

# STUDENT SHOUT OUT!

## SUBMISSION TO THE SENATE INQUIRY INTO TEACHING AND LEARNING

**Student ShoutOut: Students' Perspectives on Education**

Foundation for Young Australians

January 2013

*"Our education system  
feels like a one size fits  
all approach."*

*"I believe all  
students should  
have equal  
opportunities in  
the classroom."*

# CONTENTS

Introduction	3
Student ShoutOut 2012	5
Exploring the role of students	8
Analysis – what did the students say?	13
Stakeholder comparison	22
Conclusion	24
Policy recommendation	25
Acknowledgements	26
References	28
Appendices	32

## INTRODUCTION

The Centre for New Public Education (CNPE) would like to thank the Senate Standing Committee on Teaching and Learning for providing us with the opportunity to submit to their inquiry. CNPE is responding to the Senate's inquiry on behalf of the Foundation for Young Australians.

FYA is a national, independent, non-profit organisation dedicated solely to young people. It provides a national platform of respect and opportunity for the best ideas and actions that young Australians have to offer. FYA believes that all young people have the courage, imagination and will to shape their education and create social change. Our vision is for a generation of connected, confident and optimistic young people with a deep sense of purpose and belonging. Our mission is to empower young Australians to be successful learners and creative, active and valued citizens through research, initiatives and partnerships and by harnessing the passion of young people.

CNPE, an initiative of the Foundation for Young Australians, believes in the primacy and power of young people in helping shape their own education. As the primary stakeholders in education, students not only deserve the opportunity to voice their opinions, but are an underutilised source of information on effective teaching and learning in Australian schools. The Student ShoutOut (SSO) initiative encapsulates CNPE's belief in the importance of student voice. It provided secondary school students across Australia with access to a platform that allowed them to publically express their views on education, contribute to public debate and potentially influence policy outcomes. SSO engaged 4,436 students through facilitated workshops and an online platform where students submitted and voted on questions for the Hon Peter Garrett AM, MP, Minister for School Education, Early Childhood and Youth. The Minister responded in person to the most voted for questions, and the forum was broadcast to the public from Canberra.

## Student ShoutOut quick facts

- SSO engaged 4,436 students who asked 121 questions and cast 29,227 votes via the OurSay platform.
- SSO participants were aged between 13 and 18, coming from Government, Catholic and Independent schools across six states and territories.
- Students who asked the top three questions, as well as a wildcard entrant, were flown to Canberra and asked their questions directly to Minister Garrett in a forum that was broadcast online.
- The public was engaged through the ABC and local and social media.

This submission will provide a description of SSO, a brief synopsis of relevant background research into student voice, an analysis of the key themes of students' concerns and a comparison with other stakeholder perspectives. It concludes with policy recommendations. SSO builds on the legacy and learnings from FYA's Tell Us 2010, a national engagement campaign that asked thousands of students around Australia what success at school looked like. FYA is committed to being a leader in this space and will continue to trial national engagement strategies to help young people shape their education.

Enabling students' unique perspectives to be heard contributes to education reform as it helps create a comprehensive picture of education in which all stakeholders' views are represented. It may also aid in the implementation of reforms through potentially enhancing buy-in from students, parents and teachers. CNPE believes students' voice should be sought, heard and acted upon by the people in power.

Accordingly, we will address the committee's inquiry requirements:

- (a) the effectiveness of current classroom practices,
- (b) the adequacy of tools available to teachers, and
- (c) factors influencing the selection, training, professional development, career progression and retention of teachers.

## Policy Recommendation

**We recommend that students are represented in all stakeholder consultation processes in education policy development. To ensure meaningful participation of students, consultation needs to consider the specific needs of students as a unique stakeholder group.**

## STUDENT SHOUTOUT 2012

In 2012, CNPE launched Student ShoutOut (SSO), an initiative to empower students aged 13 to 18 across Australia to share their vision on what mattered most to them in their education. The SSO engagement process used a hybrid model of offline and online engagement strategies. Education campaigning workshops were held for 108 students in Melbourne, Sydney, Darwin, Adelaide, Brisbane and Perth to kickstart the campaign and build a community of engaged young people. The OurSay platform provided an online forum open to all Australian students, using its voting mechanisms and a competition model to incentivise young people's participation.

The 4,436 young people participated by posting questions, commenting on questions or voting for a question during a three-week period on the OurSay website. Minister for School Education, Early Childhood and Youth, Peter Garrett, answered the most voted for questions in a public broadcast.

While the online environment encouraged high levels of participation by young people, the workshops and community of young people campaigning in their classrooms and schools were crucial to the success of SSO. Initially, this offline engagement drove online participation in SSO, with nearly half the questions posted on OurSay coming from workshop participants.

The design of SSO prioritised engagement outcomes and was focused primarily on the young person's user experience. SSO does not perform a traditional survey function, as the sample of students is impacted by selection biases. However, this engagement model provided us with rich insight into the student perspective on education. The perspectives collected from SSO encompassed 4,436 students who all self-identified as 13 to 18 year olds, came from urban, regional and remote areas across Australia, were diverse in their personal demographics, and attended schools in all three school sectors (Government, Catholic and Independent).

While characteristics of an online campaigning model limited the data collectable for all students, CNPE was able to collect detailed data on the 108 workshop participants, for whom more detailed demographics are available in Appendix A.

## Case Study: Student Experience of SSO

### THE OPPORTUNITY

Jonathan is a Year 12 student. He attends a public school in Western Australia and enjoys debating, science, economics and the arts.

Jonathan and his friend Anish attended an SSO workshop in Perth with a cohort of peers, where they explored the big themes in education and developed their campaigning skills. They identified SSO as their first opportunity to have a greater say in their education outside of the traditional student participation structures at school, stating, *“otherwise, we’ve all just been going along with everyone else with a limited empowerment and limited say in our education system.”*

### WHAT DID THEY ASK?

After considering a number of issues in education, Jonathan and Anish were most concerned that their education is too narrow and is not preparing them for their future. They developed a compelling question that raises fundamental issues about the purpose of education in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century and the failures of the current system to prepare students adequately for their future. They asked:

*“We believe that a primary aim of the education system should be to develop and apply key life skills such as leadership, communication, teamwork and community involvement in order to overcome challenges and solve future problems. However, we feel that the emphasis has instead been shifted towards a more short-term, individually focused system of education, which doesn't adequately equip our students with the necessary skills required to further society. We feel that there needs to be greater incentives to participate in extra curricular and enrichment programs in order to develop a more self-driven, well-rounded and articulate future generation. The question we would like to put forward to you, Minister Garrett, is how do you propose to reform and restructure the principles of the education system in order to best achieve the full potential of our students?”*

## THE CAMPAIGN AND IMPACT

After posting their question on the OurSay platform, Jonathan and Anish had 19 days to run a campaign in their school community to raise awareness of their issue and attract votes. They engaged directly with their peers in the classroom and school, and with other students online via the OurSay platform and integrated social media channels such as Facebook, Twitter, Google+ and email. Jonathan identified that raising awareness about the issues with peers, the school community and the public was one of the most powerful aspects of the SSO experience for him.

Jonathan and Anish were early leaders of SSO and in the second week of the campaign were interviewed on ABC Radio National's *Life Matters* about their experience. They highlighted that SSO was the first time they had an opportunity to have their opinions about education heard, stating, *"Student ShoutOut is one the first ways we've been able to actively engage in the education system as a whole and potentially change it."*

After successfully attracting 4,497 votes for their question (second place) out of a possible 29,227 votes, Jonathan and Anish went to Canberra along with other student winners to ask their question directly to Minister Garrett in a broadcast forum. As a follow-up, Jonathan also met with his local member, Deputy Opposition Leader Julie Bishop MP, to further discuss his concerns about education. Jonathan is continuing to look for opportunities to actively engage in the education and political system to create change.

## EXPLORING THE ROLE OF STUDENTS

“Young people themselves are probably the single greatest untapped resource in the process of educational transformation, but their voices are likely to make us uncomfortable.” (Bentley, 2002, p. 15)

Young people have the potential to positively influence education outcomes for themselves, their schools, their communities and the system as a whole. However, their voices are restrained, and they “remain the group least frequently invited to share” (Black, 2011, p. 74). As Ben Levin argues, students are “at the bottom of the education status list,” and are more used to having things done to them rather than with them (Levin, 2000, p. 155).

There are a range of concepts in education theory that attempt to explain this potential influence – student engagement, student agency and student voice are terms which are often used and cover different domains of student experience in schooling. For the purposes of this submission, we consider the role of student voice in:

- (a) their own learning,
- (b) the decision making/governance of their schools, and
- (c) the education system at a policy level.

We also briefly consider the different mechanisms that facilitate student engagement and stakeholder consultation in a system level context.

### LEARNING AND SCHOOL CONTEXT

Traditionally, student voice has been explored within the context of teaching and learning. In practice this often translates into students having choices in *what, how* and *when* they learn. The rethinking of a student’s role in learning is at the heart of constructivist approaches to teaching and learning. These are underpinned by Piaget’s and Vygotsky’s concepts of cognitive and social constructivism. All versions of constructivism call for students to be engaged more actively in learning (Levin, 2000, p. 161). This is in contrast to ideas of learning based on the *transmission of*



*knowledge*, where students are empty vessels that should be filled. These concepts of learning are reflected in the current National Professional Standards for Teachers, which recognise the importance of teachers “supporting student participation” (AITSL, 2011, p. 14).

Students are beginning to be tapped as an important source of information for improving learning outcomes by providing feedback on teaching. The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation’s MET research project, which trialled measures of teacher effectiveness, found that, when used alone, student surveys are a more reliable measure of a teacher’s student achievement gains than classroom observation (Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, 2012, p. 14). If student feedback on teaching is appropriately sought through reliable and validated processes such as the Tripod Survey (Kane & Staiger, 2010, p. 11), it has the potential to be implemented across schools systems, efficiently and rapidly (Foundation for Young Australians, 2012a, p. 8). This research affirms the important role students have to play in improving teaching and learning, which has been partially constrained because of fears related to a shift in power towards students.

Student participation and engagement can be limited by students’ perception of their influence. Students are not confident in voicing their views in the classroom (Mellor & Kennedy, 2003, p. 533) as they do not feel their schools are interested in what they have to say (Harris, Wyn, & Younes, 2008, p. 20). This is particularly acute among students from low socioeconomic backgrounds, who are less likely to feel they have a voice (Black, 2011, pp. 465–466). Even when teachers, schools and systems actively seek to engage students, there are key questions that should be analysed around equity, such as who gets to participate.

Students have an important role to play in the decision-making and governance of their schools, as students are “surely the most important stakeholders” (Black, 2011, p. 74). Their participation in school decision-making can increase students’ sense of ownership of the school, alleviating or reducing certain behaviours such as vandalism (Micciche, 2005, pp. 7–8). Participation has also been shown to give young people a stronger sense of themselves as learners, particularly for students from low socioeconomic backgrounds, who are most likely to be disengaged (Black, Stokes, Turnbull, & Levy, 2009, pp. 14, 18). However, although students have a

“strongly developed sense of the positive contribution they can make to the decision-making and problem-solving in their schools” (Mellor & Kennedy, 2003, p. 533), they appear to feel their “participation in decision-making in schools is not actively supported” (Mellor & Kennedy, 2003, p. 533). To be meaningful and effective it is important that student participation is not tokenistic in nature.

### **POLICY CONTEXT**

Existing policy recognises the importance of engaging with young people in educational decision-making and actively promotes it. At a state level, the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (Victoria) has highlighted the importance of “encouraging active and meaningful student participation” and advised that:

“Schools should allow students to become active participants in their education, including involvement in decisions about how and what they learn, and how their learning is assessed.” (DEECD, 2009, p. 10)

The Department of Education, Training and Employment (Queensland) has also recognised that student wellbeing increases when they are “actively involved in their school” (DETE, 2012, p. 1) and advises schools achieve this by “ensuring students have opportunities to participate in school decision-making processes” (DETE, 2012, p. 2). Similarly, there is demand from students to have a say on matters of concern to them and to participate in opportunities where voicing their concerns can lead to tangible results (Collin, 2008, p. 20).

The Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians, endorsed by all of Australia’s Education Ministers, committed to the goal: “All young Australians become... active and informed citizens” (MCEECTYA, 2008, p. 8). In order to deliver these outcomes, students need opportunities to be active citizens *during* their primary and secondary education. As outlined, there have been limited opportunities in learning, school level decision-making and at the system level for this to occur.

## **STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT CONTEXT**

However, in a social media and online era, stakeholder consultation processes are being reformed by governments, politicians and stakeholders. This need has been identified at a whole-of-government level by the Declaration of Open Government, which calls for public policy to embrace web 2.0 consultation models to enable “collaborating with citizens on policy and service delivery to enhance the processes of government and improve the outcomes sought” (Tanner, 2010). This approach allows stakeholders to tell their story, ensuring that lived experience helps shape policy and aligns the implementation to identified stakeholder needs.

Politicians have also been experimenting with ways to connect with constituencies and influence the media through new online platforms. Examples of these include Google Hangouts with President Obama and Prime Minister Gillard, where questions are asked and answered through a live video exchange, Facebook and web-forum question and answer sessions.

There are also new stakeholder consultation models emerging globally in the education sector, albeit with a focus on educators. An example from the US is the VIVA project, an online platform and consultation process that facilitates direct communication between teachers and policymakers, and whose mission is to “dramatically increase classroom teachers’ participation in important policy decisions about public education” (Viva Teachers, 2012).

There is a growing appetite at a government and stakeholder level to engage in more direct and democratic consultation processes. New opportunities in communication technologies and emerging engagement models are providing vehicles to meet these demands. However, participation of students in education consultation and engagement is minimal. CNPE believes students, as both the primary beneficiary and the primary stakeholder in education, should have opportunities to engage in these emerging consultation processes. Through Student ShoutOut, CNPE aimed to develop a platform that empowered young people by connecting them with the education system at a national policy level. Their views are reported in this submission.

## SOME OF THE MOST POPULAR QUESTIONS

**“Education in Australia, and indeed the world, is a fundamental right. Considering Australia has one of the strongest economies in the developed world, the massive disparity between schools in terms of funding seems to be inequitable. We believe that a price is being put on education. Minister Garrett, what will you do to keep education as a human right, and not as a commodity?” - Sali and Allan**

**“Minister Garrett, I believe all students should have equal opportunities in the classroom and that their individual learning needs should be met. But I don't see this present in the current education system. Minister Garrett, what do you believe you can do to ensure equal opportunities for students are reflected in both curriculum and teaching methods so that we continue to challenge poor practice, and raise the standard of good practice?” - Corinda**

**“I believe that if teachers and students develop a stronger bond, the effectiveness of learning in the classroom will improve. Students lose interest in their classes if they are not engaged by their teacher in a mutually respectful dialogue. Many students that enjoy school do so because they feel comfortable and able to talk with their teachers. Minister Garrett, how are you planning to train and equip teachers to better engage with students in mutually respectful conversations in the class room?” - Sarah**

**“Minister Garrett, I believe that teachers need to bring a more enthusiastic and engaging approach to classrooms, which I feel would allow students to further their passion for subjects and school life. Minister Garrett, I believe that this is a major step to maintain students' passion in school, thus, how do you propose that you will assist teachers to sustain an interactive and engaging environment for students?” - Madeleine**

## ANALYSIS – WHAT DID THE STUDENTS SAY?

The following section will analyse the themes and concerns from students' questions, in descending order of popularity: Engagement and Student Centred Learning, Educational Equity and Disadvantage, Broader Educational Outcomes, Teacher Quality, Safe Supportive Schools and Miscellaneous (detailed descriptions of these themes are found in Appendix B). Within each theme, this analysis highlights the concerns of students, and how these concerns relate to the research on education policy. The methodology for this analysis is in Appendix C. Note that questions are analysed by the number of votes they received; see Appendix D for a breakdown of questions unweighted by votes.

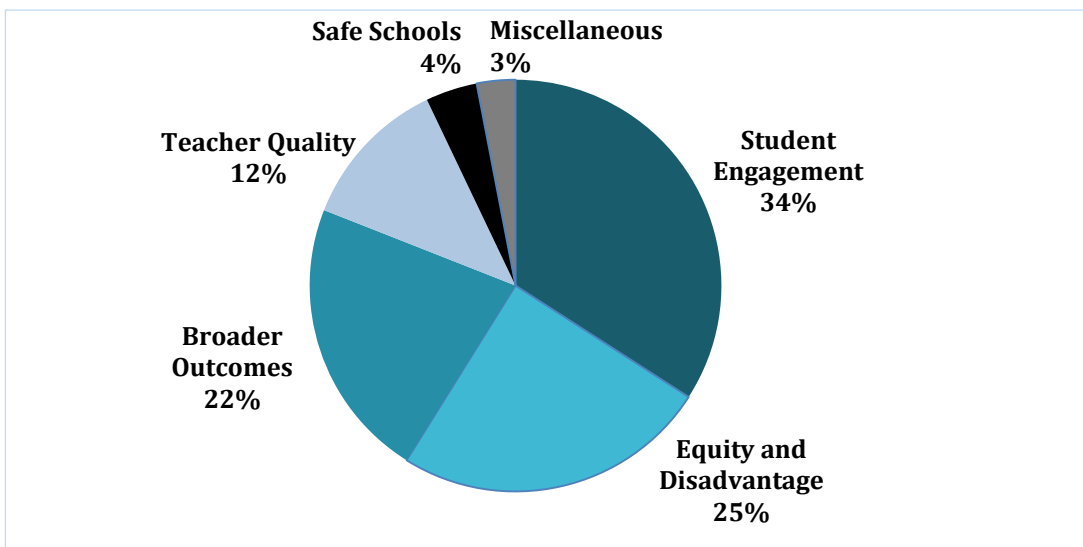


Figure 1: Proportion of votes for student questions organised by theme

### Summary of SSO Themes

In analysing the popularity of 121 questions measured by 4,436 students' votes, we found:

- Students were most concerned about the failure of the education system to engage them and meet their learning needs (34%)
- Students strongly felt there was unfairness in educational opportunities (25%)
- Many students were concerned their education was too narrowly focussed and was not preparing them for the future (22%)

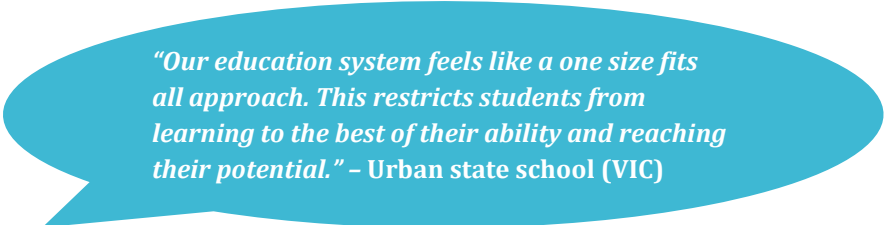
### **Summary of SSO Themes (contd.)**

- **Some students were concerned about how to improve teacher quality, recognising its impact on their education (12%)**
- **Although attracting fewer votes, a significant number of students voiced their concern over the prevalence of bullying and discrimination in their schools (4%)**
- **The role of technology and Australia's declining literacy and numeracy performance was raised by a handful of students**

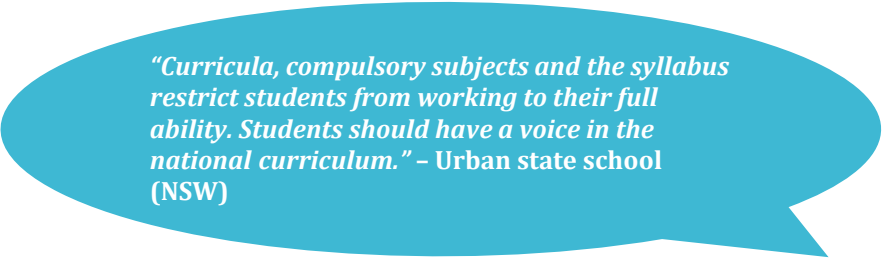
## A: Student Engagement and Student Centred Learning

### WHAT DO STUDENTS SAY?

The largest group of student votes (over one third of votes, and 19% of submitted questions) were concerned with improved student engagement in the classroom and with orienting the school system towards the needs of students. Some questions called for increased agency over how students learn in the classroom, such as catering for individual learning styles or greater individual attention. These concerns identified the importance of the teacher-student relationship in keeping students engaged in learning. Several students also expressed their desire to have more of a say about what students learn, through greater input over the content of their curriculum and choice of subjects:



*"Our education system feels like a one size fits all approach. This restricts students from learning to the best of their ability and reaching their potential." – Urban state school (VIC)*



*"Curricula, compulsory subjects and the syllabus restrict students from working to their full ability. Students should have a voice in the national curriculum." – Urban state school (NSW)*

### WHAT DOES THE RESEARCH SAY?

Most studies into student disengagement suggest that low levels of student engagement leads to poor student results (Black, 2011, p. 3). Similar to many student responses, Wyn has found that "poor relationships with teachers are the most frequent reason for students' disengagement from school". Wyn suggests that involving students as "partners in learning" with teachers create "relationships based on a better understanding of each other" (Wyn, 2011, p. 62), which closely aligns to the sentiments of the student question with the most votes:

“I believe that if teachers and students develop a stronger bond, the effectiveness of learning in the classroom will improve.” – Urban state school (NSW)

Research shows that the young people who play an active role in shaping their education have greater confidence, better social and emotional skills, a greater sense of responsibility, are better at communicating and collaborating and have a stronger sense of themselves as learners (Black & Walsh, 2009, p. 6).

## B: Educational Equity and Disadvantage

### WHAT DO STUDENTS SAY?

A quarter of votes and a fifth of questions asked were concerned with inequitable access to educational opportunity. Some students focussed on the resourcing of schools, while others focussed on the differences between students attending private and public schools. Other students highlighted the disparity of opportunities between regional and urban schools, as well as barriers affecting students with disabilities:

*“As a young Australian, I don't want to grow up in a society where the amount of money I make will determine the level of education my children will receive”. – Urban independent school & urban state school (VIC)*

*“How will the government ensure that students from regional schools are given the same opportunities as students from schools in the cities?” – Regional state school (NSW)*



## WHAT DOES THE RESEARCH SAY?

Equity is a difficult concept within education policy debates, as it means different things to different people. The OECD defines equity as consisting of *fairness and inclusion* (OECD, 2012, p. 15). While inclusion is generally accepted as an education policy objective, there are competing (but interrelated) ways of looking at *equity as fairness*:

- Equality of educational outcomes – performance gaps and achievement gaps
- Equity in educational resources – resources to respond to disadvantage
- Equity in learning, regardless of student background

Educational policy debates have focussed heavily on the private/public divide, and often reduce educational disadvantage to socioeconomic status. The Gonski Review acknowledged that Australian evidence indicates disability, indigenous background, remote schooling and non-English background also create educational disadvantage which needs to be addressed (Gonski, 2011, pp. 105–111).

ACER analysis of 2009 PISA results showed that for students in remote and regional areas, “the difference between their average reading literacy score and that of students in metropolitan schools was equivalent to almost two years of schooling,” (Thomson et al., 2009, p. 29).

OECD analysis of 2009 PISA results conclude that in the top performing school systems “students tend to perform well regardless of their own background or the school they attend” (OECD, 2009, p. 13). OECD analysis of educational systems have shown that “investing in equity in education pays off,” in terms of improved economic competitiveness and a resilient labour force during recession, beyond the individual benefits of improved incomes (OECD, 2012, pp. 13–45).

## C: Broader Educational Outcomes

### WHAT DO STUDENTS SAY?

Over 20% of votes and over a quarter of questions asked were focussed on education providing students with broader outcomes. This topic had the largest number of submitted questions. These students said the education system was not preparing them for their careers and lives in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. They also raise concerns that the education system is too focussed on exam results, without demonstrating the relevance of what they learn:

*"We believe that a primary aim of the education system should be to develop and apply key life skills such as leadership, communication, teamwork and community involvement in order to overcome challenges and solve future problems". - Urban state school (WA)*

*"Today, there is a lack of connection between what is being taught in the classroom and its application and usefulness in the real world." - Urban Catholic school (NSW)*

### WHAT DOES THE RESEARCH SAY?

There is broad consensus that the economic, technological and social context of 21<sup>st</sup> Century Australia leads to new educational challenges, and a broader set of educational outcomes that schools need to deliver on. The Australian understanding of 21<sup>st</sup> Century skills is best captured by the Melbourne Declaration (MCEECTYA, 2008), which sets out a range of educational outcomes for Australian schools, including literacy and numeracy, technology skills, logical thinking, creativity, innovation, problem solving skills, collaboration, communication, confidence, optimism, entrepreneurship, civics and citizenship.


However, much of Australian education policy and public debate remains focussed on literacy and numeracy outcomes as measured by NAPLAN testing. This is most notable in the inclusion of Australian rankings in literacy and numeracy as a top-level goal in the Australian Education Bill (*Australian Education Bill 2012, 2012, sec. 3*). Global educational policy is starting to move beyond this narrow focus, such as the inclusion of collaborative problem-solving assessment in Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) testing in 2015 (Pearson, 2011).

Similarly, the Assessment and Teaching of 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills (ATC21S) program shows that 21<sup>st</sup> Century skills can be assessed and used for informing teacher practice (Assessment & Teaching of 21st Century Skills, 2012). Twenty-first Century skills need to be incorporated into Australian curriculum, teacher practice and accountability frameworks to ensure that these outcomes are at the core of the education provided by Australian schools.

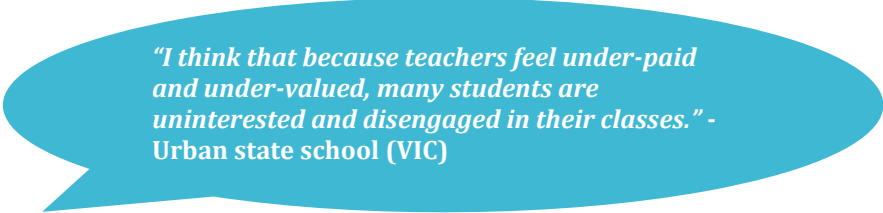
## D: Teacher Quality

### WHAT DO STUDENTS SAY?

Approximately 12% of votes and 11% of questions reflected concerns about teacher quality. These students affirmed the importance of high quality and inspiring teachers for student motivation and improvement, linking these concerns to improved student engagement. Others suggested poor practice and low teacher motivation existed because teachers are not being adequately supported, with issues related to pay, workload or prestige. Some questions identified the difficulty in retaining high quality teachers, particularly in remote and disadvantaged schools:



*"I believe that good teachers who inspire and motivate me to learn are important for my future." - Urban independent school (SA)*



*"I think that because teachers feel under-paid and under-valued, many students are uninterested and disengaged in their classes." - Urban state school (VIC)*

*“How do you plan to improve the quality of our teachers and in turn, improve our education?” – Urban independent school (NSW)*

### **WHAT DOES THE RESEARCH SAY?**

Teachers are the single most important in-school factor that impacts student learning (Hanushek, 2011; Hattie, 2003; McCaffrey, Lockwood, KORETZ, & Hamilton, 2003; Rockoff, 2004). Fundamental to teacher effectiveness policy is the development of an ongoing feedback culture in schools where teachers are focussed on learning how to teach better. However, when comparing Australia to the best performing education systems, “the culture within most schools, and schools systems, is a long way from one of openness and sharing, continuous learning and high performance” (Jensen & Reichl, 2012, p. 1).

Teacher quality has been a reform priority in many states with the recent releases of teacher quality discussion papers in Victoria and New South Wales (NSW DEC, 2012; VIC DEECD, 2012). We also direct the committee to CNPE’s submissions on these papers ( Foundation for Young Australians, 2012a, 2012b).

As previously mentioned, student feedback can be a useful source of information to improve teacher practice. Well-designed student surveys produce more consistent results of teacher effectiveness than classroom observations or achievement gain measures (Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, 2013).

## **E: Safe, Supportive Schools**

### **WHAT DO STUDENTS SAY?**

Concerns about the safety of the school environment were reflected in 4% of votes, and 14% of submitted questions. Students raised the issues of bullying, cyber-bullying and discrimination towards students and sometimes teachers:

*“I myself have experienced physical abuse in my school due to me being a Muslim.” – School unknown (VIC)*

*"To be able to create, explore and get the most out of our schooling, we must be free of racist, sexist and homophobic bullying." – Urban independent school & Urban state school (VIC)*

#### **WHAT DOES THE RESEARCH SAY?**

The Australian Covert Bullying Prevalence study found in 2009 that frequent bullying (every few weeks or more) occurred for 27% of Year 4 to Year 9 students (Hearn, 2009, p. xxi). The *Cooperative Arrangement for Complaints Handling on Social Networking Sites* recently announced by the Prime Minister reflects the current focus on cyber-bullying at an internet policy level (Department of Broadband, 2013).

A 2009 study by FYA found that 70% of secondary schools students had experienced some form of racism, and most frequently said that they felt "angry and frustrated" and felt "like they didn't belong" as a consequence (Mansouri, Jenkins, Morgan, & Taouk, 2012, p. 40).

#### **F: Miscellaneous – Technology and Literacy and Numeracy**

The smallest group of votes (3%) and questions (10%) were concerned with the role of technology in schools, as well as literacy and numeracy. Students had divergent and often conflicted views on the use of technology in the classroom and the priority of literacy and numeracy as a reform directive.

## STAKEHOLDER COMPARISON

CNPE believes that consultation with all education stakeholders is important for effective education policy: students, teachers, parents and school leaders. The questions analysed in this submission reveal the range of student concerns within the sample of SSO students.

While a detailed comparison of other stakeholder views is beyond the scope of this submission, a crude indication of other stakeholders can be extrapolated by analysing the public agenda of various peak bodies, indicated by the themes of media releases. A comparison of the main topics released by the education unions, parent groups and government ministers shows a contrast between student views and other stakeholder groups (see Appendix E for methodology).

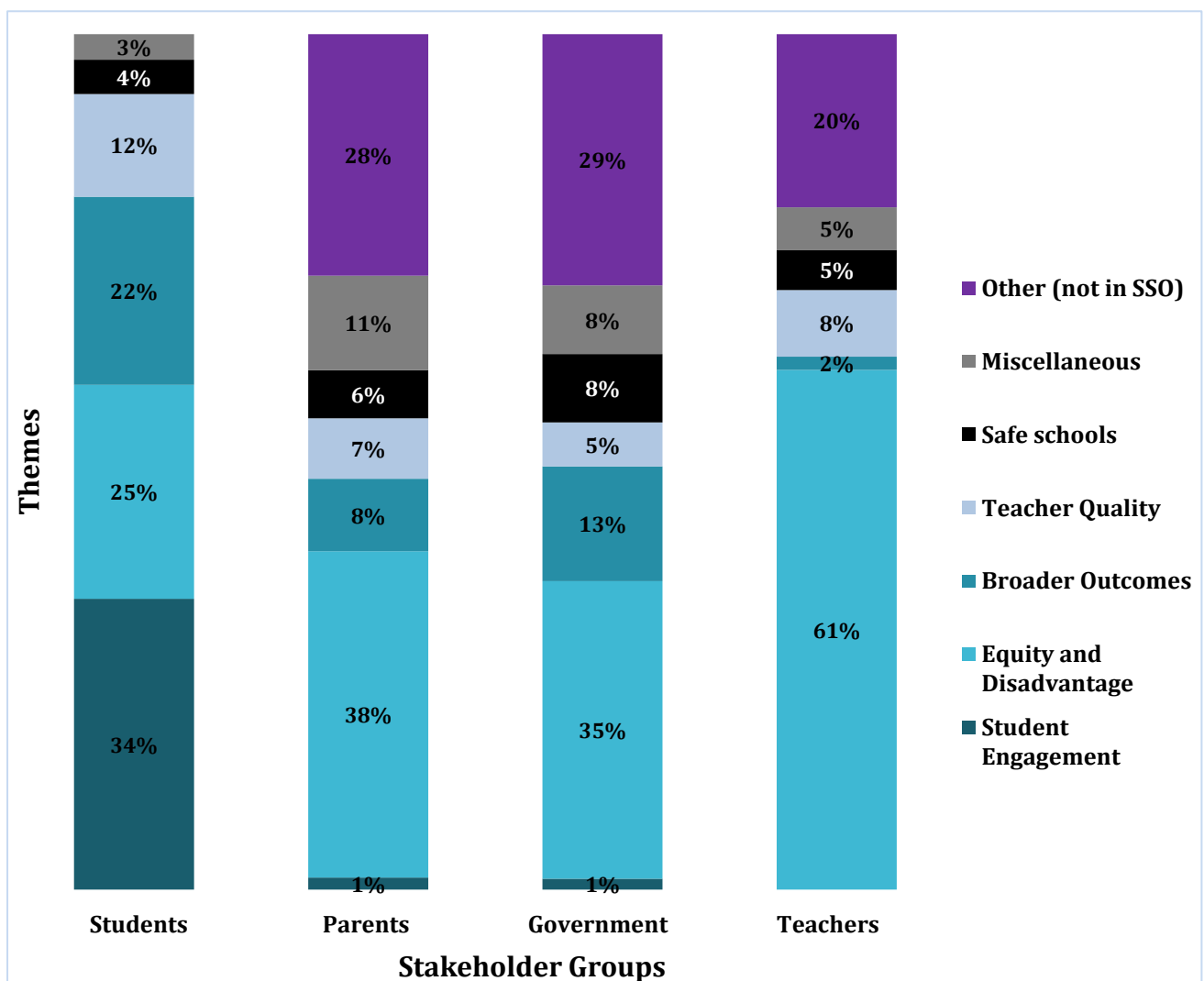


Figure 2: Stakeholder comparison of student question themes weighted by number of votes and amount of press releases, by theme, of key stakeholder groups over 2012

Student engagement and student centred learning is the most prominent theme of students but barely registers among the public concerns of other stakeholder groups. In the absence of student voice, education policy may be understating the importance of this topic in successful teaching and learning.

Equity and educational disadvantage is a substantial concern among students, but is even more prominent with other stakeholder groups, particularly teachers. This is likely to have been influenced by the public and policy debate around proposed Gonski reforms.

Broader educational outcomes were more important to students than to other stakeholder groups. Again, this may mean that education policy understates the significance of this theme, in the absence of student consultation into policy. Other major themes such as teacher quality and safe schools saw similar levels of concern between students and other stakeholder groups.

Some prominent issues that have dominated the education policy debate are missing or only received minimal attention from students, such as principal effectiveness, school autonomy, transparency and accountability, new buildings, literacy and numeracy, and technology. These factors appear to be more important to other stakeholders such as parents, teachers, principals and governments, or perhaps these issues represent experiences that are further removed from students' day-to-day experience of education in schools. These differences in perspectives highlight the value in consulting all stakeholder groups.

The distribution of topics given attention by parents and government are in very similar proportions. This may indicate the relative strength of parental influence on (or alternatively, alignment with) government, as opposed to teachers or students. In order to compare 'apples with apples' and to build comprehensive stakeholder engagement data on education in Australia there is the need for a comparative stakeholder survey. This would allow comparison of each stakeholder group on the same issues. CNPE also believes that, alongside students, all educational stakeholders (parents and teachers) should have access to platforms that facilitate engagement and allow them to publically express their views on education, shape the public debate and influence policy outcomes.

# CONCLUSION

## Lessons from Student ShoutOut

As the primary beneficiaries and stakeholders in education, students have an important role to play in shaping the education system at a classroom, school and system level. Student ShoutOut demonstrated that when engaged, young people are keen to participate, have important things to say on their education and have unique knowledge and relevant perspectives that are not necessarily represented by other stakeholders. Students wanted engaging and student centred learning, educational opportunities for all students, education preparing them for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, high teacher quality and safe and supportive schools.

Without representation, the concerns of students are left out of decision-making processes, and students become “passive recipients or objects of educational reform” (Black, 2011, pp. 75–76). SSO demonstrated students are a rich source of data on learning and are underutilised as agents of change for educational reform in Australia.

SSO was an experiment, in partnership with OurSay, in emerging consultation methods that sought to connect students from across Australia with the people in power. The experience of running SSO has provided valuable insights about the distinctive needs of students in engagement and consultation processes. When we designed SSO we did not know what to expect or what students would have to say. We did know that they had a right to be heard and their input would be valuable. This submission is an important next step in ensuring that we not only hear students but we act on what they say. CNPE will continue to trial mechanisms for effective student consultation and engage with policymakers and other stakeholders to include student perspectives in policy decision-making.



## **Policy Recommendation**

**We recommend that students are represented in all stakeholder consultation processes in education policy development. To ensure meaningful participation of students, consultation needs to consider the specific needs of students as a unique stakeholder group.**

## **Implementation Issues**

**To maximise the effectiveness of engagement efforts, consultation mechanisms should:**

- Recognise how, when and why young people are most likely to engage**
- Be informed by a nuanced understanding of the digital environment**
- Develop strategies to engage not only active young people, but those who are disempowered and disadvantaged**
- Build in formal processes to reflect student perspectives in decision-making**
- Involve independent bodies who understand both the youth and education environment**
- Consider facilitation by independent bodies to encourage diverse representation**

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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The Foundation for Young Australians' Centre for New Public Education would be pleased to speak to this submission or elaborate on our research to assist the Senate Standing Committee on Teaching and Learning in its important work.

For further information about this submission or FYA's research and initiatives, please contact:

Jan Owen AM  
Chief Executive Officer  
Foundation for Young Australians

# FIGURES

## **FIGURE 1**

Proportion of votes for student questions organised by theme

## **FIGURE 2**

Stakeholder comparison of student question themes weighted by number of votes and amount of press releases, by theme, of key stakeholder groups over 2012

## **FIGURE A1**

Proportion of workshop participants by state

## **FIGURE A2**

Proportion of workshop participant questions by school sector

## **FIGURE A3**

Age of workshop participants

## **FIGURE C1**

Relative proportion of votes compared to amount of questions asked for by theme

## **FIGURE C2**

Proportion of student questions supporting each theme

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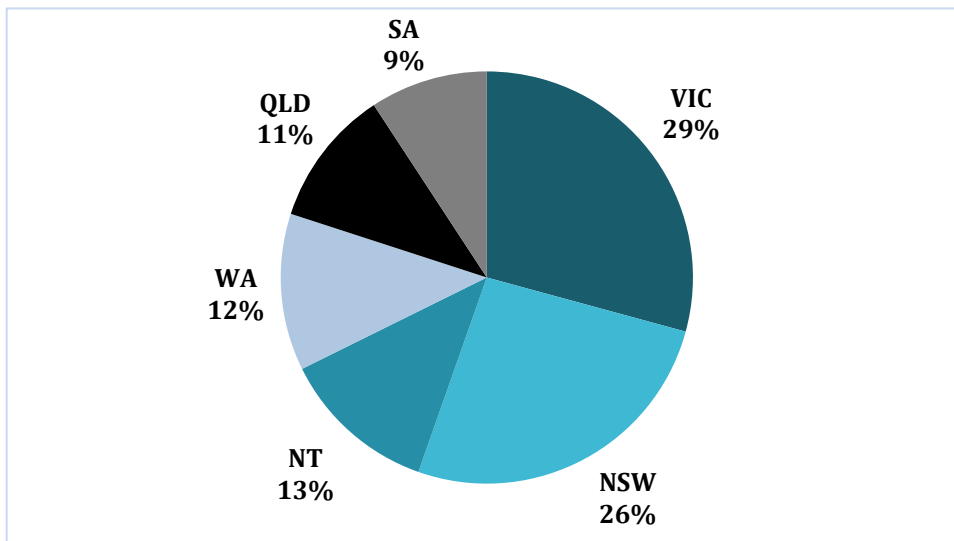
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## APPENDIX A: DEMOGRAPHICS

The online engagement platform of SSO limits the availability of demographic data at a more precise level. Voting can not be attributed to an individual, although there were automated authentication processes to ensure that students voted up to the maximum seven times, and students were required to self-identify as between 13 to 18 years of age. The amount of unique users was also tracked.

More detailed demographic data was available for the group of students who attended the offline SSO workshops in capital cities around Australia. 55% of questions submitted to the OurSay platform were submitted by students who had attended the workshops. This subset of students provides an indicative (although not necessarily representative) sample of students who participated in SSO. For example, for logistical reasons the workshop participants were disproportionately based in metropolitan locations.

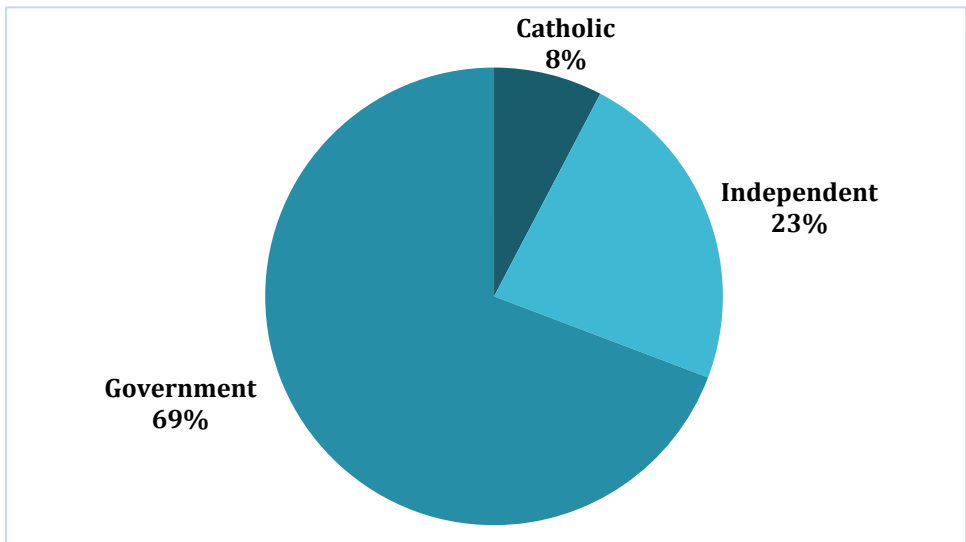
The following sections show the demographics of students who attended workshops and submitted questions on SSO. It should be noted that while the analysis in the remainder of this submission is weighted by votes, this section uses the number of questions, as there is insufficient data to disaggregate the population of voting students.



**Figure A1: Proportion of workshop participants by state**

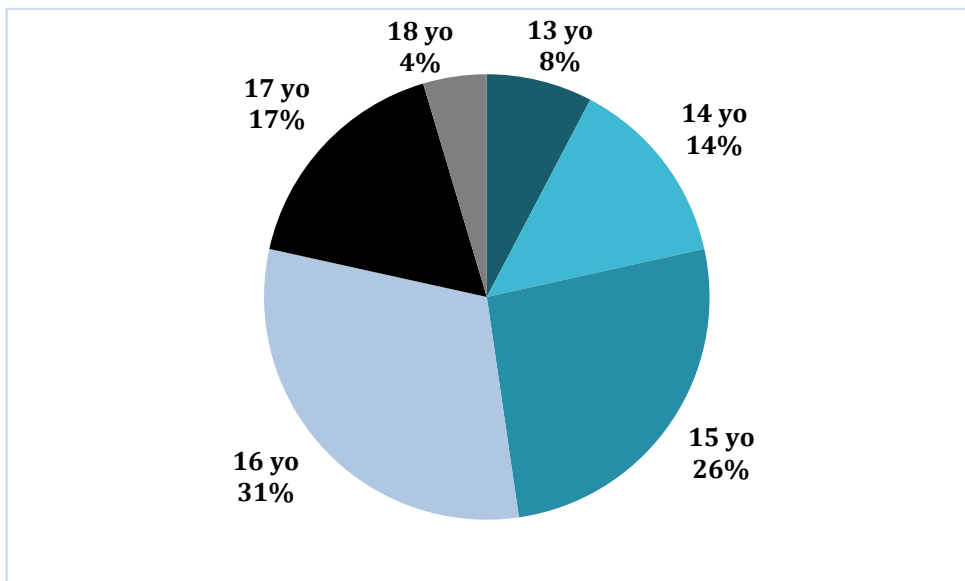
Questions submitted from workshop participants were broadly consistent with population levels of different states (excluding states and territories which did not host SSO workshops). The exception to this is Victoria, which was over-represented in this sample. WA also saw participation above its proportion of the population.





**Figure A2: Proportion of workshop participant questions by school sector**

Workshop participants who submitted questions represented all three school sectors in Australia. Independent school students were over-representative of the population of school students, and Catholic school students were somewhat under-represented.



**Figure A3: Age of workshop participants**

Participants in SSO workshops who submitted questions were between 13 and 18 years of age. The majority of students were between 15 and 17 years old.

## APPENDIX B: CODEBOOK

PRIMARY CODES	EXAMPLES
<p><b>Student engagement and student centred learning</b></p> <p><i>Paying closer attention to individual learning needs in the classroom (increasing agency in how they learn), as well as providing more choice over subjects and curriculum (increasing agency over what they learn)</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Actively engaging with students</li> <li>➤ Individualised learning</li> <li>➤ Smaller class sizes</li> <li>➤ Flexibility in learning</li> <li>➤ Student input into national curriculum</li> <li>➤ Greater subject choice</li> <li>➤ Positive learning environments</li> </ul>
<p><b>Educational equity and disadvantage</b></p> <p><i>Delivering a high quality education to all students, regardless of their background or what school they attend</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ School funding, TAFE funding</li> <li>➤ Regional disadvantage</li> <li>➤ Socioeconomic status (SES)</li> <li>➤ Catering for students with a disability</li> <li>➤ University and TAFE access for disadvantaged groups</li> </ul>
<p><b>Broader educational outcomes</b></p> <p><i>Equipping students with the full range of skills and knowledge to prepare them for their future in work and life</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ 21<sup>st</sup> Century skills such as collaborative problem solving</li> <li>➤ Professional skills for a dynamic workforce</li> <li>➤ Curriculum which responds to changing technology</li> <li>➤ Sustainability, animal ethics, global citizenship, cross-cultural awareness</li> <li>➤ Extracurricular activities and skills outside the classroom</li> <li>➤ Creative arts are undervalued</li> </ul>
<p><b>Teacher quality</b></p> <p><i>Providing high quality teachers who are inspiring to their students and highly valued by society</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Need for inspiring teachers</li> <li>➤ Improving teaching practice</li> <li>➤ Supporting and valuing the teaching profession (pay, etc.)</li> </ul>
<p><b>Safe, supportive schools</b></p> <p><i>A school environment where students and teachers feel safe, and are free of violence, discrimination and bullying</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Bullying and cyberbullying</li> <li>➤ Homophobia and racism</li> <li>➤ Tolerance</li> <li>➤ Bullying of teachers</li> </ul>
<p><b>Miscellaneous – technology and literacy and numeracy</b></p> <p><i>Technology which is up-to-date and used appropriately in schools. Australia’s international competitiveness in literacy and numeracy</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Using the latest technology</li> <li>➤ New technology is used ineffectively</li> <li>➤ Technology can distract from learning</li> <li>➤ Stronger literacy and numeracy programs</li> <li>➤ International competitiveness</li> </ul>

## APPENDIX C: METHODOLOGY

### Content Analysis

This submission presents the views expressed by the questions students asked on the OurSay platform. CNPE's qualitative analysis uses student questions as the unit of analysis and our categorisation is based off the major themes present in these questions. An initial review was conducted by two CNPE researchers to establish the themes covered by student questions. This review was synthesised into a codebook of themes with associated examples to cover all of the questions.

Based on this codebook, SSO questions were categorised into primary and secondary themes by six different raters conducting their coding independently. Several methods of aggregating these codes were evaluated for highest inter-rater reliability. The highest reliability was found by each coder choosing two potential codes, and associating each question with the single code which occurred most frequently across all coders.

### Caveats and Limitations

It should be noted that the data used in this study was not designed to be representative of the Australian student population, and the SSO campaign was not specifically designed to obtain data about the range of views of students in a comprehensive or structured manner. Therefore, the quantitative findings about the relative importance of topics should be treated with some caution. However, the submitted questions provide an indicative sample of the range of student views from around the country, and across schooling sectors.

Furthermore, each unique email address could vote seven times, so the number of votes does not directly translate into the number of students supporting a particular question. Students could vote up to seven times for a single question, or could alternatively vote for seven different questions. In either case, a higher number indicates a higher level of support among participants.

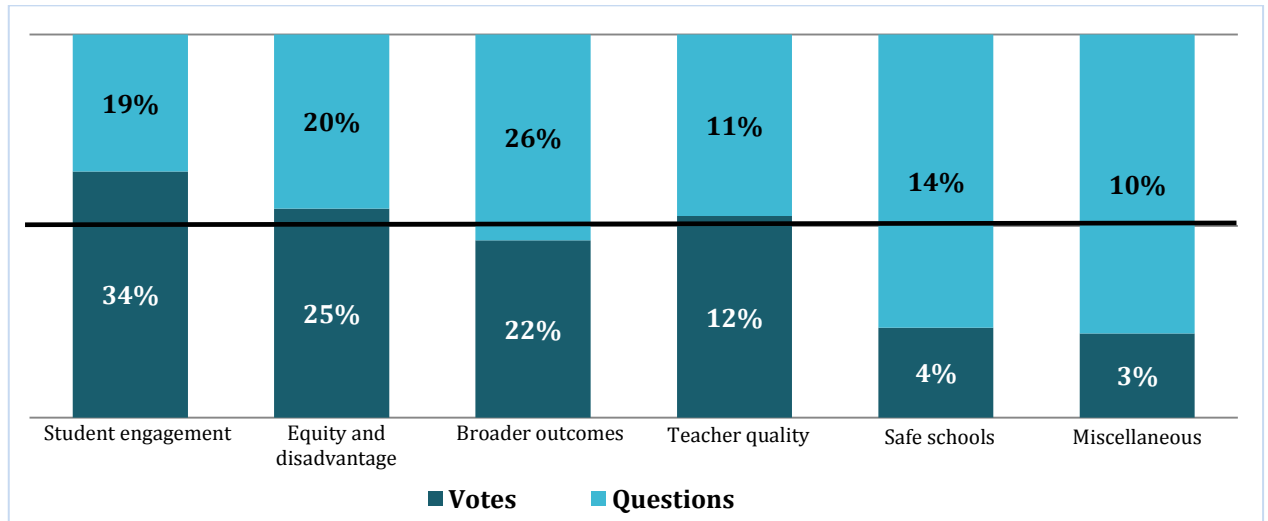
Given the reliance on votes, there may be selection effects due to campaigning – the questions receiving the most votes may be those with the most organised campaign, rather than the question that most accurately reflects the concerns of students. For this reason both the unweighted numbers of questions, as well as questions weighted by votes, should jointly be used to understand the range of student concerns.

While the questions were entirely students' own, it should be noted that via the workshops and campaign messaging, CNPE encouraged students to orientate their thinking towards the broad theme of their vision for education in Australia. This was to develop questions that were both based on students' personal experiences, and could foster thinking about the broader educational system.

## APPENDIX D: VOTES VS QUESTIONS

The overall analysis in this submission assumes that the number of votes received indicates the degree of support among SSO participants. Comparing the share of votes with the share of questions submitted reveals a more nuanced picture of student engagement with the topics.

**Topics above line had a higher share of student votes than the share of questions asked**



**Figure C1: Relative proportion of votes compared to amount of questions asked by theme**

Support for safe schools received only 4% of votes but 14% of questions asked. This probably indicates the deeply personal nature of concerns about bullying, racism and discrimination. In those cases, students may have wanted to share their personal story rather than vote for another submitted question. Concerns about literacy, numeracy, and technology (mostly technology) received only 3% of votes but was reflected in 10% of questions. This may reflect the diverse range of student views on these topics, making it less likely that a particular question will resonate.

Student Engagement and Student Centred Learning received 34% of votes but only 19% of questions. This indicates that this topic has a relatively small range of concerns (students could vote for an existing question rather than needing to submit their own) but the concerns are widely shared so attract many votes.

Other topics received broadly consistent shares of questions and votes.

## Distribution of Questions

Taking the numbers of questions submitted, unweighted by the number of votes received, reveals a more even distribution of questions across the various themes. The largest number of questions concerned broader educational outcomes, with over one quarter of questions submitted. Student engagement and equity concerns received roughly equal numbers of questions with one fifth of questions each. Safe schools received a relatively large 14% of questions, while teacher quality and miscellaneous concerns represented about one tenth of questions each.

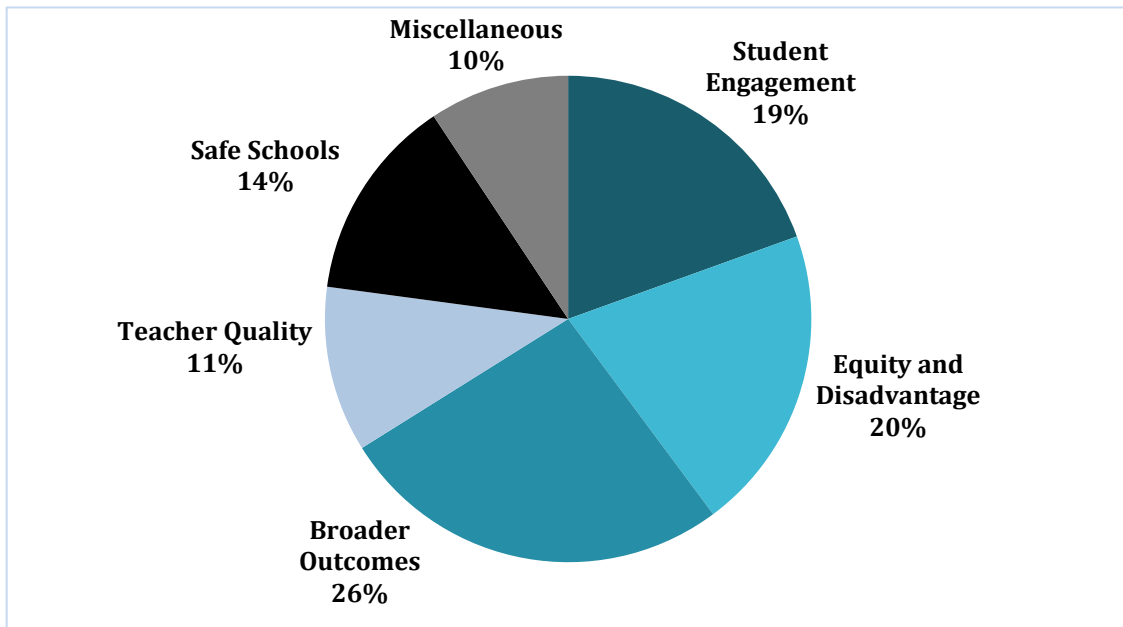


Figure C2: Proportion of student questions supporting each theme

## APPENDIX E: STAKEHOLDER METHODOLOGY

All 2012 media releases from the key bodies representing each stakeholder group were categorised according to the themes extracted from the Student ShoutOut campaign for comparability. Media releases were chosen as an indicator of what issues these respective stakeholder groups were most interested in through public comment and discussion. A content analysis of the media releases was then conducted, at the document rather than word level. It must be noted that a range of other issues frequented media releases (but were not brought up at all in the Student ShoutOut conversations), such as industrial relations, parent engagement, school autonomy, and new buildings and campuses. These are captured under 'Other'. The key bodies analysed within each stakeholder group were:

- Teachers – the Australian Education Union and the Independent Education Union
- Parents – Australian Council of State School Organisations and Independent School Parents
- Government – the offices of Minister Peter Garrett MP (Federal) and Minister Martin Dixon (Victoria)