



# MOVING FORWARDS

*Considerations for the establishment of  
a national student voice body.*

**Item for discussion**

April 2022  
Version 1.9.2

This is a live document circulated for discussion and development. As such, it is evolving based on continuous feedback from stakeholders. This version was last updated **Wed 06 April 2022**.

This document was 'temporally frozen' in April 2022, to allow for the organisation to begin the process of setting the legal structures and other governance-related matters. It will be 'defrosted' and reviewed by the Organisational Governance Committee once the legal foundations have been set.

Feedback is still welcome via email to: [governance@studentvoice.org.au](mailto:governance@studentvoice.org.au).

## **Australian Council for Student Voice**

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# SETTING THE SCENE

## Intentions

This document is intended to provide a summary of what has been done so far in the development of a national body, proposed as the **Australian Council for Student Voice**. It looks back to the Conferences held in 2019 and then 2020 and the ways in which the need for a national body emerged from these.

This document contains a proposed outline of what such a body could do and how it might be formed, including the recruitment of a voluntary Organisational Governance Committee to guide the development of its governance. It has been developed by a small group of people who have been active in this space and in the convening of these previous conferences. This document contains information about what's important to us, and what we aim to do. It is built on feedback from previous iterations of our discussions.

**In summary:** we hope to start small, beginning by connecting those involved and interested in the sector. We hope to then empower those who want to make change, building upon the work of our partners and those who have gone before us. In a practical sense, we'll start by building networks through both continuing to hold the annual Student Voice Conference that takes place in December and supporting student-led advocacy.

Feedback on this is important, so if you have any thoughts or questions, we'd love to hear from you. You can send us an email at: [governance@studentvoice.org.au](mailto:governance@studentvoice.org.au)

## Background: Some Challenges

Ideas about student voice, agency and participation have become increasingly prominent, both locally and internationally. There have been attempts to build on such initiatives, to both resource and challenge it.

These initiatives have recognised the central importance of partnerships between participants, specifically the need for and potential of ‘bridging the divide’ between the areas of students, school educators, policy makers, academics, community members, and others.

Australia has been prominent internationally in this area; however, the separation of states and territories has meant that development has been hesitant and uneven. Attempts to bring people together to learn from each other have, at times, been successful but generally have involved a relatively small group. Challenges and associated questions have emerged:

- At such events, information and knowledge has been shared amongst the attendees. However, following these events, the learnings sometimes aren’t developed or, if developed locally, are not shared. How can we ensure that this knowledge benefits the wider student voice community?
- Many personal and organisational connections have been established at the events, though the recent period of on-line interaction has both limited and challenged this networking. How can we continue to foster the connections between attendees and, looking beyond these events, how can we foster continued links between those interested in the sector?
- There has been active involvement in such events from a continuing but small segment of the education sector. Many people, schools and other groups are interested, but not actively working in this space. How can we use the knowledge and connections that each hold to empower those new to the sector or those who want to make change in their school or community?
- For 42 years, the national and international Australian-based journal *Connect* has documented and supported reflection around these issues. With the cessation of publication of *Connect* at the end of 2021, what mechanisms are needed to share knowledge and ideas?

To answer these questions and more, a group of enthusiasts who have been active in recent conferences and similar events are proposing a national peak body whose role it would be to facilitate initiatives and further development in the area of student voice, agency and participation. Proposals include conferences, a webinar series and other initiatives in line with these objectives.

This would need to be a body with a national focus, with governance representation from different systems and jurisdictions, whose task would initially be to present annual conferences. This body’s responsibilities could also extend beyond this, to being a source of resources and a sharing of theory, research and practice, to supporting students in various jurisdictions who want to initiate some form of local or state-based network or action.

And so, the idea for an **Australian Council for Student Voice** was born. This proposed national body is still in the formation stage; immediate tasks such as the development of the vision and mission, sources of funding, and ways of operations, are open for guidance from stakeholders.

## Timeline

### Pre-2019

From 1980 to 2002, there were several national Student Participation workshops and conferences under the emerging acronym of NASPAC – the *National Student Participation Conference*. These were relatively small events, held in Melbourne, Adelaide, Sydney and Hobart, and organised by enthusiastic individuals, using the publication *Connect* as a contact and communication medium.

Similarly, there were attempts to establish a national body of school students in the early to mid 1980s, under the title of the *Australian Network of School Students* (ANSS). This was auspiced by the *Youth Affairs Council of Australia* (YACA) with funding from the Federal Government. When this funding ceased, and in the absence of representative student bodies in most states and territories, the Network was dissolved.

While state and territory level student organisations and support mechanisms have subsequently emerged in various areas and jurisdictions (e.g. Victorian Student Representative Council (*VicSRC*), *New South Wales State Student Representative Council* (*NSW State SRC*), and *Brisbane Catholic Education Student Voice*), there has been no overall structure that brings together students with teachers, school leaders, policy makers, academics and others around ideas and practices of student voice, agency and participation at a national level.

The experience of several people in Australia with a series of international conferences that started in 2011 at Cambridge University in the UK, then in 2016 at Burlington, Vermont in the USA, and subsequently in Pennsylvania, USA – along with the international networking that emerged from these – has highlighted the need for a continuing national structure that brings together people with various educational roles in Australia who are active within this area.

Further, it has been recognised that student-led initiatives, particularly around climate change, have been occurring across Australia in recent years. While these initiatives may be internally connected, they are largely separated from school-based student (and other) initiatives in student voice, agency and participation.

### 2019

During the 2019 *Student Voice, Agency, and Partnerships International Conference* (*SVCMelbourne*), the organising committee (made up of students, teachers, policy makers, academics, etc.) realised that there was no ‘legal entity’ to organise the conference within Australia: to manage funds and enter into organisational contracts. As a group of enthusiasts from a variety of different backgrounds and perspectives, they eventually turned to *Social Education Victoria* (*SEV*) to be the sponsoring agency for the first conference of the international series to take place in Australia.

## 2020 & 2021

Since then, the organisers have more recently turned to the *Australian Association for Research in Education (AARE)* and *Research for Educational Impact (REDI)* at Deakin University to host the 2020 *Inclusivity: Support and Partnership for the Post Pandemic Future Conference* and the upcoming 2021 *Children and Students' Voice Symposium*, which has been postponed to May of 2022. Each of these conferences and symposia have been characterised by an alliance between academics, practitioners, students, and policy makers: 'across the divides.'

## 2021 & 2022

In moving the establishment of the Council forward, we will need to focus on three main areas: publicising the existence and role of the Council, establishing the governance structure of the Council, and establishing and developing a membership base.

It is suggested that this would entail:

### Stage 1: Publicising

- Publication and circulation of existing material such as the *Connect* #250 article and including information about the draft website
- Public calls for EOIs in governance and foundation membership of the Council
- Establish connections with various organisations of similar purposes, in order to seek support and recognition

### Stage 2: Governance (We are moving into this stage)

- Based on the EOIs for governance involvement, establish an interim Organisational Governance Committee (CoM)
- Governance Committee establishes a legal and financial structure
- Governance Committee also engages a person to lead organisation in a paid position

### Stage 3: Membership

- Formal ongoing incorporation of appropriate structure
- Governance Committee invites those who expressed interest in Stage 1 to become members (dependent on the decisions about structure)
- Public advertising of Council to drive membership

## 2023 and beyond

The Council should continue the previous development and establish and grow its presence through a variety of activities e.g. host a variety of training and events (such as a series of webinars on how to implement student voice initiatives within school or looking at the local community; conferences; professional development tools for staff, etc).

## Prior Involvement with the Student Voice Conference Series

The current conference organisers have identified their reasons for hosting the recent conference series. Many organisers themselves have expressed interest in being involved in the establishment of the ACSV. Their reasons 'why' were also similar to the visions for the ACSV.

As a national body, the Council would like to support the organisers by providing an on-going 'home' for these conferences. Ideally, the Council would support the organisers by providing practical items such as a landing page for collection of registrations, and an online page to store the resources post-conference. Ideally, the ACSV would like to be the primary organisation for hosting such a series of conferences, given the ACSV was 'born' from these conferences.

The organisers have shared the following 'reasons why' for their interest:

1. **To encourage the sharing of practice and collaboration across the divides:** We want to hear from those 'on the ground', to share examples of their work in the student voice and agency space. We want to share these leading practices to form responsive pedagogy by providing a space for students/teachers who are facilitating student voice projects to collaborate/connect with other students/teachers on similar issues.
2. **To listen to unheard voices and strive for authenticity:** We want to engage the critical voices of those who haven't traditionally been involved in these conferences. We aim to get a more cohesive and inclusive picture of the authentic student experience by critiquing current practices and looking forward to improving outcomes.
3. **To meet the needs of leaders and learners:** To support both those who may have been working in this student voice, agency and partnerships/participation sector for a while, and those who are new to the sector, to step up and make change together. We want to support those leading by connecting them with other individuals and fostering their knowledge to enhance their work.





# THOUGHTS TO CONSIDER



# Considerations for Establishment

## 1. Token Representation and Weak Connections

### *From previous iterations:*

- In previous iterations of a national body, the basis for representation of students was sometimes considered tokenistic. There were few state or territory student-run bodies involved to recommend or appoint students and therefore it was made up of mainly activist students.
- There were also weak links between student representatives. This is especially true given the lack of virtual connection during previous iterations, and the costs associated with bringing students (and others) together nationally.
- Previous iterations have also been relatively 'Victorian-focused', with a comparative lack of involvement from other states and territories.

### *Moving Forward:*

- When setting up this national body, student participation and representation must be in the hands of current students. Ideally, this body's membership model would engage students in the younger years, particularly around years 5/6. Whilst providing training, students are upskilled and gain knowledge about student voice, agency, and partnerships. Then they would take on a leadership role within the organisation during years 8-11.
- It is important that the organisation is built on a genuine partnership model. In particular, the Council should ensure that the adults within the organisation don't take over (with the best of intentions), but instead foster and support positive structures for young people to flourish as partners.
- It is also important that this body is not just a network of Victorians, but instead there is a national presence from within each jurisdiction in Australia.

## 2. Continuation of Knowledge

### *From previous iterations:*

- Following the end of the conferences, there has been no structure to ensure that knowledge is shared and of use to the sector
- With the end of publication of *Connect* - where is all this knowledge stored and shared?
- The series of conferences in December around student voice have been relatively separately organised without a formal strategy of continuation. Practically, there is a recognised need for a national centre with an ongoing presence both as a contact point and also as a mechanism for holding, gaining and passing on funds.

### *Moving Forward:*

- Each conference/symposium will have a dedicated folder on the website, which will contain information about the event and the knowledge shared at the event
- Some knowledge will be developed into short articles/presentations that can be shared post-event

### 3. Separation of Expertise

#### *From previous iterations:*

- There have been some structures within various groups such as teachers, academics, school leaders, but these have operated relatively separately
- A notable strength of the recent conferences has been the strong partnerships between the students who have been involved, and those from other areas
- Those who have been involved have not been characteristic of the broader range of educational participants. This could be observed within the student organisers and adult participants, who have been disproportionately from already strongly advantaged areas of the population. Conferences have not attracted marginalised students nor, for example, teachers struggling with ideas and practices.

#### *Moving Forward:*

- The national body is led by a partnership of people who are seen to have particular interest and expertise in the area – and recognise the expertise that all students bring to education and learning
- The body commits to partnerships in learning across existing divides.

# Organisational Values, Vision and Purpose

## Values (personality)

*Our values reinforce positive behaviours, guiding how we interact with each other and how we make decisions.*

- **COLLABORATION:** We value real connections and collaboration with all our stakeholders, ensuring we understand different points of view and treat each other with respect.
- **LEARNING:** We love to learn and discover new things; we are excited about the future and want to take an active part in it.
- **INTEGRITY:** We act with purpose; we are accountable for our actions.
- **INCLUSION:** We strive for authenticity, to hear the unheard voices, and to encourage the sharing of practice across the divides.

## Vision

*Our vision is an aspirational destination for the brand and its business.*

We envision an education community in which student voice, agency, and participation is valued by all.

## Purpose

*Purpose is the reason we exist. It is WHY we do, what we do.*

Our mission is to advance education through the promotion, leadership, and support of student voice, agency, and participation in the broader education system.

## We work with:

Rather than limiting ourselves to only or specifically working with a profession or a setting, we want to work with a wide variety of people who are interested in student voice. We hope by seeing all participants as both Leaders and Learners – but recognising the experiences and needs of all - we can positively shape our communications to what they need most.

### LEADERS

Leaders are already familiar with the concepts of student voice; they might be an educator who has implemented it in their classroom, or even a school leader who empowers their staff to support students, or a student who has been actively involved within a classroom or across the school or system. Leaders contribute positively to ACSV, through speaking at events, facilitating conversations, or even being involved in its governance.



## April K

April is an academic and a science teacher, studying at a university in NSW. They have worked with young people to conduct research about the best strategies to implement student voice within science classes.

At an ACSV event, April was a keynote speaker. They presented their research and facilitated a Q&A session.



## Hamra Y

Hamra is a secondary school student in Tasmania. They have been active in their local school and community around climate change. They have been working with other students to set up a state-wide organisation of activist students.

At an ACSV event, Hamra was a keynote speaker. They presented a summary of their action and facilitated a planning session.

## LEARNERS

Learners aren't at the level of familiarity with the ideas and practices as are Leaders; they might be a student who've just learnt about student agency and wants some strategies to implement it within their student representative council (SRC), or a teacher or policy maker or academic who wants to discover what the concept of student voice is and learn to practise it in their work. Learners are the attendees at ACSV events, who learn and participate in training, sharing their real-world experience.



### Jackson R

Jackson is a Year 8 student and a member of the SRC at a school in rural WA. They want to learn about how they can work with their school to implement student voices within the classroom.

At an ACSV event, Jackson participates by asking questions and taking notes to report back to their SRC at their school.



### Maria S

Maria is a Policy Worker in a Government Department in the ACT. They want to develop policy and practices around student voice and agency but are unsure about the theoretical, research and practice basis for this work.

At an ACSV event, Maria participates by asking questions, taking part in discussions, and taking notes to report back to their Departmental policy team.

## Organisational Governance Committee

- The governance of the Council should be determined after examining options such as an Incorporated Association, Company Limited by Guarantee, Cooperative and so on. Decisions here will determine the management structure.
- An interim Organisational Governance Committee should be established on a voluntary basis to oversee and drive the initial formation of the organisation. It should aim to move to a properly constituted body as soon as practicable.
- Both the interim and on-going Organisational Governance Committee should be made up of a variety of representatives from as many fields/professions as possible. These should include but not be limited to; school students, academics, school leaders, policy makers, educators/teachers, and others (e.g. support organisations). The Governance Committee should be made up of a variety of representatives from as many jurisdictions and sectors as possible across Australia.
- The Governance Committee should meet on a regular basis (perhaps monthly or even bi-monthly) to make decisions around the direction of organisation: funding, legal structure, staffing, annual conference, etc. It would probably need to meet on-line.
- Staffing should begin by engaging a person to drive the organisation on a day-to-day basis. Then, dependent on need and funding, it would move to a wider structure, focused on specific needs (e.g. Engagement, Resources, Events, Operations, etc.)

## Expressions of Interest and Feedback

Thank you for taking the time to read through this document.

We kindly ask that all feedback is shared either via email to [governance@studentvoice.org.au](mailto:governance@studentvoice.org.au) or via the link below.

If you are interested in being involved in the Australian Council of Student Voice either as a foundational member or in the Organisational Governance Committee, we ask that you complete the Expression of Interest form via the link below.

<https://www.studentvoice.org.au/about-us/moving-forwards>





Australian Council for  
**STUDENT VOICE**

## **ACSV National Office**

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