE'S SELF-AWARENESS, INCLUDING SELF-CONTROL AND SELF-EFFICACY, AND OUTCOMES IN ADULT LIFE, INCLUDING WELLBEING, SCHOOL ATTAINMENT, EMPLOYMENT, AND HEALTH.²⁸ SELF-AWARENESS IS ONE OF THE CORE CAPABILITIES EMPLOYERS IDENTIFY AS A REQUIREMENT FOR YOUNG PEOPLE TO ENTER AND SUCCEED IN THE WORKPLACE.²⁹

A person's self-perception, their confidence in their abilities and a belief in their individual efficacy, have been linked to longer-term wellbeing.³⁰ For young people planning their post-school pathways, attributes including responsibility for themselves and others, self-control, accountability, and recognition of their own strengths and weaknesses help form a foundation of capabilities for future success. There was widespread evidence that these reflective traits are emergent among students who participated in ABCN programs, often alongside their growth in another skill, for example, communication.

Students demonstrated the **ability to identify personal strengths** and what is needed to improve:

'I wasn't great at identifying my weaknesses and strengths. I just thought overall, that I was an average person, able to do some things and having limitations. In the program, I was able to express more what I was able to do and what I struggled with. I learned that I'm horrible with technology. But I'm great at communicating.' Year 12 student

'I can work better in a group setting. I now enjoy solving problems.' Year 9 student

Some described how participation in ABCN helped them clarify realistic career goals and why they are of interest:

'I always wanted to do computer science...the program definitely improved my interaction skills, reinforced what I always wanted but gave me more clarity towards how I can approach this.' Year 12 student

'Before, I just wanted to [do] Bachelor of Law but after the program, I want to learn about business as well. I learned how to borrow money, open a business, how to be a good leader.' Year 12 student

Students showed an emergent **awareness of matching their own skills and qualities** to those required for future roles, including leadership:

'The program has increased my confidence immensely to believe in myself. Moreover, it has helped me learn to communicate my ideas and work better in a team which has helped me with my leadership role in Year 12.' Year 12 student

CASE STUDY

YEAR 12 STUDENT, 16, FEMALE, MARIAM*: 'THERE'S DEFINITELY MULTIPLE WAYS YOU CAN GET INTO THE COURSE THAT YOU WANT TO GET INTO YOUR CAREER'.

Currently I'm looking into **civil engineering**, around that area. As someone who in my household doesn't really know much outside the household, talking to these people who've experienced life outside and work definitely helps me a lot in my journey. I knew before [what I wanted to do], but the program has definitely enhanced my understanding or knowledge of the different ways to get into that career path. You can do university, or you can do TAFE courses.

Social capital +
Networks +
Careers
knowledge ➡
Pathways
post-school

The best thing they've done is definitely these mentor talks. Whether one to one, or whether when you're with your friend, and you're talking to a mentor. Because they made you think outside of the box. And they just think of alternative pathways.

Critical
thinking ➡
Enterprise
skills

The program with all women, it kind of gives me the confidence to enter this work force that I know is definitely male-dominated. So it definitely gave me the confidence to take myself out of my shell and move into the big world.

Enhanced
confidence ➡
Life skills

It kind of taught me different things along the way. I guess in Year 9 that taught me about working together in groups, collaboration. But now it's more, now that I'm in Year 12, it's taught me about the different pathways, different things that you can do after high school.

Teamwork +
communication
➡ Enterprise
skills



'My approach to future goals has shifted as I am no longer scared of failure and I'm learning as an entrepreneur should. I now know the intricacies of many different pathways to my future profession.'

Year 10 student

LOOKING AHEAD

LONG-TERM IMPACT 1

WHO IS LIKELY TO ACHIEVE LASTING OUTCOMES?

RESEARCH HAS SHOWN THAT LONGER-TERM MENTORING PRODUCES BETTER OUTCOMES FOR YOUNG PEOPLE, INCLUDING HIGHER ASPIRATIONS AND INCREASED PARTICIPATION IN LEADERSHIP POSITIONS.³¹

‘I’m willing to step up and work towards my goal, medicine. And part of the inspiration is thanks to ABCN programs, thanks to my mentor, because he told me about his own story.’

Year 12 student

The research aimed to identify medium- to long-term outcomes for ABCN participants, and to better understand what predisposes some students to gain more from taking part in ABCN programs than others.

From synthesis of the survey and qualitative data, key factors that influenced which students achieved lasting outcomes were:

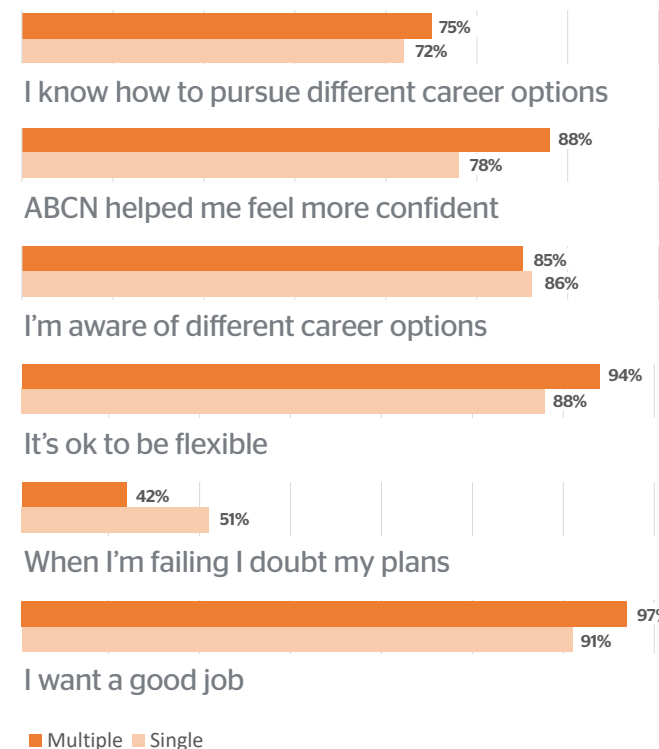
- participating in multiple programs
- the role of the students’ disposition, and
- connecting with ABCN mentors

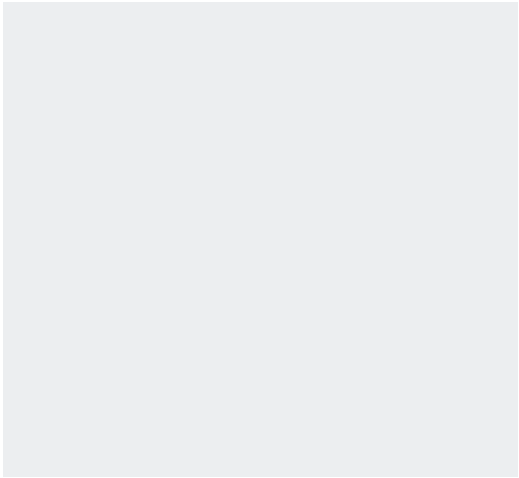
Students who participated in multiple programs showed statistically significant increases in confidence. 88% agree that ABCN helped them feel more confident about their career goals, compared with 78% of single program attendees.

Multiple programs were associated with slightly higher ratings overall (except on student confidence in pursuing their aspirations).

Self-doubt reduced when students participated in multiple programs. Among attendees of two or more ABCN programs, 30% strongly disagreed with the statement ‘When I’m failing, I doubt my plans’, compared with 19% of single program attendees.

Student outcomes by single/multiple program attendance
% agreeing





ABCN'S IMPACT LONG-TERM 2

WHO IS LIKELY TO ACHIEVE LASTING OUTCOMES?

'I can set goals to work towards things I want to do. Secondly, I know what I want to do in life and how to get there. Finally, I'd also probably be more confident in a job interview than I would have been prior to the ABCN programs.'

Year 9 student

'When I'm not in control, I'll freak, which is one of my weaknesses. But my mentors in my group helped me to identify that I needed to be more flexible and adaptable.'

Year 12 student

'To have a mentor who focuses on self-improvement instead of trying to force their beliefs on you was extremely helpful.'

Year 12 student

Interviewed students who participated in more than one program were not only more likely to remember multiple aspects of the programs but also had clearer ideas about, and more confidence in, their future.

In interviews, students who had participated in only one program, or who had not recently participated, sometimes struggled to remember the detail. While a single practical activity stood out to these students and was likely to last (e.g. memory techniques), there appeared to be less lasting impact on outcomes such as future **aspirations, confidence or engagement levels.**

Students who participated in multiple programs were often keen to take advantage of as many experiences and opportunities as possible:

'I always like to be involved in opportunities, like whatever comes. And I just wanted to learn and learn new skills.' Year 12 student

It is plausible that the same personal disposition not only made them more likely to participate in ABCN programs but also drove them to make the most of the programs.

Students who made a strong connection with mentors were more likely to engage fully with the programs and report lasting outcomes and confidence about their future. Students were almost universally positive about their mentors, particularly their friendliness and their ability to engage students and make them feel comfortable. *'I think it's that interaction between mentors and mentees that really helps us open up.'* Students benefited from the opportunity to establish a strong connection with mentors, not only through their advice and information, but also through role modelling, and lived experience.

'My mentor was someone who was very patient. He always reminded me that just because you fail now, you can always do well later...just like take the lessons from your failures and you really get back up. That's part of what GOALS taught me. It's not just about making goals, but it's also improving yourself as well and really seeing yourself in a better light.' Year 12 student

DISCUSSION

WHY PATHWAYS, ENTERPRISE & LIFE SKILLS MATTER

PATHWAYS, ENTERPRISE AND LIFE SKILLS EQUIP STUDENTS FOR A WORKFORCE THAT IS TRANSFORMING FAST

All three key impact areas show longevity since program completion:

- Students are better prepared to adapt to rapid shifts in workforce patterns
- Students have transferable and gateway skills
- Students are building long-term skills currency that increases over their careers

ABCN's three key impact areas — **Pathways**, **Enterprise** and **Life skills** — showed encouraging longevity, evident in students' buoyant aspirations, confidence, planning and motivation when it comes to their post-school futures. These three areas align with the core skillsets and personal capabilities widely considered pre-requisites for young people if they are to make successful transitions into a workforce that is transforming fast. These personal, social, and cognitive capabilities are increasingly valued for their broad applicability and enduring 'shelf-life', contributing to agile and adaptable workforces.^{32,33}

The ability to navigate **Pathways** post-school, considering a broader range of occupations and adopting a flexible approach to career progression, prepares young people to cope with the rapid shifts in workforce patterns driven by technology, globalisation, and labour mobility, among other factors. Increasing awareness of pathways has demonstrably challenged young people's assumptions about certain careers (e.g., gender stereotyping may discourage girls from

pursuing STEM career pathways), broadening their career horizons.

An enhanced level of **Enterprise skills** (e.g., interpersonal skills, problem-solving, creativity) equips young people with the capabilities that are universally demanded by employers. These transferable skills can operate as 'gateway skills' to early career employment. For a generation facing complex, non-linear career pathways, with likely periods of contract, part-time work or self-employment, strong Enterprise skills are foundational. Students' emerging understanding that these skills have real-world value beyond the classroom is also critical; recent employer research has highlighted how the ability to recontextualise existing skills is a fundamental part of young people's job-readiness.³⁴

Increased **Life skills** (e.g., motivation, self-organisation and confidence) have long-term currency, growing in value over the course of a young person's career. Confidence, notably, was the single most prevalent impact of participation ABCN students named. Some evidence points to Life Skills overtaking technical know-how as the main determinant of advancement by the mid-career stage.³³

CONCLUSIONS

BUILDING PATHWAYS TO THE POST-SCHOOL WORLD

The findings discussed here provide compelling evidence to support the long-term impact described in ABCN's Theory of Change. Young people who shared their views reported significant, sustained improvements in aspirations, post-school planning, attitudes towards the future, and connection to the world of work, up to three years after participating in ABCN programs. ABCN students reported increased levels of engagement in education, confidence and resilience compared to their Australian peers, speaking to the effectiveness of mentoring support.*

ABCN's broader focus on Enterprise and Life skills rather than employability skills alone positions students for success in a challenging job climate. Further, the impacts of mentoring reported here are frequently overlapping and co-dependent, reflecting the reality of how skills are combined and utilised in the world of work.

Australian schools are becoming increasingly socially stratified, contributing to worsening inequalities for young people from low-income and under-served backgrounds.³⁴ Inadequate resources and social capital during their school

years can restrict the opportunities available to these young people throughout their adult lives. Organisations like ABCN play a pivotal role in counteracting this inequality, by strengthening school engagement and improving future prospects for young people. The findings here affirm the real and lasting benefits of ABCN's mentoring programs. Supporting young people at key points in the formation of their post-school plans demonstrably boosts their confidence to pursue a broader range of careers than they otherwise would consider. Further, the findings point to the vital role for ABCN to continue to develop its mentoring programs to offer students:

- a grounded, broader understanding of the world of work, particularly STEM opportunities
- greater clarity about how their developing skills have real-world applicability and value
- a toolset of capabilities and attitudes necessary for negotiating a rapidly transforming workforce.

ABCN'S MENTORING IMPACTS

INSIGHT 1: Broadens students' awareness and aspirations for diverse and emerging pathways, including STEM careers.

INSIGHT 2: Develops key employability and workreadiness skills.

INSIGHT 3: Develops capabilities that are relevant to a rapidly changing workforce.

INSIGHT 4: Strengthens benefits when students engage in multiple programs.

*See p25

ENDNOTES

1. Lamb, S., Huo, S., Walstab, A., & Wade, A. (2020). Educational opportunity in Australia 2020: Who succeeds and who misses out. Mitchell Institute. Melbourne.
2. Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW, 2021). Australia's youth: Engagement in education or employment. <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/children-youth/engagement-in-education-or-employment>
3. Tiller, E., Greenland, N., Christie, R., Kos, A., Brennan, N., & Di Nicola, K. (2021). Youth Survey Report 2021. Sydney, NSW: Mission Australia.
4. See 1
5. PISA (2019). Results (Volume III): Country Note: Australia https://www.oecd.org/pisa/publications/PISA2018_CN_AUS.pdf
6. Mann, A., & Dawkins, J. (2014). Employer Engagement in Education: Literature Review. CfBT Education Trust. Reading, England.
7. See 1
8. Productivity Commission. (2019). The Demand Driven University System: A Mixed Report Card. Commission Research Paper. Canberra.
9. See 2
10. Kashefpakdel, I.T. & Percy, C. (2016). Career education that works: An economic analysis using the British Cohort Study, *Journal of Education and Work*. 30:3, 217-234, DOI: 10.1080/13639080.2016.1177636
- 11, 12 Reserve Bank of Australia (2018). Labour market outcomes for younger people. Bulletin – June 2018, Reserve Bank of Australia.
- 13 ABS (2019) Labour force, Australia, Oct 2019, <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/labour/employment-and-unemployment/labour-force-australia/dec-201914>. NSW Department of Education (2021). Pathways for the Future Project Pilot: Summary Report. <https://education.nsw.gov.au/about-us/educational-data/cese/publications/research-reports/pathways-for-the-future-pilot-project-summary-report>
15. Torii, K. (2018). Connecting the worlds of learning and work Prioritising school-industry partnerships in Australia's education system.
16. Wilkins, R., Botha, F., Vera-Toscano, E., & Wood, M. (2020). The Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia Survey: Selected Findings from Waves 1 to 18. Melbourne Institute: Applied Economic & Social Research, University of Melbourne.
17. Jokisaari, M. & Nurmi, J.E. (2005). Company matters: Goal-related social capital in the transition to working life. *Journal of Vocational Behaviour*, 67, 413-428
18. Lin & Dumin 1986 Lin, N. & Dumin, M. (1986). Access to Occupations through Social Ties. *Social Networks*, 8, 365 – 385.
19. Mann, A., & Percy, C. (2014). Employer engagement in British secondary education: wage earning outcomes experienced by young adults. *Journal of Education and Work*, 27.(5), 496-523
20. National Skills Commission (2021). State of Australia's Skills 2021: now and into the future. Annual Report 2020-2021. National Skills Commission, Canberra.
21. K. Torii (2018). Connecting the worlds of learning and work: Prioritising school-industry partnerships in Australia's education system, Mitchell Institute, Melbourne.
22. Gutman, Leslie & Schoon, Ingrid. (2013). The impact of non-cognitive skills on outcomes for young people. A literature review. Education Endowment Foundation, London.
23. Kashefpakdel, E.T., Newton, O., Clark, J., Rehill, J., Emms, K., Laczik, A. (2018). Joint Dialogue: How are schools developing real employability skills? Education and Employers, Edge Foundation and National Education Union, London.
24. Bruce, M. & Bridgeland, J., (2014). The Mentoring Effect: Young People's Perspectives on the Outcomes and Availability of Mentoring. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED558065.pdf>
25. Tiller, E., Greenland, N., Christie, R., Kos, A., Brennan, N., & Di Nicola, K. (2021). Youth Survey Report 2021. Mission Australia, Sydney.
26. PISA. (2019). Results (Volume III): What School Life Means for Students' Lives . OECD Publishing, Paris.
27. Martin, A., Burns, E., Collie, R., Bostwick, K.... (2021). Growth Goal Setting in High School: A Large-Scale Study of Perceived Instructional Support, Personal Background Attributes, and Engagement Outcomes. *Journal of Educational Psychology*. 10.1037/edu0000682.
28. Goodman, A., Joshi, H., Nasim, B., & Tyler, C. (2015). Social and emotional skills in childhood and their long-term effects on adult life. Institute of Education, London.
29. The Young Foundation & Impetus PEF. (2014). Preparing Young People for Work. The Young Foundation, London.
30. See 28
31. Bruce, M. & Bridgeland, J., (2014). The Mentoring Effect: Young People's Perspectives on the Outcomes and Availability of Mentoring. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED558065.pdf>
32. Trisha Fettes, Karen Evans & Elnaz Kashefpakdel (2020) Putting skills to work: it's not so much the what, or even the why, but how..., *Journal of Education and Work*, 33:2, 184-196, DOI: 10.1080/13639080.2020.1737320
33. World Economic Forum (2020). The future of jobs report 2020. World Economic Forum, Geneva,
34. Chzhen, Y., Gromada, A., Rees, G., Cuesta, J., Bruckauf, Z. (2018). An Unfair Start: Inequality in Children's Education in Rich Countries, Innocenti Working Paper 2018. UNICEF Office of Research, Florence.

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.

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, this year ABCN expanded its network to 46 company partners from corporate Australia and almost 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, 56,303 students have been 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. Some 225 students have benefitted from this initiative since inception.

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

¹ Educational opportunity in Australia, Lamb (2020)

² Program for International School Assessment (2016, 2019)

³ McKinsey & Company, in partnership with Oxford Economics (2020)

⁴ Educational opportunity in Australia, Lamb (2020)

⁵ Educational opportunity in Australia, Lamb (2020)

⁶ It's who you meet, Education and Employers (2012)

⁷ What do schools want from engagement with business? ACER (2019)

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 maths 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 Year 12 or equivalent**

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.⁴

 **Less likely to be employed**

51% of young adults from the lowest SES backgrounds are engaged fully in education, training or work, compared to 82% from the highest SES backgrounds.⁵

But these statistics belie the enormous potential of the young people in these schools. Research has demonstrated that business engagement with education can make a significant difference to young people⁶, particularly those from low SES backgrounds. Australian schools want to increase their engagement with business, to help support their young people make better choices, and an effective transition from school.⁷

'This program has given me a more positive view of life and the hardships, the mistakes and failures we face and has pushed me to follow my dreams – and for that I'm grateful.'

Student, *Focus*

ABCN IMPACT 2021

OUR REACH


5,946
STUDENTS
MENTORED*


3,215
MENTORS


189
SCHOOLS


46
BUSINESSES

A total of
14,681
STUDENTS
involved in
all initiatives

A total of
3,774
VOLUNTEERS
involved in
all initiatives

*Mentoring figures were significantly impacted due to ongoing lockdowns

OUR IMPACT: STUDENTS


92%
OF GOALS AND
ASPIRATIONS
STUDENTS
completed Year 12

(compared with an 82%
national average and 68% for
disadvantaged students¹)


100%
OF SCHOLARSHIP STUDENTS
graduating from Accelerate are
employed or studying

(compared with 51% of 24-year-olds from the
most disadvantaged backgrounds²)


63%
OF GOALS AND
ASPIRATIONS STUDENTS
have received university offers
(compared with 60% national average
and 46% for disadvantaged students²)

96%
OF
INTERVIEW 2 IMPRESS
STUDENTS
say they understand how to prepare
for a job interview (compared with 33%
beforehand)

¹ Educational opportunity in Australia 2020: Who succeeds and who misses out (Lamb et al. 2020)

² The demand driven university system: a mixed report card (Productivity Commission 2019)

³ Educational opportunity in Australia 2020

OUR IMPACT: MENTORS


94%
said their mentoring/
coaching skills improved
after the program

92%
GREW THEIR
UNDERSTANDING
of other generations
and cultures




98%
FELT INSPIRED
to help others more often
as a result of the program


99%
FELT PROUD
that their company
is part of ABCN

CONTACT US

Australian Business and Community Network
Sydney | Melbourne | Brisbane | Perth | Adelaide

ABCN HEAD OFFICE

📍 Level 3, 141 York Street, Sydney 2000
PO Box Q394 Sydney 1230

☎ (02) 8988 6850

✉ info@abcn.com.au

💻 www.abcn.com.au

 @ABCN

 @abcnoz

 @ABCNoz

 @ABCNoz

 @ABCN



'Any opportunity our students have to connect to the world of work is wonderful. It helps them become more aware of the world around them and they see value in the work they do at school.'

Teacher, *Future Thinkers*

'Absolutely amazing! Definitely what I have needed for so long. I praise all efforts put in by every individual who has made this program possible. I cannot thank you all enough.'

Student, *Focus*

PARTNER WITH US
INFO@ABCN.COM.AU

ABCN 
Business Partnering with Education

Impact report design supported by

**space
lab
design**
spacelabdesign.com