

# VOICE OF OUR YOUTH

LESSONS FROM REMOTE  
LEARNING

**“My life during this time was a really big roller coaster! It was filled with ups & downs! There were lots of twists and turns! But this roller coaster event will go in history...”**

In the last two weeks of Term 2 2020, Campaspe Cohuna LLEN in partnership with Campaspe Shire collected information from schools and students in the Shire of Campaspe on their experiences of remote and flexible learning. We used focus groups, surveys and stories written by students, with more than 430 students involved. Our thanks to the students and schools who participated and shared their experiences with us. This is a summary of what we gathered.

## **Engagement and Reach**



Engaged 12% of secondary school students in Campaspe



60 students participated in one of four focus groups



6 students contributed stories



374 students completed a survey about their experiences

## **The good, the not so good, and things to improve**

Less distraction, less disruption from other students - this was a common theme where students found that they were able to complete set tasks in a much more timely fashion than if they were in a classroom environment, but were still able to interact with and seek support from their peers via online chat and video groups. However, some students had to deal with distractions at home, particularly from younger siblings.

**“Being left to do the work at my own pace, without the normal class distractions, allowed me to complete much more work than I normally would.”**

Working at own pace - students who were provided with weekly lesson outlines for classes appreciated the opportunity to work ahead or catch-up depending on their circumstances. It was noted that students who had classes where online meets were lengthy, felt that they were constantly behind in the work as the next classes for the day moved very quickly.

Students at some schools were provided with ‘free periods’ where they were able to catch-up on outstanding work, or move ahead at their own pace, which was seen as a very positive outcome.

**“the internet around the country is less than reliable, and some mornings, oh did you know it. Join a Teams meeting -> drop out -> join back -> dropout again -> repeat”**

Internet access and suitable devices - issues around internet connectivity and access to devices were raised on numerous occasions.

Some students who required devices and mobile data were not able to obtain these until the final weeks of remote learning. This caused some angst as students were unable to join class meetings and watch interactive videos that were required for their classes, despite being provided with hard-copy versions of assessments. The majority of students we spoke to used the internet at some stage during remote learning.

On line platforms - The complexity and variety of on-line platforms and their purposes were not well understood by students and parents. In focus groups students complained of having to access more than 20 platforms/websites/on line resources. Students needed help to navigate but couldn't adequately explain them to parents. And parents usually had no familiarity at all. There are some benefits in using Teams and Google as some parents have now used these for work, rather than specialised education platforms - these certainly have their place but are foreign to everyone outside of schools.

Teacher access - if remote learning is following the school timetable teachers should be accessible during classes, and students need a variety of ways of interacting with the teacher - face to face via technology, email, messaging. Teachers need to be able to respond in real time to the majority of questions.

This demonstrates that teachers care about teaching and about their students. After poor internet access, delays in responses from teachers was the next biggest cause of frustration for students.

**“there were challenges with Microsoft Teams that students struggled with during this time, such as internet connection issues, not being able to find resources and files, and some files getting deleted unexpectedly”**

## **Things that helped**

In some cases, students had been paired with a teacher of their choice, who they felt comfortable with, and were able to contact them to discuss issues – whether they be related to school work, home life or issues with other teachers – this was seen as being invaluable to their success during remote learning.

Some students expressed satisfaction at being able to do extra of elements of personal interest. They could do extra or higher-level work in a subject. Lower years in secondary school gave examples of computer coding exercises where some enjoyed the activity and completed many activities, and others disliked coding.

Some work is well suited to independent learning, and being self-paced. Some work is not – such as practical and team activities. Homeroom structures are helpful to set up for the day – explaining what is happening today, any news, any updates. It is a check-in for everyone which students appreciated.

Students valued returning to school and value the face to face time with their teachers.

It is an opportunity to strengthen the student/teacher relationship.

Some students noted that their relationship with some teachers that may have been strained prior, improved greatly during remote learning. They commented on the fact that some teachers were more empathetic to students if they were struggling with timelines, and offered support to ensure that they were able to successfully complete their tasks, and noted that the improved relationship has continued since school has returned.

**“As Year 12’s we were also able to see how much our teachers really went over and beyond to help us during such a critical time.”**

Students can see the value in having some on line learning available, now that face to face learning has resumed – to catch up on work, or for those who do not cope well in a busy classroom.

Some students appreciated being able to fully utilise their IT equipment, and saw value in having it, as opposed to much of their classroom learning which is completed from text books and written tasks.

## **And not so helpful**

The majority of students emphatically do not choose remote learning as a preference. Most are clearly saying they do not want to go back to it. A small number are now struggling to return to face to face learning. Schools are reporting that some students have not returned at all.

Year 7 students were particularly affected, as they were only just settling into secondary school and forming new friendship groups when schools abruptly changed to remote learning.

Students were wary of activities like bring your pet which they saw as silly and time-wasting.

Students in a class turning off cameras and mics is helpful for bandwidth and reducing noise, but means the teacher has nothing to bounce off. It also means that a student turning their mic on to ask a question is effectively standing up in front of the whole class – and many won’t do that. Focus groups talked about their reluctance to ask questions in this way. Even in classes where the teacher remained accessible in a Google Classroom, students would go back on line to ask a question and feel unable to because one or more other students were “hanging around” in the same virtual space.

# Recommendations

Streamlined on-line platforms – use fewer platforms and have them more integrated, so that students are not having to work across multiple structures, in particular ensuring that only one platform is used for communicating plans, and providing and submitting work.

Student PD in use of selected platforms. Schools which used specific platforms already for some class activities found the transition to remote learning easier, when it was on the familiar platforms.

Clear structure and plans for students – purpose, work required, outcomes required, timelines. Students who experienced this appreciated it and want to see it continue. The structure helped them see where the work fitted in and what the objectives are, and enabled them to work ahead if they chose to.

Teacher PD in on-line delivery techniques and use of selected platforms. A different set of skills are required for on-line teaching. With remote learning teachers lose the critical interaction that lets them know how students are responding in real time.

Small groups on line with a teacher may be helpful. Students are wary of asking questions in an on-line forum where others can hear (and judge) them. Trying to ask questions via email or message can be challenging for students – how do they describe in writing where they need help? Teachers and students cannot meet one on one, for legal reasons. But a small group of three or four students that are friends, or they feel comfortable working with, may be able to interact better with a teacher. Teachers will know the groups that operate in the physical classroom so can set up similar in the on-line environment.

Mixed delivery for some classes – self paced elements, individual work, group work, prac work, whole of class activities. This is similar to what you would expect in an adult learning environment. Variety of ways of remote learning – not all screen based. Some students talked about struggling with this. They couldn't sit in front of a screen all day, some complained of headaches (this could be bad posture, unsuitable furniture, or they need glasses). Schools posted on social media some good examples of practical work to demonstrate theory, some of which was done outside.

# Opportunities

Remote learning has been an opportunity to develop employability skills – self management, organisational, technology, communication. These skills could be included in assessments. It also offers the opportunity to customise learning to suit learning styles, abilities, interests, strengths and weaknesses.

## Key points



### Students value:

- teachers who care about teaching
- structure and planning so they can see how today's (and this week's) work fits into their learning
- purpose to the work they are assigned



### Students prefer:

- face to face learning
- variety



### Students need:

- reliable internet access
- technology platforms that are integrated and simple to navigate and that they have some familiarity with



### Teachers need:

- ways to connect and engage on line
- technology skills to make effective use of platforms