

Digital Learning 2025: Celebrating our successes

The year is 2025. As our city celebrates with a week of Learning Days, it is time to reflect on the successes of the last five years. We have worked collectively to develop a digitally enabled city where all learners have equity of access and are using technology to enhance knowledge, pathways and wellness. This didn't happen by accident.

As you remember, in 2020 the world was rocked by a major pandemic. As a response to COVID19 the New Zealand Ministry of Education worked with schools to ensure that every school student had access to a digital device in the home and that their homes had internet access. This was a huge undertaking, and while not perfect it set the foundation for students to have more agency over their learning and to grow skills in self management.

When schools returned onsite they were faced with a dilemma. Should they call in all the devices or should devices stay in the hands of students? How would they work differently to support learners who had grown agency and self management skills? Our schools throughout Christchurch Ōtautahi decided collectively that they would leave devices in the hands of students for the remainder of Term 2, to see what would happen. Information was collated and clear opportunities were identified and mapped by the city. Schools developed a plan to keep devices with students on a permanent basis for those who had no access typically.

They made these decisions after seeing the positive benefits for equity and drew on some key research such as:

- A 2016 declaration by the United Nations that the [internet was a basic human right](#) which plays an important role in civil participation.
- A 2017 report from Tokona te Raki, the Māori Futures Collective [Change Agenda: Income Equity for Māori](#) which identified the income gap for Māori as \$2.6 billion/year and which would likely move to \$4.3 billion/year by 2040 unless action was taken. This did not take into account the effects of a world impacted by COVID19.
- Research by the 2020 [Christchurch Economic Recovery Forum](#) showed an increase of 24% in those receiving the job seeker allowance in March-April 2020 and a prediction that impact would be felt most amongst lower socio-economic groups, leading to greater poverty and inequality.

A working party was formed to keep momentum going. It was decided that initially every Year 12-13 student without access to their own digital device would be given one at the start of the 2021 year. All homes without internet access would have the provision based on set criteria developed.

Feedback from the prototype was largely positive. Students were now able to access technology for their learning and schools continued to use the skills and tools seen as beneficial to keep from the rāhui experience. Digital capabilities of teachers and students were enhanced.

In 2022 the project was rolled out to all secondary schools and by the end of 2024 all students from year 5 upwards had technology in their homes and could access the internet to continue learning. A plan was developed with schools, Ministry of Education, iwi, hapū, businesses and community groups to design future focused learning opportunities and pathways so that the technology truly became a mechanism for transformation. Groups worked in hubs to support the needs of those most at risk. Students were involved in tuakana-teina projects helping their parents and whānau to gain digital skills and to access learning and information online.

A constant renewal programme supported by businesses and community groups meant that benefits continued.

The growth in the city's digital capabilities means that Ōtautahi Christchurch has now repositioned itself as a centre for digital businesses and entrepreneurial start ups. In 2025 it is a major exporter of knowledge and has gained a reputation as a [learning city](#). ChristchurchNZ has been able to market the city through the [Supernodes](#) it had established, with special pathways and opportunities offered for all students. A set of city wide microcredentials have become a well respected addition to students' learning portfolios and are used by other cities as an exemplar.

- What would it take to make this scenario come alive?
- What would ensure this didn't work?
- What are some other possibilities?
- How might we grow seeds of change?
- What are the pockets of the future that already exist?

[This *reflection from the future* was developed as a provocation to open conversation. For more information visit <https://www.thinkbeyond.co.nz/blog/digital-learning-2025/> or contact Cheryl Doig at c.doig@thinkbeyond.co.nz

