

KEY FUTURE SKILLS FOR HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS IN AUSTRALIA:

2025

THEIR IMPORTANCE FOR EQUITY AND FUTURE EMPLOYMENT



Table of Contents

Contents	Page Number
Introduction	3-4
Literature Review	5-7
Critical Appraisal of Themes	8
Synthesis to Research Question	8
Methodology and Ethical Consideration	9-10
Conclusion	11
Recommendation	11-12
References	13-14

Introduction

The rapid transformation of economies, technologies and societies has created unprecedented challenges and opportunities for young people (Deloitte, 2025a; OECD, 2024).

High school students must now be equipped with a broad set of transferable competencies that extend beyond academic knowledge to adapt to globalisation, automation and social change (World Economic Forum [WEF], 2025; OECD, 2025).

These key future skills encompass artificial intelligence literacy (Deloitte, 2025a; WEF, 2025; OECD, 2019), green transition and sustainability skills such as environmental stewardship, renewable-energy engineering and climate-change adaptation (WEF, 2025); cognitive and socio-emotional skills like critical thinking, problem solving, creativity, communication, collaboration, emotional intelligence, adaptability and leadership (Deloitte, 2025b; OECD, 2024), digital and information literacy (OECD, 2025) and human-centred capabilities such as resilience, flexibility, ethical judgment and cross-cultural awareness (Deloitte, 2025b; OECD, 2022).

Despite policies promoting inclusion, educational outcomes in Australia remain strongly tied to socio-economic background. Students from disadvantaged communities face reduced access to higher education, employment pathways and skill-building opportunities (OECD, 2024). For these students, gaining future skills is essential to breaking cycles of inequity and securing meaningful futures (Project Nascent, 2022; Maker & Bahar, 2024).

The Australian educational charity, A Start in Life, commissioned Project Nascent (Fleet, 2022) to identify the most relevant skills for high school students entering the modern workforce.

The report outlines two key skill categories:

- Learning Skills: creativity, collaboration, communication, information literacy, critical thinking, problem solving and digital literacy.
- Behavioral Skills: social and cross-cultural skills, flexibility and adaptability skills and leadership.

Project Nascent also highlights the urgent need to equip financially disadvantaged Australian students with these competencies to thrive in a rapidly transforming economy.

Research Questions:

1. What are the most essential skills high school students need to enter and remain competitive in the modern workforce?
2. Are the findings from A Start in Life's Project Nascent (2022) still relevant in 2025?

Objectives:

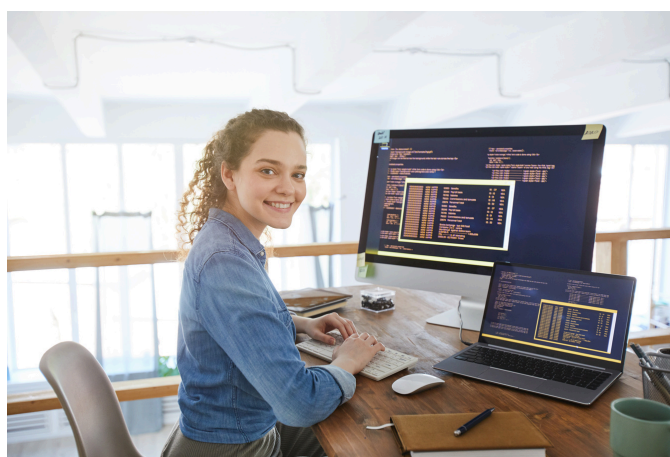
- To define and identify the most relevant future skills for Australian high school students.
- To examine the significance of these skills for student development and equity.
- To analyse their importance in relation to Australia's current and future workforce needs.
- To assess whether the findings from Project Nascent (2022) remain applicable in 2025.

Literature Review

Importance of Key Future Skills for Student Development and Equity

Future skills are vital, not only for employability, but also for student development, wellbeing, and equity (OECD, 2024). Research shows that “social-emotional skills, such as resilience and empathy, predict long-term outcomes but remain unevenly distributed, disadvantaging lower socio-economic groups. Addressing these inequities through skill development is therefore a critical equity strategy (OECD, 2024).

Maker and Bahar (2024) argue that “communities cannot afford to lose the talents of any young people” (p. 28), urging a focus on creativity, collaboration, and communication in inclusive classrooms. Their findings show that all students, regardless of background, benefit from opportunities to develop these skills. Similarly, Nycum and Mullen (2024) identify adaptability and digital literacy as crucial to preventing youth exclusion from the labour market.

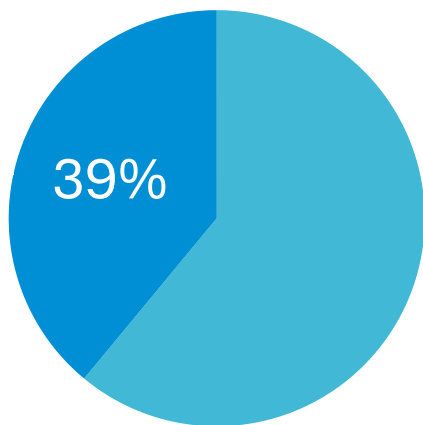


Future Skills
support students'
development,
wellbeing and
equity



Labour Market and Future Employment Demands

39% of current core skills will be disrupted by 2030



Labour markets worldwide are undergoing rapid disruption due to automation, artificial intelligence and green and digital transitions (WEF, 2025; Deloitte, 2025; OECD, 2025). The WEF (2025) predicts that 39% of current core skills will be disrupted by 2030, with employers prioritising analytical thinking, resilience, leadership and creativity.

In Australia, Jobs and Skills Australia (2024) highlights transferable skills such as problem-solving, collaboration and adaptability critical across growth industries such as the digital economy, care sector and renewable energy. Deloitte (2025a) further emphasises that human–AI collaboration demands digital fluency integrated with ethical judgement and creative problem-solving.

OECD (2022, 2025) confirms that while automation replaces routine tasks, human capabilities such as problem-solving, empathy, and adaptability remain non-automatable, making them central to employability. For Australian students, these skills are indispensable for future workforce participation and economic resilience.

Creativity, Critical Thinking and Human-Centred Capabilities

Creativity and critical thinking consistently emerge as core competencies for the future. Park et al. (2021) found that they are mutually reinforcing and essential for navigating uncertainty and complexity. Maker and Bahar (2024) extend this, showing that creativity, collaboration and communication drive inclusive talent development.

OECD (2024) adds that curiosity and persistence enhance engagement and outcomes, especially when combined with critical thinking. Deloitte's Human Capital Trends 2025 report identifies creativity, adaptability, and empathy as essential for complementing technological systems (Deloitte, 2025b).



Together, these findings indicate that creativity and other human-centred capabilities those that cannot be automated are the most enduring and valuable competencies for the future of work.



Critical Appraisal of Themes

Across the literature, there is strong consensus on the “4Cs”: critical thinking, creativity, collaboration and communication, supported by adaptability, sustainability, resilience and digital literacy (OECD, 2019). However, differences exist in emphasis: Project Nascent and OECD focus on equity and social-emotional development, while WEF and Deloitte highlight industry demand. Although empirical studies demonstrate measurable gains in creativity and critical thinking (Maker & Bahar, 2024; Park et al., 2021), longitudinal Australian data linking skill development to employment outcomes remains limited.

Synthesis and Connection to Research Problem

The literature shows that future skills serve dual purposes: (1) enabling equitable student development and resilience and (2) aligning education with workforce needs. For Australian students, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds, these competencies are vital for overcoming inequity and securing meaningful employment.

By integrating global workforce insights with equity-focused approaches, this research supports organisations like A Start in Life in designing programs that prepare students for both social participation and economic opportunity.

Methodology and Ethical Considerations

Both qualitative and quantitative data were synthesised from academic literature and organisational reports

This study employed a mixed-methods design drawing exclusively on secondary sources. Both qualitative and quantitative data were synthesised from academic literature and organisational reports to provide a comprehensive analysis.

Sampling

A purposive sampling approach was used to select relevant literature from peer-reviewed journals (e.g., Australasian Journal of Gifted Education, Frontiers in Psychology, VASCD Journal), Australian databases (e.g., Informit), and research repositories (e.g., ResearchGate). Reports from reputable organisations including OECD, WEF, Deloitte, McKinsey & Company, and Jobs and Skills Australia were also included.

Search terms included future skills, job readiness, adaptability, lifelong learning, equity, creativity, critical thinking and digital literacy. Of more than 15,000 initial publications, 25 were shortlisted and 15 were identified as highly relevant.

Scope and Limitations

This research focuses on high school students; findings may not generalise to primary or tertiary contexts. Reliance on organisational reports may introduce bias, as such sources can reflect institutional priorities.

Ethical Considerations

As this study used only secondary data, there was no direct involvement of human participants. Nonetheless, ethical integrity was maintained through:

- Accurate citation and avoidance of plagiarism.
- Critical evaluation of source credibility.
- Transparent interpretation of evidence.
- Recognition of limitations and potential bias in organisational sources.

Conclusion

Key future skills are essential not only for employability, but also for adaptability, wellbeing and civic participation. Evidence from OECD, WEF, Deloitte, and Jobs and Skills Australia confirms that the competencies identified in A Start in Life's Project Nascent (2022) remain highly relevant in 2025. Its emphasis on learning skills (creativity, collaboration, communication, information literacy, critical thinking, problem solving, digital literacy) and behavioural skills (social and cross-cultural awareness, flexibility, adaptability, leadership) continues to align with global trends. However, recent developments position digital literacy, AI collaboration, resilience, emotional intelligence, green transition and sustainability and lifelong learning as even more central.

Recommendations

Project Nascent can expand its framework to explicitly integrate:

Resilience and Emotional Intelligence

- Developing students' capacity to manage disruption and build healthy, adaptive relationships (OECD, 2024; Deloitte, 2025).

Green Transition and Sustainability



- Preparing students to engage in low-carbon industries and sustainable practices (OECD & European Commission, 2025).

Digital Literacy and AI Fluency

- Enabling learners to evaluate, navigate, and use AI systems responsibly (OECD & European Commission, 2025).



Human-AI Collaboration

- Equipping students to work productively with AI tools using ethical judgement and creativity (Akinragbe, 2024; Deloitte, 2025).

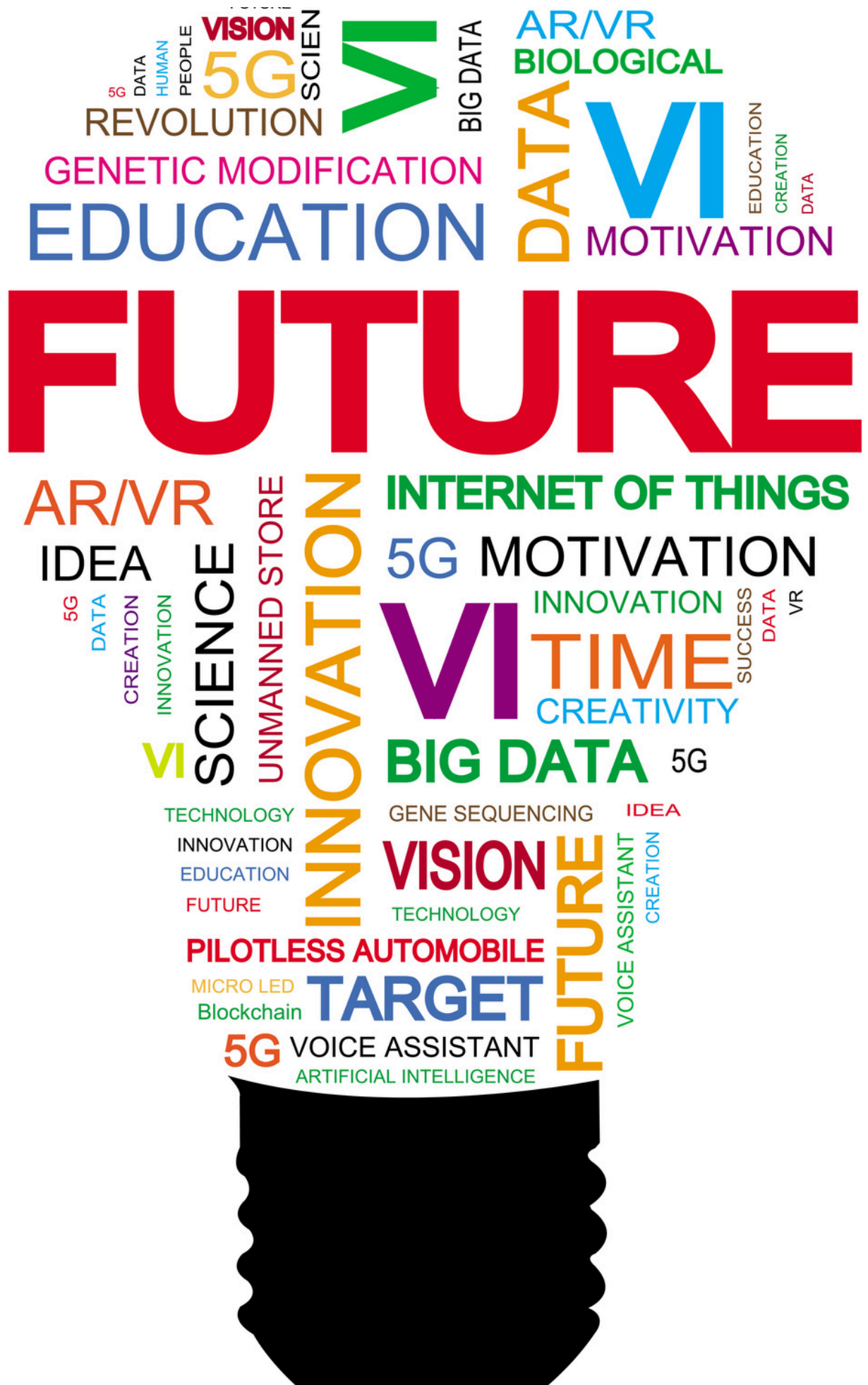
Lifelong Learning Mindsets

- Embedding continuous upskilling pathways to maintain adaptability in evolving industries (McKinsey & Company, 2025).

By integrating these areas, A Start in Life can further strengthen its skill development programs, ensuring they remain relevant, engaging and transformative for students navigating the AI-driven economy of 2025 and beyond.

References

- Akinnagbe, O. (2024). Human-AI collaboration: Enhancing productivity and decision-making. *International Journal of Education, Management, and Technology*, 2(3), 387–417.
https://www.researchgate.net/publication/386225744_Human-AI_Collaboration_Enhancing_Productivity_and_Decision-Making
- Deloitte. (2025a). Tech trends 2025. Deloitte Insights.
https://www.deloitte.com/content/dam/assets-zone1/au/en/docs/industries/technology-media-telecommunications/2025/DI_Tech-trends-2025.pdf
- Deloitte. (2025b). Global human capital trends. Deloitte Insights.
https://www.deloitte.com/content/dam/insights/articles/2025/glob187692_global-human-capital-trends/DI_2025-Global-Human-Capital-Trends.pdf
- Jobs and Skills Australia. (2024). Better together: The jobs and skills report 2024.
<https://www.jobsandskills.gov.au/publications/jobs-and-skills-report-2024>
- Maker, J., & Bahar, K. (2024). Talent development in inclusive classrooms: An analysis of student growth. *Australasian Journal of Gifted Education*, 33(2), 28–56. <https://search.informit.org.exelsia.idm.oclc.org/doi/10.3316/informit.T2024100200009200958463598>
- McKinsey & Company. (2025). We're all techies now: Digital skill building for the future. McKinsey & Company. <https://www.mckinsey.com/capabilities/people-and-organizational-performance/our-insights/we-are-all-techies-now-digital-skill-building-for-the-future#/>
- Nycum, J. F., & Mullen, C. A. (2024). Preparing high school youth for 21st-century success. *VASCD Journal*.
<https://www.researchgate.net/publication/386424700>
- OECD & European Commission. (2025). Empowering learners for the age of AI: An AI literacy framework for primary and secondary education (Review draft). OECD, Paris. https://ailiteracyframework.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/05/AILitFramework_ReviewDraft.pdf
- OECD. (2019). Future of education and skills 2030: OECD learning compass 2030 – A series of concept notes. OECD Publishing. https://www.oecd.org/content/dam/oecd/en/about/projects/edu/education-2040/1-1-learning-compass/OECD_Learning_Compass_2030_Concept_Note_Series.pdf
- OECD. (2022). What skills and abilities can automation technologies replicate and what does it mean for workers? OECD Publishing. <https://doi.org/10.1787/646aad77-en>
- OECD. (2024). Social and emotional skills for better lives: Findings from the OECD survey on social and emotional skills 2023. OECD Publishing. <https://doi.org/10.1787/35ca7b7c-en>
- OECD. 2025. Education at a Glance 2025: OECD Indicators. OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/1c0d9c79-en>.
- Park, J. H., Niu, W., Cheng, L., & Allen, H. (2021). Fostering creativity and critical thinking in college: A cross-cultural investigation. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 12, <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2021.760351>
- Project Nascent. (2022). Project Nascent Skills V2. A Start in Life.
- World Economic Forum. (2025). Future of jobs report 2025. World Economic Forum.
<https://www.weforum.org/publications/the-future-of-jobs-report-2025/>



Acknowledgement

We sincerely thank A Start in Life for the opportunity to complete our placement and conduct this research, supporting the organisation's mission to empower young Australians through education.

Our heartfelt appreciation goes to Kathleen Donohoe (Chief Executive Officer) for her leadership and support; to our Project Supervisor, Brianna Ott (Student Assistance Program Manager), for her guidance and encouragement; and all staff members of A Start in Life for their continuous support.

We are grateful for access to Project Nascent (2022) as our primary research source.

We also thank Excelsia University College, our research instructors, and the Field Education team for their continual guidance and support throughout our placement journey.

Nabila Tasnia and Ruchika Ghimire
Master of Social Work (Qualifying)
Excelsia University College