

What Do Schools Want from Engagement with Business?

Final report submitted to the
Australian Business and Community Network



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Australian Council for Educational Research



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What Do Schools Want from Engagement with Business?

Executive Summary

In recent years there have been policy discussions of the potential value of businesses engaging in the school education sector. However, the voice of educators is rarely heard and teachers' perspective is vital to understanding what would ensure positive outcomes from such engagement. This research addresses this by engaging directly with school leaders and teachers around what they want from engagement with business, including reflections on experiences to date.

Main findings

- Educators see business having a critical role to play as a partner to support Australian students. Over 90% of the schools surveyed want to increase their current engagement with business
- Schools want to engage with business for a variety of reasons, particularly increasing students engagement with learning, building student awareness and aspirations about potential careers, and developing students' 'future work' capabilities and understanding of future work environments.
- Some educators also see value in engaging with business for educators' own professional development and awareness of the changing world of work.
- Schools are looking to increase engagement with business across the board. The strongest areas for growth they identify are:
 - Mentoring of students by business people
 - Work experience
 - Workplace visits
 - Careers talks and fairs
- Schools are trying for breadth and depth in their engagement with business: breadth through activities like careers talks that reach high numbers of students but lightly, and depth through personalised targeted interventions such as mentoring and work experience. Many schools are happy to contemplate a wide array of engagement with business.
- Schools with limited engagement with business are more likely to focus on 'hard' skills; those with a deeper engagement also focus on 'soft' skills vital for the constantly changing world of work.
- Engagement with schools generally builds a positive perception of business in the community. Schools are positive about how willing businesses are to support young people and about the impact such support has on their students.
- Very few schools have had a negative experience with business. Awareness of such pitfalls can assist in developing positive, long-lasting school–business relationships.

What Do Schools Want from Engagement with Business?

Background

The Australian Business and Community Network (ABCN) is a purpose-led not-for-profit organisation bringing together business and school in low socioeconomic status (SES) areas. ABCN delivers business-oriented mentoring programs and workplace experiences to develop students' skills and mindsets, aspirations and connections.

ABCN was established in 2005 by a group of CEOs whose vision was to engage business to have a greater positive impact in the community. Since then 40 000 students have benefitted from direct mentoring through the organisation's work. Today ABCN is a network of 42 of Australia's leading companies and over 200 schools working together to make a difference to the lives of young Australians from low SES background.

In recent years there have been policy discussions of the potential value of businesses engaging with the school education sector. For instance, Torii (2018) recommended three key priorities for change to encourage school–industry partnerships:

1. School-industry partnerships need to be valued and measured at the system level.
2. School-industry partnerships need to be a priority in all schools.
3. Governments need to make it easier for all parties to engage in school-industry partnerships.

The Australian Government has recognised the importance of such partnerships, as stated in Recommendation 8 of *Through Growth to Achievement: The Report of the Review to Achieve Educational Excellence in Australian Schools* (DET, 2018):

Strengthen school-community engagement to enrich student learning through the establishment of mechanisms to facilitate quality partnerships, including engagement in mentoring, volunteering and extra-curricular activities, between schools, employers, members of the community, community organisations and tertiary institutions.

Evidence from the United Kingdom suggests that four or more positive student interactions with employers is associated with a fivefold reduction in levels of non-participation in employment, education or training after completing school.¹ In a similar vein, Rothman and Hillman (2008) found that Australian students were more positive about career advice in school when they participated in a variety of career-related activities, including talks from employer representatives. In addition, Curtis and McMillan (2008) found that, among a large percentage of Australian school non-completers, there was a mismatch between work

¹Education and Employers (2015). It's who you meet: Why employer contacts at school make a difference to the employment prospects of young adults. Accessed 21 November 2018 from <https://www.educationandemployers.org/research/its-who-you-meet-why-employer-contacts-at-school-make-a-difference-to-the-employment-prospects-of-young-adults/>.

aspirations and the reality of the work available. Programs that link schools and their students with employers can provide a better understanding of the workplace.

Yet among the discussion of school–business partnerships, the educators’ voices are rarely heard. Given this context, ABCN commissioned the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) to examine what Australian schools would like from business, and what types of school–business interaction could be most beneficial to schools to act as a guide to businesses considering engagement with schools.

Method

Phase 1: The ABCN survey

During 2018, ACER worked with ABCN to develop a questionnaire that could be sent to schools to explore their attitudes in relation to engagement with business. In Term 4, the questionnaire was sent to ABCN schools, generally in low-SES metropolitan areas across Australia. These schools had already been engaged with business, so responses reflect the attitudes of schools that had already successfully engaged with business. A small number of schools had been involved with ABCN in previous years but were not engaged with any business at the time of the survey in 2018.

During January 2019, the responses from the ABCN schools were analysed to identify items that did not elicit reasonable responses from schools. As a result of this analysis one item was changed: When identifying reasons for engaging with business, one response—relating to the development of professional networks and connections for students outside the school—had too few responses to continue its inclusion as a separate response option.

Phase 2: The sample survey

For Phase 2, the ACER sampling team selected government schools in three participating states. The sample in each state was stratified to ensure an equal number of metropolitan and non-metropolitan schools. For each school that was selected to be in the main sample, two schools of a similar SES and location were selected as replacement schools. If the main school did not participate in the survey, then a replacement school would be invited to participate. Schools that had already responded to the 2018 ABCN survey were excluded from sample selection.

The questionnaire had been redeveloped for Phase 2 in 2019 by removing items that had more relevance to ABCN schools where programs were already operating. The questions that were removed would not have been appropriate for non-ABCN schools. However, after a low response rate in the initial stages of Phase 2, the questionnaire was further redeveloped to reduce the time required for completion.

Research applications were submitted to New South Wales, Victoria and Queensland, which are the largest jurisdictions by student enrolment. Applications were submitted on 12 February 2019. Research approval was granted by Queensland on 8 April 2019 and by Victoria on 15 May 2019. New South Wales approved the request on 16 September 2019.

Data collection

For the Phase 1 ABCN survey, invitation emails were sent by ABCN to school contacts, directing them to the online questionnaire hosted by ACER. The original Phase 2 sample survey went live on Tuesday, 23 April 2019, to coincide with the beginning of Term 2 in Queensland and Victoria. Emails were addressed to principals in 399 schools in Victoria (222 schools) and Queensland (177 schools). The response rate was poor in the first week, and reminders did not attract enough additional responses. The first listed replacement schools were then approached, but another low response rate was achieved.

At this point, it was agreed that the questionnaire could be shortened, reducing completion time from 15–20 minutes to less than 10 minutes. The second listed replacement schools in Queensland and Victoria were then invited to complete the shortened questionnaire. The invitation emails were also shortened so that the initial request to complete the survey could be read in one screen.

The shortened version of the email was sent to principals in New South Wales schools on Monday, 16 September 2019. The invitations were sent to allow completion in the two weeks before the end of Term 3. All 404 schools—main schools and replacement schools—were invited to participate, as there would be no time available for follow-up.

Results

This section compares the results of the survey conducted during 2018 in schools already engaged with the ABCN ('ABCN schools') with results of the survey conducted in 2019 with samples of schools in New South Wales, Queensland and Victoria ('Sample schools'), where appropriate.²

Participation

From the 2018 ABCN questionnaires, usable responses were received from 174 educators. From the 2019 sample, usable responses were received from 82 educators. The majority of educators were working in secondary schools or in combined primary/secondary schools, but the balance between secondary only and combined schools is markedly different between the ABCN schools and the sample schools (Table 1). This difference reflects the source of the participants in the two surveys. ABCN schools are mostly in metropolitan areas in most jurisdictions; the sample used schools across each participating state, so that schools in non-metropolitan areas—many of which are combined primary/secondary schools—had an equal chance of being selected into the sample. Overall, 83 per cent of ABCN schools enrolled secondary students as did 87 per cent of sample schools.³

Table 1 Distribution of schools responding, ABCN schools and sample schools

Type of school	ABCN schools (2018)		Sample schools (2019)	
	n	%	n	%
Primary	26	15%	3	4%
Secondary	138	79%	45	55%
Combined Primary/Secondary	7	4%	26	32%
Other	2	1%	0	0%
Not provided	1	1%	8	10%
<i>Total</i>	<i>174</i>	<i>100%</i>	<i>82</i>	<i>100%</i>

Note: Percentages may not sum to 100% due to rounding.

The school principal or deputy/assistant principal most often completed the questionnaire, accounting for between 40 and 45 per cent of respondents in each group. The school's careers adviser accounted for 10 per cent of respondents in ABCN schools and 27 per cent of respondents in sample schools. In many of the schools, respondents may have more than one responsibility, which is not accounted for in Table 2.

² In some cases, the questions were altered. Such changes are noted in the accompanying text.

³ Respondents were not required to provide the school name.

Table 2 Distribution of educators responding, ABCN schools and sample schools

Type of school	ABCN schools (2018)		Sample schools (2019)	
	n	%	n	%
Principal	53	30%	27	33%
Deputy/Assistant Principal	26	15%	6	7%
Careers Adviser	18	10%	22	27%
Year Level Adviser	18	10%	2	2%
Head of Department	18	10%	7	9%
Guidance/Wellbeing Officer	5	3%	0	0%
Class teacher	29	17%	4	5%
Other/Not provided	7	4%	14	17%
<i>Total</i>	<i>174</i>	<i>100%</i>	<i>82</i>	<i>100%</i>

Notes: Percentages may not sum to 100% due to rounding.

Responses

What percentage of schools are engaged with business?

Across the two surveys, only six schools—three ABCN schools (2% of responding schools) and three sample schools (4% of responding schools)—were not engaged with business.⁴ Five of the six schools not currently engaged with business are primary schools; the sixth is a combined primary/secondary school.

How do schools engage with business?

The most common way that schools engage with business is through work experience programs (see Table 3). Nearly all schools in the 2019 sample cited work experience as one way of engaging with business. In addition, 92 per cent of schools in the 2019 sample cited career talks as an engagement with business. Among ABCN schools in 2018, these two activities were most common, at 81 per cent, but a number of other activities were more common than in sample schools. ABCN schools much more frequently cited mentoring programs (79% compared to 41%) and skill development workshops (52% compared to 38%) than did sample schools. On other types of engagement there was little difference between the two groups of schools.

⁴ The ABCN survey approached schools that were known to ABCN in 2018. This included schools that may have had some form of engagement with a business in the past but did not have an engagement with a business at the time of the survey.

Table 3 Type of engagement between schools and business, ABCN schools and sample schools

Type of engagement	ABCN schools (2018) (%)	Sample schools (2019) (%)
Work experience	81	97
Vocational placements	72	79
Career talks, speakers and fairs	81	92
Mentoring of students by people from business	79	41
Skill development workshops	52	38
Workplace visits	67	66
Enterprise/competition coaching	18	23
Teacher development	36	49
Cases from business that link to curriculum	31	34
Sponsorship	25	30
STEM-focused programs	58	45

Note: Respondents may have identified more than one type of engagement with business.

Why do schools engage with business?

All respondents were asked why their schools engage with business, but the format of the question was changed after the ABCN survey was completed. ABCN schools were given a list of 11 reasons for their engagement and asked to rank three reasons only. The sample school respondents could select any of the 11 reasons, with no limit on the number of reasons selected and with no ranking of reasons.

For both groups, the two most commonly cited reasons were to build student awareness and aspirations about potential careers, and to increase student engagement in learning (Table 4). Four items were less frequently ranked by the ABCN schools:

- Developing professional networks and connections for teachers outside the school
- Developing teachers' understanding of current and future work environments
- Building the capability of school leaders and teachers
- Increasing access to and understanding of state-of-the-art technologies

These same four items also were less frequently selected by the sample schools in 2019. These items focus on teachers and school leaders, rather than students, who are the focus of all other items.

Because sample schools could identify more than three reasons for engaging with business, some reasons were cited more frequently among sample schools than among ABCN schools:

- Linking learning to real-world problems
- Developing students' understanding of current and future work environments
- Developing students' 'future work' capabilities
- Supporting students to make the transition to work
- Creating employment pathways for students

These five items focus on students, rather than teachers and school leaders. Overall, this shows that in both groups, schools engage with business for the benefit of their students.

Table 4 Reasons for engagement with business, ABCN schools and sample schools

Reason for engagement	ABCN schools (2018) (%)	Sample schools (2019) (%)
Increasing student engagement in learning	55	90
Linking learning to real-world problems	34	86
Building student awareness and aspirations about potential careers	60	90
Developing students' understanding of current and future work environments	38	78
Developing students' 'future work' capabilities	31	83
Supporting students to make the transition to work	16	77
Creating employment pathways for students	23	72
Developing professional networks and connections for teachers outside the school	5	48
Developing teachers' understanding of current and future work environments	5	58
Building the capability of school leaders and teachers	6	49
Increasing access to and understanding of state-of-the-art technologies	5	42

Note: Respondents may have identified more than one type of engagement with business. ABCN school respondents (2018) were asked to rank three reasons for engaging with business; sample school respondents (2019) were able to identify all reasons listed.

What types of business do schools engage with?

Between the ABCN schools and the sample schools, there is a marked difference in the type of business that schools engage with. The sample schools are most commonly engaged with local businesses, either private enterprises, not-for-profit organisations or local government. Compared to the sample schools, ABCN schools are more commonly engaged with state or national private enterprises (Figure 1).

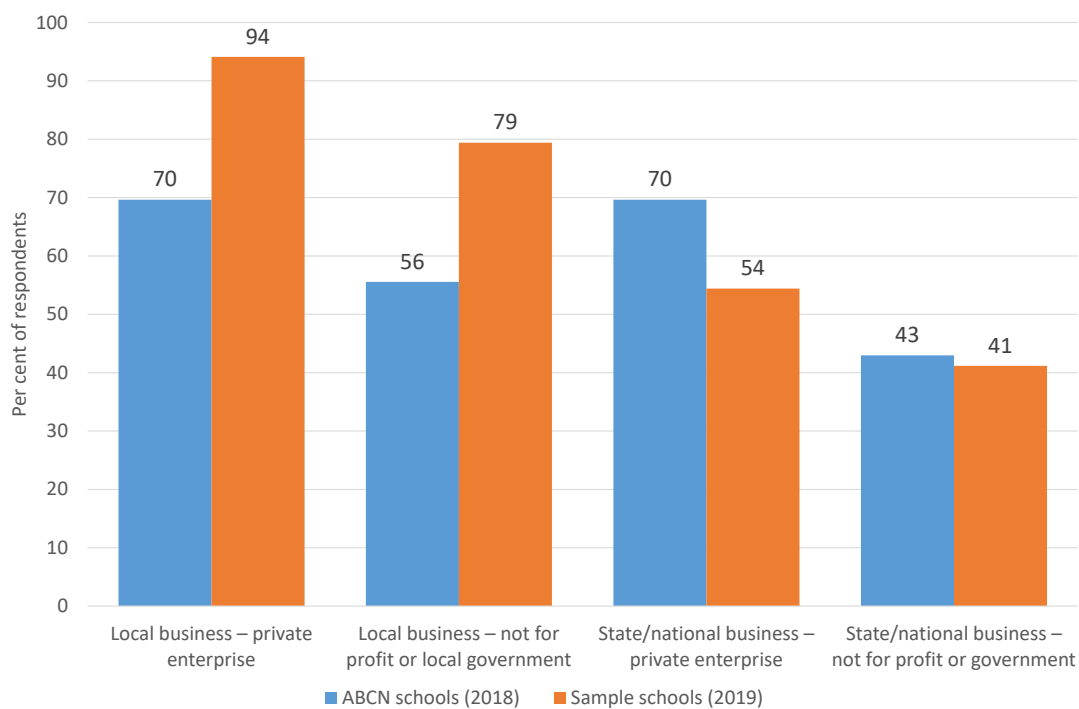


Figure 1 Type of business schools engage with, ABCN schools and sample schools

Note: Respondents may have identified more than one type of business.

Which students are the focus of engagement with business?

There is debate over the age at which advice about careers and students' engagement with business should begin. According to a report in *The Age*, the Career Education Association of Victoria told an inquiry into careers education to introduce laws to force schools to offer careers education as low as Year 3 (Cook, 2018). A similar sentiment has been expressed in the United Kingdom.⁵ We recognise that a school's engagement with business is not the same as careers advice, but there is a close relationship between them, as seen in many of the responses to the surveys of schools and their reasons for engaging with business.

Both ABCN schools and sample schools focussed their engagement on students in Year 10. This is the year level at which young people must choose a pathway to school completion. Senior school certificate studies commence in Year 11; in Victoria, the state's Certificate of Applied Learning (VCAL) begins with studies in Year 11 (although work from Year 10 can be counted toward the certificate).

ABCN schools had Year 7 as a focus year more often than did sample schools, but the percentages were low (16% for ABCN schools and 7% for sample schools). Among sample schools, only three per cent of schools had participation by Year 7 students and six per cent had participation by Year 8 students.

⁵ Education and Employers (2018). Starting early – the importance of career-related learning in primary school. Accessed 19 August 2019 from <https://www.educationandemployers.org/career-related-primary/>.

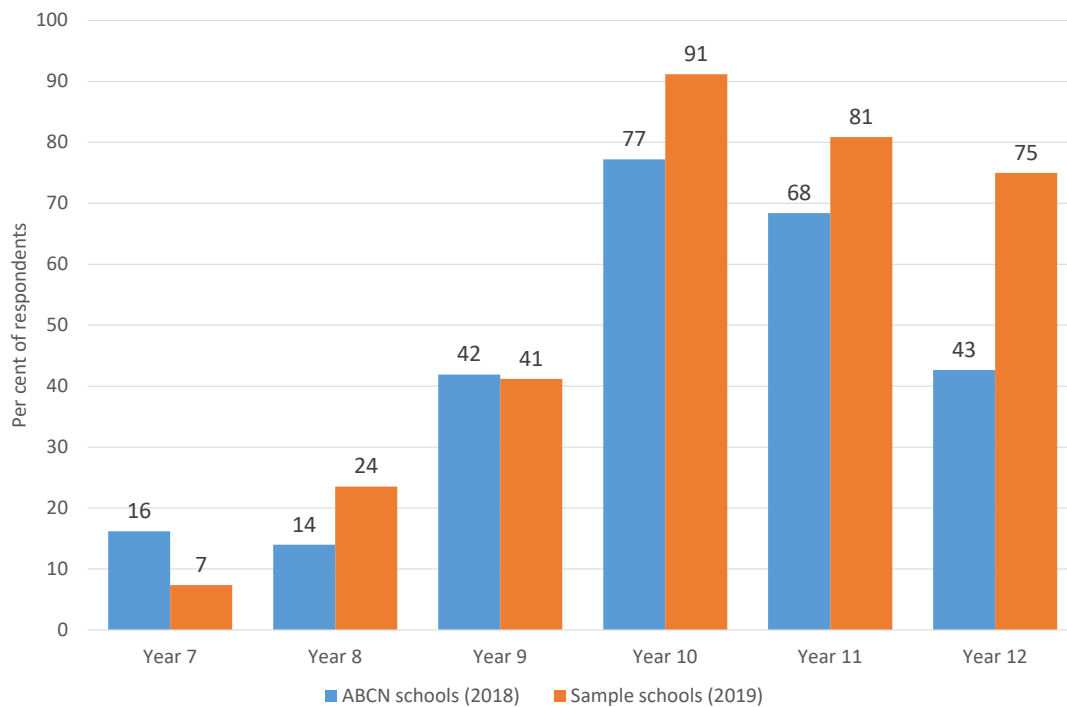


Figure 2 Year level of students involved in business engagement activities, ABCN schools and sample schools

Do schools want to expand their engagement with business?

More than 90 per cent of schools in both groups said they would like to expand or enhance their engagement with business, with most saying they would 'definitely' expand (Figure 3). Only 10 per cent of 2018 pilot schools and six per cent of 2019 sample schools said they did not want to expand, but only by stating that they time was not right for expansion or enhancement. No school in either sample said that they would definitely not want to expand their engagement with business.

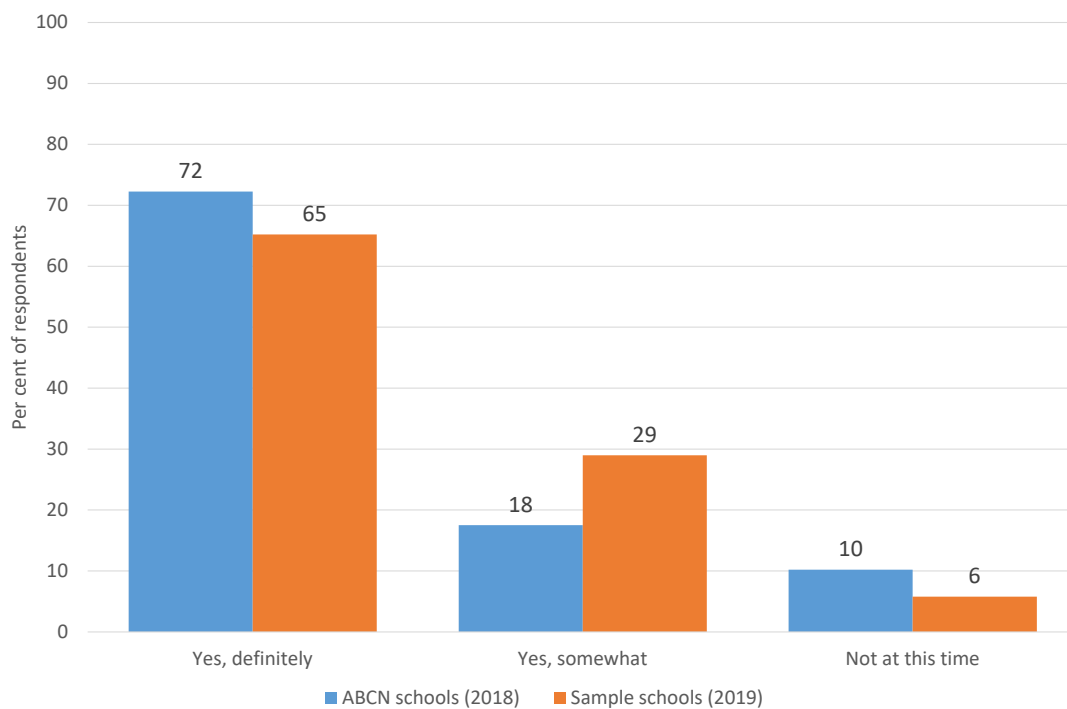


Figure 3 Schools’ interest in expanding or enhancing their engagement with business, ABCN schools and sample schools

In 2019, sample schools were asked how they would like to expand or enhance their engagement with business and were given a number of options. The most common responses were in relation to mentoring (75%), work experience (75%) and workplace visits (73%) (Table 5). Nearly all schools in the 2019 sample were already engaged with business through work experience (see Table 3 above), and more than two-thirds through vocational placements. Many of these schools commented that they were located in non-metropolitan areas where there were not enough of these placements available for their students.

In the ABCN survey, the question of how they would like to expand or enhance their engagement was asked as an open response item. Coding of the responses elicited a similar ranking of areas for expansion as in the 2019 sample, with mentoring mentioned by 25 per cent of schools, with work experience or placements by 22 per cent of schools, and workplace visits by 9 per cent of schools. One quarter of schools mentioned the importance of letting businesses know that schools are willing to engage with them. These schools were already engaged with business in a variety of ways, so it is likely that many had already taken up a wider variety of options compared to the 2019 sample schools.

Table 5 How schools would like to expand or enhance their engagement with business, sample schools only

Type of engagement	Sample (2019) (%)
Work experience	75
Vocational placements	55
STEM-focused programs	63
Career talks, speakers and fairs	70
Mentoring of students by people from business	75
Skill development workshops	55
Workplace visits	73
Enterprise/competition coaching	32
Teacher development	55
Cases from business that link to curriculum	59
Sponsorship	48

Note: Respondents may have identified more than one type of engagement with business.

The following sample of responses from ABCN schools in 2018 offers opportunities for expansion of school–business relationships.

- Engagement through mentoring programs as well as work experience, guest presentations and working alongside students in their curriculum, promote better outcomes for students.
- I would like to see business come into the school more often and not only work with students, but also teachers particularly in the VET area where teachers need to know what is happening in the real world.
- If we are investing energy into these programs we need them to be sustainable and measurable. Working with business to meet specific needs from planning stage up would be of benefit.
- Longer term partnerships with businesses, similar to how we have partnered long term with universities.
- A whole school approach 7-12 for community connections, including local and state wide businesses.

In the 2018 ABCN survey schools ranked the different ways they engaged with business in terms of impact on the students. The activities with the greatest impact, according to these schools, were mentoring of students by people from business, work experience, and vocational placements. Table 3 above showed that ABCN schools’ most common engagement with business was through work experience, career talks, mentoring and vocational placements. Engagement through career talks was not one of the top three activities in terms of impact; rather it was ranked as the fourth highest for impact.

ABCN schools were also asked about how they would like to engage with business. More than one-half (51%) said they would prefer face-to-face contact at workplaces and 40 per cent said they would prefer face-to-face contact at schools. Only a small percentage (8%) said they would prefer to use digital technologies to engage with business.

ABCN schools were also asked whether there were any barriers to digital access for engagement with business. Of those schools that responded, more than one-half (52%) mentioned issues of access and reliability of the technology, including the availability of devices for students. A number of schools cited concerns with timing and organisation. One important consideration, mentioned by three schools, is the ability to ensure that those who work with students have completed appropriate checks, such as working with children and police checks, which are required by anyone who has contact with young people in schools. Approximately 16 per cent of schools saw no technical issues.

Why don't schools want to expand their engagement with business?

Only a small number of schools in both the pilot and sample groups stated they did not want to expand their engagement with business at the time of the survey. One half of the schools stated that they were satisfied with the current level of engagement with business. Schools also stated that there is not enough time or resources—including staff—to expand.

What has surprised schools about working with business?

Respondents in both groups were given the opportunity to provide open comments about what has surprised them about their engagement with business. The vast majority of respondents—86 per cent—were extremely positive about this engagement. Respondents wrote about the willingness of businesses to be involved with schools:

- 'Their willingness to share their career journey and working space with the students'
- 'The willingness of business, preparedness to dedicate staff time and resources to supporting students'
- 'The willingness of mentors to engage with our children and forge relationships where our kids feel valued'
- 'The willingness to get engaged with schools at a non-specific business level'

One common word, used to describe the businesses, was 'generosity':

- 'The generosity of spirit and absolute commitment to making a positive difference to a young person's life'
- 'The generosity of the staff who want to act as reading mentors to our students'
- 'Their generosity of time and interest in the students'

Most respondents also wrote about the impact on students, including the development of students' skills, their confidence in speaking with professionals, their experiences with the 'real world', and their focus on their school studies. A number of respondents cited a number of benefits for students.

- 'The business world adds aspiration, depth and meaning for students who are uncertain of these pathways. Mentors' lives connecting with the students and unlocking their aspirations and possibilities for the future.'
- 'The emphasis on team work is such an important aspect to fit in the corporate field. For the students it's a highlight for them as when at school and sitting for exam it's all about them performing well for themselves. It's always great talking to the students about the importance of soft skills in a workplace and how this can make you a great employee.'

- ‘Students’ great response to seeing a real life workplace and the innovation. Helps to increase their awareness of life outside of school. Students feel like an “adult” for the day.’

Of the small percentage of respondents who offered negative comments, the general issue was the presumed lack of understanding about how schools operate under various curriculum requirements, particularly class hours to meet senior secondary certificates.

- ‘Business tends to have little understanding in how schools work or the challenges that schools face in delivering curriculum or the pressure that teachers face in delivering, assessing and managing students.’
- ‘Sometimes, it is surprising how little business knows about the education system and our requirements under legislation in what is required to be taught.’
- ‘Teachers seldom approve senior students being absent from their classes due to state syllabus demands made on both students and teachers, *i.e.* the large body of subject knowledge to deliver and only a limited time to implement teaching for each subject. Another issue faced at school is daily timetabling, which is highly structured and regimented, and I feel that industry is quite unaware of how timetabling and the structure of the school day affects teacher availability, as all teachers are timetabled on class, and are unable to access funds to cover their classes with another teacher.’

One respondent felt that the broker the school had worked with was more interested in meeting the needs of the company rather than the needs of the school and its students.

We also asked the ABCN schools if they had ever had a negative experience in working with business. While their engagement with business was extensive, only 17 per cent said they had had a negative experience. Around one-third of the negative experiences were a lack of understanding of the nature of disadvantaged students or school procedures; one comment was around hidden sales agenda, one comment was around students being exploited in work experience and a few comments were around the lack of follow-through by business.

Only a small number school expressed any concerns about how they have engaged with business, but the comments that express these concerns indicate areas that could undermine a successful school–business relationship. And regardless of some negative experiences, the majority of these schools have chosen to continue to engage with business.

Discussion

This research was designed to identify whether schools want to engage with business and, if so, how they wish to do so. A questionnaire was administered in 2018, sent to schools that had already worked with ABCN. The same questionnaire, as well as a shortened version, were then sent to samples of schools in 2019 to elicit similar information from schools that were not associated with ABCN. The samples were drawn from the ACER sample frame, with a focus on government schools in three states: New South Wales, Queensland and Victoria.

More than 90 per cent of schools are currently engaged with business in some way. For nearly all of these schools, this engagement comes in the form of work experience or vocational placements for students. But engagement with business should be more than work experience or vocational placements. Businesses can provide mentoring to students, teachers and school leaders, and help to develop students' life skills that assist in fitting in to the workplace.

The data collected for this project indicate that schools that are working with ABCN and other brokers are more likely to engage in a wider range of activities than are schools not working with a broker. Compare to other schools, schools working with ABCN currently have much greater access to business people who provide mentoring to students and teachers. Schools that engage with business on their own—as many of the 2019 sample schools do—do not have such access. They tend to work less frequently with national businesses, which have the resources to offer more in the way of mentoring or learning opportunities. They also have fewer opportunities to see engagement with business as more than work experience or vocational placements.

The difference between responses from ABCN schools in 2018 and responses from the sample schools in 2019 indicates the value of the work of ABCN and other school–business brokers. That value is in assisting schools to understand what opportunities are available from engagement with business, and providing a wide range of these opportunities. As noted in the introduction, research has shown that the wider the range of opportunities for students, the more successful the engagement with business.

Sample schools are less involved in programs that involve mentoring of students and teachers, which is a strong focus of ABCN programs. In some ways, sample schools see more of the operational benefits of engaging with business, such as finding placements for students and building student awareness of work environments; there is less focus on helping students prepare for the 'soft skills' of work. Mentors can provide insights into the social aspects of the workplace, offering students support for careers, not just work.

The reduced focus in sample schools, especially those where work experience is the main engagement with business, can also be linked to some of the open responses given by educators when asked what had surprised them about working with business. One common theme in those responses was how surprised educators were that mentors were willing to share details of their lives. Such sharing gives meaning to students, showing that work is more than just a job.

A number of recent reports, such as those by the Foundation for Young Australians (FYA; 2018), Global Access Partners (GAP; 2019) and Skillsroad (2018), have recommended improvement in career advice for young people in schools, particularly in relation to

employment and the ‘new reality of work’. As part of a new career education strategy, FYA (2018, p. 31) recommends:

Careers learning activities and work exposure opportunities provided in ways that young people want to learn: through experience, immersion and with peers, both in and outside of the classroom.

The research contained in this report indicates that many schools, by engaging with business, offer students experiences that can ease the transition from school to the workforce.

The lessons to be learned from this research are as follows:

Schools want to engage more with business.

By engaging with business, schools wish to build student awareness and aspirations about potential careers, increase student engagement in learning, develop students’ understanding of current and future work environments, develop students’ ‘future work’ capabilities and link learning to real-world problems.

Schools want to engage with business both broadly and in-depth for more personalised learning opportunities and are open to a variety of opportunities.

Schools are open to a wide range of interactions. They see that a variety of opportunities can cater for the many different needs of their students. Many schools talked about just wanting more interaction across the board when asked how they wanted to expand their interactions with business. Some opportunities, however, require more concentrated engagement, such as targeted work placements and vocational opportunities.

Engagement with schools builds a positive perception of business in the community.

Schools were generally positively surprised in their interactions with business, and given the scale of the interactions that some schools have had, very few reported any negative experiences. The ‘generosity’ of business and their volunteers was repeatedly commended.

Some schools still need assistance in establishing engagement with business.

Schools with limited engagement with business—particularly those in the 2019 sample compared to the ABCN schools—do not realise what can be achieved in a relationship of the type available through ABCN and other brokers. When a school–business engagement is little more than work experience—which is often the case when schools organise their own contacts—it is difficult for schools to imagine other possibilities from such engagement. In this sense, schools ‘don’t know what they don’t know’ (to quote Donald Rumsfeld⁶). Further, that limited engagement more likely than not focusses on the ‘hard’ skills of work, rather than opportunities that may be gained through ongoing engagement with business.

⁶ Donald Rumsfeld was the US Secretary of Defense under President George W. Bush, from 2001 to 2006. He was describing intelligence available (and not available) to the US in the months after attacks on the World Trade Center in New York in 2001.

‘Reports that say that something hasn’t happened are always interesting to me, because as we know, there are known knowns; there are things we know we know. We also know there are known unknowns; that is to say we know there are some things we do not know. But there are also unknown unknowns—the ones we don’t know we don’t know.’ (12 February 2002; emphasis added)

This suggests that all schools need to understand that a school–business engagement is more than the provision of work experience or vocational placements; it is an opportunity for students to learn about the world after school.

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