

# COMMISSIONER'S DIGITAL CHALLENGE

## COMMISSIONER CONNOLLY'S MESSAGE IN 2020



My role as South Australia's Commissioner for Children and Young People is guided by the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, the core international treaty which sets out the civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights that belong to all children.

### **Why a Digital Challenge for South Australian children?**

Over the past three years, I've spoken with thousands of children across South Australia to find out what they think is important and what they would change if they could.

Hearing these direct voices of children and young people led me to develop and implement a strategic plan that has four key focus areas. One of these is to 'engage and empower young digital citizens'.

South Australian children asked me for ways to be creative now, ways to learn what they need to know now, and ways to start preparing for the jobs of the future – and so my Commissioner's Digital Challenge was born.

I want children and young people in South Australia to be informed, skilled and fearless in their approach and participation in the digital world. I want them to be confident they have the knowledge they need to be engaged and empowered digital citizens.

### **Bridging gaps**

Children and young people born in this millennium are growing up in a digital world.

On the one hand this is changing the way they view their world, how they access information and services, gain knowledge, form opinions and participate in the things that matter to them. On the other, it involves ensuring all children and young people have access to digital technology, and are being taught the skills and information they need to feel digitally empowered and not digitally threatened or left behind.

Beyond mere access, children and young people need inclusive active opportunities to interact with and create digital technology, to understand digital thinking, and to develop their digital literacy skills. This is what will enable them to operate confidently as digital citizens, reaching their full potential through digital empowerment.

Let's open up to the possibilities for technology to make a more humane world – a more inclusive and democratic world. By working together to bridge the social and economic gaps we know exist across our metropolitan, regional and remote communities we can all help to achieve this aim.

# “My annual Digital Challenge is about increasing digital opportunity for the children and young people of South Australia.”

SA Commissioner for Children and Young People, Helen Connolly

## A digital learning journey

In its inaugural year my ‘Learn to Speak Robot’ Challenge was completed by an estimated 19,026 South Australian children and young people involving 217 schools and 31 libraries and Scouts and Guides groups. In 2020, in addition to ‘Learn to Speak Robot’, I am launching a new challenge: Space to Dream. I’m also opening up both challenges to children and young people of all ages. There will be further challenges joining the mix in future years as my digital learning journey continues to expand. Next year I’ll launch my systems thinking challenge, and beyond that I’ll be exploring digital literacy and digital citizenship challenges.

## Learn to Speak Robot

Learn to Speak Robot is a coding and computational thinking challenge that recurs each year. It includes activities from Code.org’s Hour of Code, Gok Learning, Microsoft’s MakeCode, Digital Technologies Hub, CS Unplugged and Code Club Australia. Most activities use computers but some only require paper, pencils, sticky notes, white boards, pebbles, chalk and beads to learn the basics of thinking like a computer. Children completing this challenge earn a Learn to Speak Robot Certificate of Achievement. Schools submitting their Challenge Completion Form are also in the running for digital rewards (kindly made available through Challenge partners).

## Space to Dream

Space to Dream is a Mars-themed design thinking challenge being launched this year. Just like Learn to Speak Robot it will be available on an annual recurring basis. Space to Dream enables children to design their own ‘invention’ applying the ‘Space to Dream’ design thinking process. Children can create their design using free 3D design tools from Challenge partners Makers Empire, or hand-draw their idea. All children completing Space to Dream earn a Space to Dream Certificate of Achievement. Selected 3D designs will be 3D printed by Makers Empire and drawings will be 2D printed and showcased for the public to view in a special exhibition at MOD (Museum of Discovery). The school submitting my favourite design will also win a 3D printer donated by Makers Empire.

## It’s free

The Commissioner’s Digital Challenge is free for everyone – for schools, libraries, community groups and children taking the Challenge at home.

## An engagement challenge for every educator

My digital learning journey includes Australian Curriculum aligned options. Schools and students can also choose to take my Challenge outside of school. Or if they’re really keen, they can take both Challenges in school and outside it!

Some schools have jumped headfirst into the digital thinking our children and young people need right now – some have dipped their toe – others simply aren’t game at all.

My Challenges are an opportunity for every educator:

1. For early adopter educators to push further and share their expertise.
2. For those not yet on the digital bus to climb aboard and realise the journey to digital empowerment is well within reach.
3. For those with limited access to internet, computers or devices to use unplugged versions that are mostly paper-based.

### **Unplugged options**

Many of the Challenge activities are available in unplugged versions and can therefore be explored without the need for devices.

### **Extended Learning**

There are optional extended learning options for those keen to expand their learning. These include comprehensive Massively Open Online Courses (MOOCs) and a range of resources – including a robotics library - curated for ease of access via my dedicated Commissioner's Digital Challenge website.

### **Key Dates**

Both the Learn to Speak Robot and Space to Dream Digital Challenges open on the first day of School Term 1 and close on the last day of School Term 3 each year. Schools and their students can register any time from now until the last day of School Term 2 to take part.

It is my hope that my Digital Challenge will encourage children, and the important adults in their lives, to start to engage with the abundance of free quality digital learning material already available online.

I look forward to seeing children and young people leaning in to their innate creativity and limitless potential, as they learn to navigate and master digital tools, using them for the good of humankind in ways not yet imagined.

### **Helen Connolly**

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