

A vibrant watercolor background featuring a rainbow spectrum of colors (blue, green, yellow, orange, red, pink) with numerous black silhouettes of birds in flight scattered across the scene.

Student Aspirations Graduate Attributes

What do students in the Lismore Diocese need to know, do and 'be' to live productive and meaningful lives?

How has COVID-19 impacted on hopes and aspirations?

What do they aspire to?

What do their parents and teachers hope for them?

How do schools help them achieve this?

What is this research about?

The Catholic Schools Office Lismore (CSOL) has developed a student-centred strategic framework that positions 'Fullness of Life' for students as the core focus of its education efforts. In developing student attributes we wanted to ensure these are informed by what students tell us about their aspirations for the future. The CSOL worked with the Centre for Children and Young People at Southern Cross University to undertake a robust, ethical study that captured student views alongside those of other key stakeholders. This document summarises the key findings.

The Research Process

The research aimed to find out:



1.

Aspirations

What are the aspirations of students in the Lismore Diocese? And what do their parents and teachers hope for them?

2.

Attributes

What qualities and characteristics will students need to thrive and to follow their aspirations after school?

3.


School Support

What can schools do to help develop and strengthen these qualities and characteristics?

The research involved two parts:



Evidence Review
A comprehensive review of existing evidence



Focus Groups
in 6 primary and 6 secondary schools

Insights gathered from:
143 students
90 Teaching & CSOL Staff
24 Parents

Two full final reports are available. The key findings from both are summarised here.

Findings

1. Aspirations

*"I want everyone to be equal...I want to be part of the change."
(Girl, Year 5-6 Focus Group, School A)*

*"Find a profession that I wake up to and am excited to go to my job. I want to change the world."
(Boy, Year 7-9 Focus Group, School D)*



The students aspire to:

- ◆ A career they are passionate about and will enjoy
- ◆ A career in which they can make a difference in the world
- ◆ A healthy work/life balance

Parents & Staff hope students will:

- ◆ Have the confidence & self-belief to follow their aspirations
- ◆ Have the resilience to manage set-backs and cope with change
- ◆ Be happy, healthy and optimistic
- ◆ Have the skills and motivation to engage in life-long learning

All participant groups added the importance of:

- ◆ Meaningful and respectful relationships with family and friends
- ◆ Having the practical life skills needed for adult life
- ◆ Living by good moral values — being a good citizen

Insights from the evidence review: Aspirations in the Lismore Diocese reflect generational shifts away from materiality. They reflect deeper understandings of health and happiness. These understandings are more important than ever in an uncertain, changing world.

*"Being happy and surrounded by supportive people. Continue to learn and grow in all aspects of my life."
(Girl, Year 10-12 Focus Group, School C)*

Evidence-Informed Tips on Careers

Career aspirations are quite **CONCENTRATED** - expand students' knowledge of other careers in stable sectors.



Aspirations are relatively **STABLE** across primary and secondary students - can begin general career exploration earlier, before pressure to 'choose.'



Strong interests in helping professions (e.g., medical, teaching etc.). These are **STRATEGIC** choices in a changing society.



2. Attributes

We asked students, parents, teachers and CSOL staff what students need to know, do and 'be.' That is, what **knowledge**, **skills** and **characteristics** would help students to thrive and to follow their aspirations after school.

Across all of the focus groups we heard:

- ◆ 25 different things to **know** (such as how to manage money and how to communicate well)
- ◆ 21 related **skills** (such as conflict resolution, critical thinking skills and life-long learning)
- ◆ 31 underpinning **characteristics** (such as empathy, confidence and resilience)

During the analysis process we linked together similar ideas and concepts. This resulted in a list of 21 ideas, which are displayed in the word cloud below.



The 21 skills and characteristics were then distilled further. Similar concepts were collated and consideration was given to ideas that were mentioned most frequently by different participant groups. This resulted in five key student attributes. These are...



These attributes will be taken into consideration in the final version to be developed by the Catholic Schools Office.

Insights from the evidence review:

‘Soft skills,’ such as the five student attributes listed above, are more important than ever to help young people maintain their wellbeing and navigate further study, work and family life in a changing society. The evidence review found many lists of desirable attributes across different organisations and programs, but they all echo similar attributes to those listed here.

In addition to the increased importance of these attributes, three core skills / essential competencies remain vital for all students. These are sufficient proficiency in literacy, numeracy and digital literacy to allow graduates to fully participate in the labour market and community.

3. School Support

What helps students develop the attributes needed for an uncertain, changing future?

Participants perceive schools already offer the following:



- ◆ Career fairs and work experience
- ◆ Supportive, caring teachers
- ◆ Daily structure (time management etc.)
- ◆ Wellbeing / mental and physical health programs (meditation, drugs, alcohol, sex education etc.)



- ◆ Student voice
- ◆ Exploration of faith
- ◆ Anti-bullying policies
- ◆ A sense of community
- ◆ Opportunities for teamwork

"Teachers teach you about patience, respect, equality and tolerance (teachers model respect)."
(Boy, Year 5-6 Focus Group, School A)

Participants perceive schools could provide further support through:

"[Teachers give us] support with getting outside our comfort zone."
(Girl, Year 10-12 Focus Group, School A)



More Programs

- Life skills
- Mental health & wellbeing
- Resilience



Strengthening Community

- More community building activities
- More rites of passage
- Less tokenistic rewarding of everyone



Home-School Relations

- Strengthen communication / workshops for parents on learning content
- Involve families in career fairs



Teaching Differently

- Strengthen independent learning
- Instil a love of learning
- Simplify curriculum and focus on core skills
- More learning outdoors
- More 'hands on' and creative learning



Real World Learning

- Make clearer connections between learning content and real world value
- More industry expert days

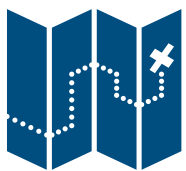
Insights from the evidence review:

The evidence echoes the above ideas about the importance of school culture:

- ◆ When students see wellbeing values and skills, like empathy and teamwork, modelled by others at school;
- ◆ When they have ownership over their learning;
- ◆ When time for relationship building is prioritised and they experience respectful relationships;
- ◆ When reflection and moral values are part of daily conversations; and,
- ◆ When student voice and participation are central to their school experience...

...they will more likely develop these attributes, which then become a way of 'being' they can take with them through life.

Where to from here?



System Level Mapping

The five student attributes make explicit the outcomes that the CSOL and its schools are seeking to nurture and develop through their accompaniment of students. These attributes will be implicitly and/or explicitly embedded into the different domains of the 'Fullness of Life' strategic framework that guides the educational efforts of Lismore Diocesan schools. Areas of inquiry for consideration in moving forward:

- Are there key Year activities, curriculum specialisations, units of work or co-curricular activities that already develop these student attributes?
- How can we ensure the development of these attributes is more intentional?
- Where are the gaps across our learning, wellbeing and faith programs?
- How might we monitor and evaluate the development of these attributes?
- How might we involve students in this process?

Insights from the evidence review - Looking to the Future:

The current generation of young adults are more educated than ever, but navigating life after school and achieving things like home ownership, a secure job, the security to have children, and work/life balance has been extremely challenging in Australia's 'gig economy.' This can have considerable impact on mental health. Achieving career stability is even more complex for students from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds.

Instability and uncertainty about the future have heightened due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Having purpose (helping others, building strong relationships, being healthy, having faith, living ethically etc.) may help support mental health and wellbeing now and in the future, especially when combined with attributes like resilience and life-long learning skills.



This snapshot of student, staff and parent views in the Lismore Diocese in 2020 highlights what students need to know, do and be to have happy, meaningful and productive lives, as well as what schools can (and do) provide to support this.

This document provides a brief summary of research undertaken by the Centre for Children and Young People (CCYP) at Southern Cross University in conjunction with the Catholic Schools Office Lismore (CSOL). The summary has been developed and designed by The CYRA Service.

We wish to acknowledge the 12 schools in the Lismore Diocese involved in the research: St Augustine's Primary School, Coffs Harbour; St Carthage's Primary School, Lismore; St Joseph's Primary School, Tweed Heads; St Joseph's Primary School, Wauchope; St Joseph's Primary School, Woodburn; St Patrick's Primary School, Macksville; Newman Senior Technical College, Port Macquarie; St John Paul College, Coffs Harbour; St Joseph's College, Banora Point; St Paul's College, Kempsey; St Mary's Catholic College, Casino; Xavier Catholic College, Ballina. We would like to extend our gratitude to all student, staff and parent participants for their enthusiastic support and generosity with their time and expertise. We especially thank Mr Paul Milgate from the Catholic Schools Office Lismore for his leadership with this initiative.

The full, final reports are available via the CCYP website: <https://www.scu.edu.au/centre-for-children-and-young-people/our-research/>



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Suggested Reference: Graham, A., Truscott, J., Simmons, C., & Canosa, A. (2020). *Student Aspirations, Graduate Attributes: Summary of Research Findings*. Centre for Children & Young People, Southern Cross University: Lismore, Australia.