

Ideas into Action

FESTIVAL OF IDEAS REPORT

2023

What is the Festival of Ideas?

The Festival of Ideas (FOI) is an annual event created 'by secondary students for secondary students' as a platform to share their ideas to improve their educational experience in Brisbane Catholic Education (BCE) schools. BCE's largest stakeholder – students – known as 'delegates' are invited to speak up, be heard and make a positive change in BCE schools. Taking place during the September school holidays, the day was designed and led by the 2023 Student Voice Consultant team and supported by staff and volunteers.

Who are the Student Voice Consultant Team?

The Student Voice Consultant (SVC) team are an appointed group of 21 secondary students from across BCE who represent the secondary student body by sharing ideas, consulting and participating in decisions that affect their safety, wellbeing and learning in BCE schools.

Who attended the day?

There were 39 student delegates representing 25 BCE secondary and P-12 schools. This event provided them with a unique opportunity to collaborate with BCE staff on initiatives that directly and indirectly affect them.

What was the theme?

As 2023 marked the 5th Festival of Ideas the SVC's came up with the theme of Future of Voice. This theme encompasses the essence of the students honouring the legacy of Student Voice, celebrating the present, and embracing the future of student voice within BCE.

What was the approach?

Student Voice aims to cultivate an environment of ongoing collaboration by facilitating students' involvement in existing BCE projects at FOI and long term. This approach ensures that students' input remains a vital and continuous part of BCE initiatives fostering a sustained culture of engagement and partnership.

Staff supporting the Student Voice Consultant team approached key function areas within BCE that align with students' areas of interests from previous festivals. These areas of interests were grouped into the following categories: Choice & Voice, Student Safety, Love of Learning, Diversity, Equity & Inclusion, Student Mental Health and Sustainability.

Overview of The Day

Ideas into Action Sessions

Each key function area pitched their current projects detailing how their work and interests aligned with the theme and vision for the day. The SVC's voted on projects that interested them and contributed to the planning and execution of these sessions alongside BCE staff. These sessions, named "Ideas into Action" allowed delegates to share their lived experience and ideas.

The four Ideas into Action Sessions were:

- Voice into Student Protection
- Voice in the Strategic Plan
- Voice in Assessment and
- Voice in Career Education.

These sessions were co-designed and co-facilitated by the SVC's.

Additional Sessions

Two additional sessions were held throughout the day:

- Student Voice Awareness Day feedback was gathered to capture delegates' experiences of the day and ideas for the future
- A Legacy Activity provided students an opportunity to revisit and respond to students' ideas from 2019-2022 and share any new ideas they may have.

Sharing of Ideas

Key discussion points from the Ideas into Action sessions were collated and shared with BCE Leaders and staff at the end of the day.

WELCOME

CONNECTION

LEGACY ACTIVITY

MORNING TEA

IDEAS INTO ACTION

LUNCH

IDEAS INTO ACTION

SHARING OF IDEAS

BCE Students Dreams from Ideas into Action Sessions

Students' dreams are their best hopes and wishes from each " Ideas into Action Session" are summarised below

Voice in Developing the Strategic Plan

- School communities that are open and accept all beliefs
- Utilise technologies and digitise more resources e.g. textbooks/diaries/lesson plans
- Celebrate the diversity of both students and staff
- Differentiate flexible learning and approaches to assessment
- Offer more real-world learning and faith experiences.

Voice in Student Protection

- Have accessible, engaging and student friendly information about student protection processes and guidelines
- Clear information about school's responsibilities for student safety and wellbeing including mandatory reporting requirements.
- Explain to students what happens when mandatory reports are made and keep students informed about actions taken to address their concerns.
- Provide a range of options for students to access support including online, email and text options – including online, email and text options.

Voice in Assessment

- Less stressful and more enjoyable assessment
- Manageable workloads
- Provide different assessment options e.g. creative and 'hands on' assessment
- Different ways to show competency.



Voice in Career Education

- Individualised support and a range of learning/career pathway options
- Learning opportunities that focus on getting ready for life after school
- Access to further Peer Tutoring (students supporting students)
- Ability demonstrate different ways to show learning
- Build social connections and culture in school
- Build student independence and practical skills
- More partnering and collaborating with students.

Ideas into Action: Voice in Student Protection

Guiding Questions:

How do students want to be informed about student protection guidelines and processes?

What do students see as barriers to seeking help or reporting safety concerns and how can BCE improve this?

Student Ideas - Accessible student protection information

- Students feel that to reduce the stigma and fear associated with speaking out they need to understand more about mandatory reporting (what it is, what happens and how they will be kept in the loop)
- Students would like more information about BCE's student protection responsibilities and for the information to be presented in a student friendly format (bite size and easy to understand)
- Students want their schools to commit to providing regular safety information in their schools (e.g. using assemblies and different gatherings to explain roles and responsibilities)
- Students would like to receive student protection information via links in their school planner, on the school portal, talks and presentations by school leadership, guest speakers and role plays of different scenarios
- Students would like the choice of how they access student protection information (online, physical copies and verbally from SPC's) and that it is accessible for all students (those with disabilities or different cultural backgrounds).

Improving access to support

- Students want to know what staff responsibilities are and what the school must do to keep them safe
- Students would like to see their school Student Protection Contacts (SPC's) more visible
- To reduce barriers to accessing support students said they want options - including online, email and text to contact SPC's and the Guidance Counsellors
- Students would like their SPCs introduced in classes, assemblies, and posters with clear pictures in popular locations
- Students would like to have safe places in their schools like a 'chill out zone' with fidget toys, beanbags, aromatherapy, chill out cards for when they need it
- Students say they would feel more comfortable in some situations talking to peers and would like more peer support.

Next Steps:

1. Engage students in the design and implementation of student protection resources for students
2. Develop a student protection awareness campaign with students.

Facilitated by SVC James Bonnici (Yr 9, St Augustine College, Augustine Heights) & Student Protection Officer Caitlan Christie

Ideas into Action: Voice in the Strategic Plan

The Strategy Team developed twelve broad themes created from the Strategic Plans' first level of engagement with students and staff via a BCE wide survey. The SVC co-facilitating this session selected five of the twelve themes (Academic Excellence, Positive School Culture, Empowered Students, Sustainability and Thriving Catholic Communities) to consult with the FOI delegates.

Guiding Question:

What can Brisbane Catholic Education (or your school) do now to ensure the themes for the 2025-27 Strategic Plan are realized in the future?

Each category below is what students have said would need to happen to achieve the theme.

Academic excellence

- Clear direction and feedback from teachers
- Celebrate individual improvement in performance
- Students to create their own SMART goals based on strengths
- Accommodate all learning styles through differentiated learning
- Value different definitions of success
- Flexible learning and approaches to assessment.

Positive school culture

- Teachers listen to and understand students better
- Incorporate Student Voice into learning and planning
- Celebrate diversity of all students and staff - special diversity days
- Mental-health awareness and support - mental-health days, chill-out hubs.

Empowered Students

- Advocate for students'
- Provide real-world learning opportunities through work experience / excursions / real-world application of lessons
- More accessible tutoring / online options
- Understand the students' goals / differentiated support
- provide opportunities to explore interest work experiences, real-world experiences.

Sustainability

- Providing explicit opportunities and initiatives for recycling and reusing waste
- Support clean/renewable energy practices - A/C, technologies, solar
- Incentivise students and staff to recycle e.g., inter house competitions and reward schemes
- Digitalise more resources e.g., textbooks/diaries/lesson plans
- Environment changes to allow for outdoor learning
- School to avoid pesticides by adopting clean sustainable practices
- 10c container bins visible in schools
- Donation days to charities and causes
- Reduce plastics in tuckshop
- Provide options for accessible public transport to minimise cars on the road.

Thriving Catholic Communities

- Encourage student faith leaders at the school
- School communities to be more open and accept all beliefs
- Allow students to use agency in their faith development
- Host community events to encourage understanding and participation in Catholic traditions
- Offer more engaging religious education lessons, excursions, guest speakers, alternative assessments
- School-based youth groups and clubs to practice their faith
- Invite in parish priests more often
- Offer a real-world / practical application of the Gospel.

Next Steps:

1. The delegates ideas will be used to inform the development of the new strategic plan
2. The Strategy team will invite students to participate in further feedback rounds (expected to be in early 2024).

Facilitated by SVC Nicholas Tatham (Yr 9, St Teresa's College, Noosaville) & Strategic Analyst Gemma Chisholm

Ideas into Action: Voice in Assessment

How could teachers empower student to demonstrate evidence of their learning?

Student Ideas

- Give students more agency in their assessment
- Create interesting, enthusiastic and inviting tasks
- Students want to be engaged and brainstormed a variety of ways to complete assessments and present information: videos, animation, websites, cartoons, posters, PowerPoints, diagrams, group presentations, performances/skits, excursions with scavenger hunts. In science students suggested assessments such as completing experiments, writing tasks, a mock informative game show, multimodal presentations, excursions to observe things like real life energy transfers
- Students want assessment that allows them to demonstrate learning in preferred ways
- For assessments to be about more than showing how much you know.

Next Steps:

1. Consult with teachers and school community – school staff and community voice
2. Adapt, modify and change assessments and how they are taught
3. Provide students with options of how they want to complete assessment.

Facilitated by SVC Connie Krupa (Yr 8, St John's College, Nambour) & Lead Education Advisor Brent Johnston

Ideas into Action: Voice in Career Education

If you could re-design how learning happens in the classroom and the school day experience, what would it look like?

Student Ideas

- Personalising options to suit the needs, learning styles and interests of students (e.g. make learning fun and independent)
- Hands-on, inquiry based, practical learning
- Tailor subjects to career pathways
- Learn more about relevant life and career skills (e.g. finance, applying for jobs, voting, changing a tyre, home maintenance, time management, productivity, conflict management)
- Create opportunities for work experience across year levels
- Build connections with and invite in real industry professionals/experts
- Redesign the school day (e.g. brain breaks, changing lunch break tunes, breaks between subjects to allow for adjustment and preparation to learn in the next class)
- Having more mini breaks during lessons
- Redesign the timetable (e.g. remove unnecessary assemblies and PC, have different timetables for junior and senior classes)
- Ask and gather ideas from students about what is helpful and what could be better (e.g. suggestion of an anonymous ideas box)
- Flexible spaces and furniture
- Have effective Student Representative Council that come together as a cluster to influence learning.

Next Steps:

Turning Ideas into Action – Next Steps

- Provide authentic opportunities for student input, collaboration and participation to make changes.

Facilitated by SVC Claire Deamon (Yr 10, McAuley College, Beaudesert) & Careers Education Project Officer Cassie Geissman



Voice in Student Voice Awareness Day

At the 2021 Festival of Ideas, students had the idea of creating a day to showcase, celebrate and raise awareness of how BCE school communities and BCEO function areas are amplifying the voices of students in decisions that directly impact on them. The very first Student Voice Awareness Day was celebrated on 4 September 2023. The Chair of the Student Voice Awareness Day (SVAD) working group Laura Moore consulted with students about their experience of the 2023 SVAD and explored ideas for 2024 and beyond.

Student Ideas

Themes for SVAD

- Your Voice – Your Day

SVAD Activities and Events

- Have activities that help students and staff collaborate
- Provide activities directly to students that they can use with each other and school staff
- Provide a resource pack to schools to share stories that connect BCE schools
- Hold an event with other schools in the cluster.

Increase School Participation in SVAD

- Market and advertise SVAD throughout the year
- Have conversations in schools about students' ideas for SVAD
- Send SVC to speak at different schools
- Have SV staff attend all schools before SVAD.

Challenges of SVAD

- Communication between SVCs and their school-based mentors
- Having an allocated BCEO staff member to contact and communicate with around SVAD
- Engaging students to share their points of view
- Engaging students in the whole day
- Engaging and communicating with students from diverse backgrounds.

Next Steps:

1. Link actions for 2024 to the 3 key themes of collaboration, communication and conversation
2. Seek student feedback for a suitable date for SVAD
3. Explore establishing a SVAD grant to encourage more participation by schools and students
4. Explore methods of facilitating engagement between students and staff, and engagement between schools to celebrate SVAD
5. Take meaningful steps to ensure opportunities for engagement with students from diverse groups
6. Develop materials and resources that can be provided directly to students to celebrate SVAD.



Legacy Activity: Looking back to look forward

Student ideas have been and are the foundation of the Student Voice program. Across the past 4 years of FOI, over 320 students have contributed to the Student Voice Program's direction.

Prior to the delegates beginning their Ideas into Action sessions which focused on the future of voice, students reflected on themes and ideas identified over the last four years. This session allowed the 2023 delegates to reflect on ideas that were important to past delegates and vote on what continues to be important to them. The delegates were asked to answer the question 'what previous student ideas remain priorities for you?'

The 3 ideas and themes identified as important by the delegates were:

1. Career education and life after school

- Students would like time allocated in the school timetable for life skills classes for all students
- Students would like to shape the current curriculum so they have the knowledge, skills and confidence for the 'real world'

2. Mental health education and support

- Students want compulsory mental health and wellbeing lessons in the curriculum and help shape this, so it meets their needs
- Students would like to have a digital platform that supports them in asking for help and access mental health resources/services
- Students would like to have access to more staff who can support their safety and wellbeing at school e.g. better understanding of & access to Guidance Counsellors, SPCs etc.

3. More opportunities for student feedback

- Students want to have more opportunities to share their ideas throughout the year and not just during FOI.

The student voice team will continue to be guided by what students say is important to them and will use the three themes identified in the Legacy Activity to focus on growing strategic partnerships with the relevant function areas within BCE to turn these ideas into action.

Facilitated by SVC's Jade Engels (Yr 10, St Michael's College, Merrimac), Sophie Hattingh (Yr 8, Siena Catholic College, Sippy Downs), Shraddha Maker (Yr 8, St Thomas More College, Sunnybank), and Sebastian Rimmer (Yr 9, Clairvaux MacKillop College, Upper Mount Gravatt)

Vision for 2024 and beyond

The Student Voice team look forward to continuing our focus on strengthening student voice in BCE so that students are actively involved in enhancing student safety, belonging, connection and learning in BCE schools.

We will focus on:

- creating an accessible and inclusive Student Voice Network for students via an online platform
- building the knowledge, skills and confidence of students to share their views and participate in decisions that impact on them
- continuing to provide opportunities for student engagement and input with the SVC team and BCE staff working together ensure students are informed on the progress of initiatives and projects.



Turning Ideas into Action: What can you do?

This report is packed with ideas on how to improve and strengthen safety, wellbeing and learning in BCE schools. Take some time to reflect on what you learned, what surprised you, how this might impact you and your role. What is one thing that you can do, big or small, to action a student idea or amplify the voices of students within BCE?

If you are interested in partnering with Student Voice in 2024, would like to know more, or share your experience with voice please contact us at voice@bne.catholic.edu.au



Employee Relations and Student Protection
Email: voice@bne.catholic.edu.au