

Post COVID-19 ReStart Workshop – Event Summary

30th March 2021

On Tuesday 30th [March the Enabling Capability Platforms](#) held a Post COVID-19 ReStart Workshop, focusing on critical issues exposed by and arising from the pandemic. We had over 150 attendees on the day, and over 80 participants in the interactive strategic discussions. There were presentations from RMIT's five Post COVID-19 ReStart Initiatives:

- A Greener Start: Enabling environmentally sustainable futures;
- A Healthier Start: Enabling resilient health systems and populations responsive to major health challenges;
- A Digital Start: Enabling social innovation and inclusion for digital futures;
- A Better Work Start: Enabling effective, resilient, ethical and responsible businesses for future workforces;
- A Fairer Start: Enabling a more inclusive and equitable future Australia.

ReStart Snapshot



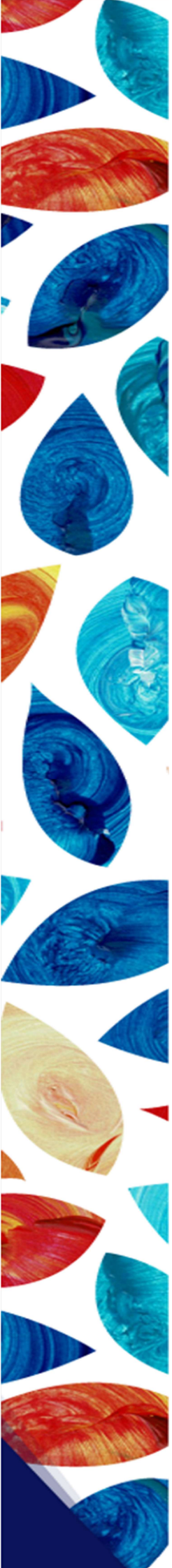
Discussion of Critical Questions

Four critical questions were posed to the breakout rooms. The feedback from the five-breakout rooms is summarised below:

1) What are the main issues facing our society as it restarts?

Equity, Equality, Justice

The COVID-19 pandemic laid bare issues of equity and justice in our society. In particular, the noticeable resurgence of equitable work and gender inequalities that often come intertwined. The pandemic forced low paid workers to undertake multiple jobs, which further contributed to the spread of the virus. At the same time, those same workers suffered disproportionately from the shutdown of entire sectors of the economy. Overlapping with this was the disproportionate effect of the shutdown on the financial situation of female workers. Paradoxically, some disadvantaged groups may have experienced a temporary



increase in their welfare as a result of Job Seeker and the provision of emergency housing. Yet, as emergency provisions come to an end, it is highly likely that financial vulnerability will resurface dramatically. In the aftermath of the pandemic, one of the key issues is how we inject social, gender-based equity into the new normal.

Resilience

The pandemic erupted as a public health emergency with the potential to overwhelm our entire healthcare system. In Australia, public health measures initially aimed at “flattening the curve” led to a de facto elimination of the virus, notwithstanding episodic outbreaks across the states. The pandemic has highlighted the need to invest in adaptive infrastructures, capacities and capabilities to make our society more resilient to future shocks in the form of pandemics or, most likely, climate change emergencies. By making emergencies, disasters, and crises part of our strategic approach to resilience we can return to growth while aspiring to a fairer society.

Digitisation

The pandemic has also significantly accelerated the trend of digitisation. The key question here is how we can advance digitisation of our economies and services without constructing a two-tiered society – the digital natives or quasi-natives, and the digitally excluded. Likewise, digitisation as an enabler of remote working or studying raises ethical questions about wellness, life-work balance, and potential worker/student surveillance. The benefits and challenges of COVID-19 accelerating digitisation are yet to be fully resolved. In our own University – the questions above translate into how we maintain our own productivity and student numbers in a COVID-19 constrained world. Even with a full return to normal, many students will choose to attend courses virtually, and the question then becomes how we ensure the wellness of those students.

2) Moving Forward – how can RMIT contribute to these issues?

The ReStart teams have been experimenting with wider means to contribute to our society beyond our traditional roles in teaching and research. RMIT has looked at:

- a) Direct manufacturing of goods (such as PPE) and prototyping of manufacturing methods;
- b) Developing reports and policy briefs to influence both the government and the community;
- c) Contributing to surveys defining critical issues for the State or the Commonwealth;
- d) Building consensus on critical issues with a wide range of industry, government and community partners;
- e) Developing and applying specific technologies and guidance to address critical issues (e.g. safety in the workplace).

As we move forward RMIT should expand and refine this means of engagement.

3) Moving forward who should our priority partners be and why?

Partners should reflect on the different processes deployed by the five ReStart initiatives, both as distinctive programs addressing key issues but also as a holistic strategy to reach out to wider ecosystems of industry partners, as well as society at large.



4) **What are the barriers to your participation in the ReStart initiatives?**

The teams identified a range of barriers to participation, some of them expected, some more subtle. First, financial constraints have imposed increased teaching and administrative duties on staff, with decreasing time to allocate to new initiatives.

The Starts are challenging our communities to work in new ways. The goal to develop cross-disciplinary approaches towards resolution of critical problems requires the development of common language across the disciplines and a focus on tangible outcomes. In addition, further communication of both the conversations and the outcomes of Start activities has proved to be difficult.