



ABCN GLOBAL BEST AWARD MEDIA RELEASE

ABCN and PwC win Gold at Global Best Awards for *Innovate* STEM program

Australia, Sydney 16 June 2016 – ABCN's *Innovate* program was honoured this week with a Gold Global Best Award in the Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) category for the Australia & Oceania region. Developed in partnership with PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC), *Innovate* was specifically designed to increase Australia's pipeline of problem solvers and innovators skilled in STEM by inspiring engagement and uptake of these subjects among low socio-economic secondary students in Australia.

Research shows a rapidly growing number of students opting out of, or performing poorly in STEM subjects. This trend is disproportionately higher for students from low socio-economic areas - yet the reality is that 75% of the fastest-growing jobs already require STEM skills. Boosting student engagement in STEM subjects is critical to expand career options for disadvantaged students, increase potential STEM candidates at tertiary level and future-proof Australia's workforce.

Innovate targets Year 7 and 8 students to build interest and confidence around STEM in the early years of high school. Working in small groups with PwC mentors, students experience STEM brought to life with opportunities to solve complex problems and demonstrate innovation, creativity and critical thinking. The program aims to encourage the continuation of STEM subjects in high school and establish the link between STEM skills and future careers.

"ABCN is fortunate to have the support of member companies such as PwC, who enable us to continue developing programs that respond to a constantly evolving employment landscape", says ABCN CEO, Jacqui Jones. "We're immensely proud of *Innovate* as a high impact mentoring program that is win-win – addressing a need both for industry and for the young students with whom we work."

PwC's STEM Leader Tony Peake said: "The nature of the work we do in Australia is changing and we must ensure the students of today have the right skills and training for the jobs of tomorrow."

Our research shows that Australia needs to lift the level of STEM workers by about 1% of the current workforce if we're going to be competitive with the top performing countries in terms of STEM skills – countries like Germany, Israel, South Korea and Sweden.

Supporting and nurturing upcoming talent is a critical part of this effort, so we're extremely proud to have partnered with ABCN to develop the *Innovate* program.

PwC mentors worked with students on STEM based projects, helping them to see the link between the STEM subjects they are studying at school and how they can shape your career path."

Feedback from the two pilot programs in Victoria and NSW was overwhelmingly positive with 100% of the PwC mentors reporting they would like to be involved in the program again and 81% of students reporting they were more interested in STEM subjects following the program.

Held every second year, the Global Best Awards are hosted by the International education business Partnership Network (IPN). *Innovate* is now a nominee for an overall Global Best Overall Award in the same STEM category, as well as being in the running for the coveted Global Best Award winner over all categories. These will be announced at the IPN Awards Ceremony in September in Oslo, Norway.

Media enquiries

ABCN – Amy Weaver, Communications Manager amy.weaver@abcn.com.au 02 8988 6851

**About ABCN**

The Australian Business and Community Network (ABCN) is a business-funded, not-for-profit organisation that connects business with disadvantaged education through mentoring and partnership programs. Supported by nearly 40 member companies and corporate partners from well-recognised, national and global organisations, we are led by an experienced body of CEOs who actively participate in business-education partnerships and support their employees to do the same.

Our aim is to provide students with the skills and work experience they require to make sound personal, educational and vocational choices. This is achieved through structured programs that involve corporate volunteers mentoring students in the workplace and business partnering with disadvantaged schools.