The background features a series of red, wavy, concentric lines that create a sense of depth and movement, resembling a stylized 'C' or a series of overlapping curves. The text is white and stands out against the dark background.

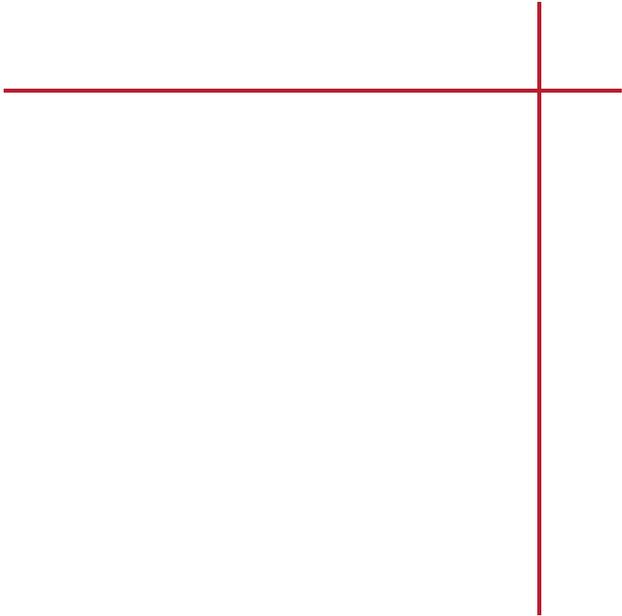
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**CFTE ACADEMIC AND  
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SERIES**

**The Role of the  
Government in Education**

Caroline Stockmann  
Chief Executive, ACT

**ARTICLE 1**

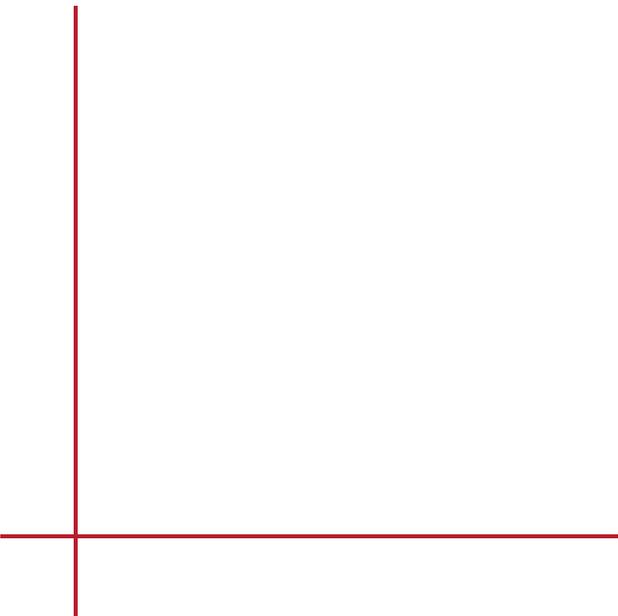


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# **Transforming education through collaboration: how we can work together to address new ways of learning**

**By Caroline Stockmann**  
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## **The three big questions**

We see around the world, over the last decades indeed, that education can be at the heart of government policy – or not. There are economies we are all familiar with where, for instance, the focus on weapons and warfare has transitioned societies which were highly educated into ones where education takes a back seat. I have spoken with people who have only had early years of education, but whose parents had PhDs. So the question is: how does education compete with such other pulls on the taxpayer's purse, including health and infrastructure?

The second question to me is around how governments partner with others to achieve their goals. There are great examples all around the world where this has been achieved, but there is also a lot of missed opportunity.

And the third thing I ask myself is: which are the smart governments who are going to exploit the acceleration of technology through COVID-19, and support their local educational 'heroes' to reach out across the world to bring in more students, thus supporting their economy and ploughing back money into the educational system?

## **Question one: Competing priorities**

This is the trickiest 'nut to crack'. If a political party's ideology is in one direction and they believe their voters prioritise that, then that is where they will focus. Today, with the mass disruption of COVID-19, we do see that education is coming more and more under scrutiny, however. People are conscious that young people have been suffering, and schooling has become a major priority, as has higher education. Politicians wish to keep educational establishments running – and not only to keep young people out of their working parents' hair to keep the economy going. There is concern about the mental health of young people, who may have lost hope in their future, and there is also concern that in a changing world young people need to be skilled/re-skilled/up-skilled.

Prior to the pandemic, we already saw a rising trend in young people wanting to study more online, in shorter 'bursts' and with a plan to change careers at regular intervals during their lives. Things are shifting somewhat now, but the first points still hold true and the question mark is around whether they will be able to change careers in a very tough market. But that is short-term thinking. In the longer term, the pace of change in technology and business will just increase, and we will all be reinventing ourselves on a regular basis, most likely.

Speaking with academics around the world, it is interesting to observe that students have been asking for a return to face-to-face classes, but then not using them. Their interest in the 'campus' is more to be with other young people, and their preference for learning is tending towards the 'remote'. However, teachers in schools are saying that they cannot teach as effectively without being in close proximity to students, observing their work and sharing the same physical space. This is understandable as students of that age are still requiring a lot of guidance and support.

For mature learners, we see at the ACT that it is the networking element that is missing for some, but that can be recreated to a great extent. The missing body language is something we are having to work hard at, and it can leave us exhausted at the end of the day. But people adapt, and there is a lot that can be done if governments invest in simple things like broadband, so everyone has a clear image of who they are speaking to, for example. If we really focus on getting the digital learning offering to the next level, then we will all reap the benefits.

The ACT was very lucky in that the vast majority of its qualifications were already online at the outset of the pandemic, and we have been exploring a lot with online networking platforms – which are really quite a difference from the ‘normal’ video call format, where people are saying they are suffering from ‘Zoom fatigue’. If governments were to back tech companies with a remit which explicitly focuses on enabling human interaction via digital platforms, then we would see a real difference in the effectiveness of the learning which isn’t pure reading and memory work.

### **Question two: Partnerships**

I touched on this above. Basically, businesses need to run these new educational offerings that tech companies can support and governments can enable. Governments are not good at running the educational offerings themselves, with all due respect, as that is not their focus nor remit. So partnerships with others are key to success. And it does not have to be just one other – there are many experts out there, and one way of driving advancements through is to take a very collaborative approach and open up the communication lines to discuss how to create win-win solutions. The more protectionism we see, whether nationalistic or at the individual organisational level, the less effective we will be in reaching our joint goals.

For this, there needs to be real transparency – this is the only way we will get the right outcome, and therefore the criteria needs to be set upfront, which again can be done with the right inputs from others. There is a really exciting opportunity here to blend decades of academic, professional association and other educational expertise with digital and behavioural considerations (the neuroscientists are writing a lot about how our brains are actually changing, which supports the evidence we see of people wanting more interactive, shorter pieces of learning), to arrive at something never before envisaged perhaps, but maybe the optimum solution.

### **Question three: Internationalisation through accelerated technology**

This is, of course, the great learning for those who were sceptical in the past: the ability to work from any physical location, because technology does in fact allow for that (for those, of course, who are not by necessity having to carry out manual/physical work), is a gift to those in the educational sector. You can attract students from anywhere in the world as well as lecturers, guest speakers and back-office workers. We were told in various industries that this simply was not possible, but that has been proven wrong. So, where we now say that education is not as effective on a ‘remote’ basis: is that also a myth which needs busting?

Farsighted governments will be looking at this carefully. I know from my own network that educational establishments are doing so, but it is not clear how involved the politicians and civil servants are. This is an opportunity staring us all in the face, but it requires leadership to take action, and I think it will be the ‘agile’ governments who grasp hold of it and take the lead in fact – as marketers know, it is always the best position to start from.