



20 JAN, 2020

Get our kids ready for digital future

West Australian, Perth

Page 1 of 2

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Think about the devices and technology we take for granted in 2020 that we didn't have in 2010 — iPads, self-driving vehicles, artificial intelligence, laser eye surgery, robotic vacuums and Fitbits, to name a few.

And I'm sure this decade will continue to deliver even more high-tech inventions.

As highlighted at last year's Resources Technology Showcase, the mining and energy sectors are at the cutting edge of innovation and technology, whether it's through the use of drones or autonomous haul trucks, drills and underwater vehicles.

For the almost 5000 students who attended the showcase, it was an exciting experience that might lead some of them to pursue a career in mining or energy.

The student feedback survey from the showcase event revealed 92 per cent of teachers and 68 per cent of students who attended now had a better understanding of the resources sector after attending the showcase.

And 66 per cent of students said they were more likely to be interested in science, technology, engineering and maths subjects at school.

It was alongside the showcase that the Digital Technologies pilot was launched by Premier Mark McGowan, Education Minister Sue Ellery and me.

In an Australian first, robotics, coding and automation are just some of the skills the students, who are part of

this year's pilot program will be taught. To put it into context, digital technologies are seen as the most exciting change to the school curriculum in a generation.

The Digital Technologies pilot was funded and developed through the Pilbara Collaboration Charter, signed by the Premier, Chamber of Minerals and Energy WA, and members BHP, Chevron Australia, CITIC Pacific Mining, Fortescue Metals Group, Rio Tinto Iron Ore, Roy Hill, Woodside and Yara Pilbara. The pilot program will be rolled out to 28 schools in the Pilbara at the start of the upcoming first term.

If successful, it could then be offered to hundreds of thousands of students from pre-primary to Year 10 across WA and will include new digital technology challenges in automation and data science.

Digital technologies will help give more students a greater understanding

about the skills and capabilities required for the high-tech jobs of the future, within the resources sector.

And because it offers such a diverse range of careers, the resources sector is now one of the largest employers in WA. In the 2018-19 financial year, the sector employed an average of more than 124,000 people — 12,000 more people than the previous year.

Driven by a number of major projects, this figure is higher than at any point in WA's recorded history. By comparison, 11 years ago the sector was employing fewer than 70,00 people.

WA's resources sector is also punching well above the national average by employing a much higher proportion of workers at 6.7 per cent, more than three times higher than the



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national average of less than 2 per cent. We hope those figures continue to get even stronger in 2020.

Paul Everingham is chief executive of the Chamber of Minerals and Energy of WA



The Resources Technology Showcase was a huge success. Picture: Matt Jelonek