

# **Tweed Shire Youth Council Evaluation Report**

## **1. Executive summary**

A review of the Tweed Shire Youth Council program can provide an improved outcome for engagement between Council and the youth of the Shire.

The program is now in its fourth year of operation. Enough time has elapsed to consider the benefits of the outcomes it is producing and whether this is the direction that Council wants to keep the program going in. Council has requested this report to evaluate the program and recommend any adjustments or changes to take it forward. To achieve this, a review of the relevant documentation, including the Youth Council Terms of Reference, has been made to compare it to the actual outcomes being produced. In addition, the student participants and school teachers were surveyed on their thoughts about the program, along with input from Councillors and Council staff.

This investigation of the program has identified that it is in fact out of alignment with the intent of the original Terms of Reference. Initially it was set up to be an advisory committee to Council on youth issues, however the main practical outcomes of the program now are school-based projects that are led by Youth Council members, with the assistance of Council staff where needed. While these projects are positive and valuable, they sit outside of the advisory committee role that the program is supposed to have as its priority function for Council.

Recommendations have been made within this report to make changes in how the Youth Council operates, to bring it in line with the original intent. These include providing relevant information in meeting agendas so that students have the opportunity to grasp an issue before they are asked to come together to discuss it and make a recommendation to Council. Another is that the students be selected from the Year 10 or year 11 group rather than year 12 as the older students struggle to commit fully to the program due to their final year studies along with work and social activities.

It is also suggested that most of the committee meetings be held during school hours and at host schools to allow for an improved opportunity for Council to engage with school communities.

In addition to the recommendations made about the Youth Council itself, it is also suggested that Council consider investigating other options to build on the good work that is being done through the school-based projects by involving specific branches of Council in youth engagement projects – such as community building activities, environmental projects, involvement in facility planning, etc, as there are many ways that Council can create partnerships with the youth of the Shire.



## 2. Introduction

The Tweed Shire Youth Council program was developed by Tweed Shire Council as an action from the Youth Strategy. It was inaugurated in 2016 and has continued to run each year since then. The Terms of Reference states that the Youth Council was created as a “*student leadership and civic program*” with the intention of involving young people in local government decision making and supporting young people to deliver Strategic Outcomes one through six of the Youth Strategy.

Now in its fourth year, an evaluation of its progress and feedback from stakeholders is being undertaken. This report provides Council with information based on feedback from student participants, schools, and internally from Council to examine the alignment of the program with the Terms of Reference that were used to create it. Suggestions are also made in regard to the future of the program.

### 2.1 Overview of the current Youth Council program

The Council web site, on the page titled “Young People”, introduces the Youth Council program as a commitment that came from the Youth Strategy and Action Plan (2013-2017), under Strategic Outcome 1, Action Item 2: “*Establish a Youth Council to act as an advisory committee and respond to issues relevant to young people aged 12 to 24 years*”.

The Terms of Reference for the Youth Council states that the objectives for the programme are aligned with the Strategic Outcomes of the Youth Strategy:

*“The Youth Council is a student leadership and civic program which will involve young people in local government decision making to build a resilient youth population and provide opportunities for young people to reach their full potential. Council will support young people to deliver the following Youth Strategy outcomes:*

*Strategic Outcome 1: Young people are valued members of the community and engaged in decision-making that affect them.*

*Strategic Outcome 2: Young people feel proud of where they live with access to quality places and spaces.*

*Strategic Outcome 3: Young people are involved in local events and a range of creative, sporting and social activities.*

*Strategic Outcome 4: Young people have access to a range of local education, employment and career opportunities.*

*Strategic Outcome 5: Young people feel safe and protected from drugs, alcohol and violence.*

*Strategic Outcome 6: Young people can get around, have access to services and have affordable places to live.”*

It is noted that Strategic Outcome four, five, and six are not core Council responsibilities and are aligned more closely with state government responsibilities. Therefore, any actions by the Youth Council on issues that relate to these points would be most likely to be advocacy based.

The Youth Council program currently operates as a group of representatives of the ten high schools in the Shire. Each school may nominate two student representatives between the ages of fifteen to eighteen years old, and they are usually in their senior year of school.

The meetings take place four times per year, being once per school term. The venue for the meetings rotates between the Murwillumbah Civic and Cultural Centre, Council Chambers, and the Tweed Heads Administration Building, Harvard Room – two meetings at each site per year (however, it is noted that the Terms of Reference allows for the Youth Council itself to set a meeting location at their discretion).

Meeting agendas include opportunities for members to introduce and discuss projects that they would like to champion on behalf of the youth of the region. There is also a workshop section of the meeting devoted to updates on Council projects, where feedback can be provided to Council from the group.

In addition, the meetings can include presentations from external organisations that have a connection to issues affecting youth, and also feedback from the Youth Council members to Council on local matters that are of interest for their own school area. These may, or may not, be Council related matters.

At the fourth and final meeting, the Youth Council members report back to the Council on their activities for the year and they are awarded with a Certificate of Appreciation in recognition of their service to Council.

### **3. Evaluation of the program**

#### **3.1 Approach and methodology**

The evaluation of the program is based on stakeholder feedback, and on a comparison of the structure of the program to how it is proposed in the Terms of Reference. The process used to investigate the current program has been a combination of an examination of:

the relevant Council documents, including:

- The Terms of Reference for the Youth Council;
- Youth Council Student Handbook;
- Youth Council Information Pack
- Records (agendas and minutes) of Student Council meetings,

and feedback from stakeholders in the process including:

- Youth Council participants
- School representatives (teachers)
- Councillors and staff



This feedback was obtained through utilising written surveys in the case of students and teachers, along with face to face discussions with Tweed Shire personnel.

In addition to this, research was undertaken of similar programs from other locations, which included:

- Brisbane City Council (QLD)
- La Trobe City Council (VIC)
- Blue Mountains City Council (NSW)
- Southern Downs Regional Council (QLD)

## 3.2 Evaluation findings

### 3.2.1 Program design, content and implementation

The Terms of Reference (TOR) provides an expectation that the Youth Council will be an advisory committee to Council, a forum to identify youth issues, a vehicle to initiate projects that address concerns raised by youth, and a promotional and communications program for Council to engage with local young people. However, with only four contact meetings per year (one per school term) the time factor will not allow for any in-depth consideration of all these tasks.

It is also noted that the first meeting of the year includes introductions and voting on positions, and also sets the scene for the new Youth Council members, so they understand what to expect from the program. The last meeting of the year is the opportunity for the Youth Council to provide a summary of their activities for the year to Councillors. This effectively leaves just two meetings for detailed discussion and debate on matters that are to be dealt with.

In section 1.2 (Objectives) of the TOR, it is stated that the Youth Council shall: "*Identify issues of importance to young people in Tweed Shire and initiate projects to help address these concerns*". With only two full meetings to come to an agreement on a list of priorities and to discuss options for what can be done about them, it is clear that the Youth Council does not have the capacity to initiate projects as a body, although it can identify issues and advocate to Council or other entities about them.

The TOR is not clear on the role of the students in terms of their responsibility as a representative of their school. That is, whether they are there to represent the official views of their school itself, their student body, or are they there to articulate their own opinions and vote on that basis. It does, however, state that to further the objectives of the Strategic Outcomes in the Youth Strategy the Youth Council will:

- "*Consult with young people to provide advice to Council on a range of issues relevant to young people*"

It can therefore be assumed that any vote taken should be based on an opinion gained from consultation with other young people. This could potentially be the result of an interaction with others based on a specific issue, or it could be a general opinion that is based on previous discussions with others and/or a personal experience that relates to the issue in a broader sense. This would suggest that an item that is to be put before the Youth Council should be done so prior



to the meeting where it is to be discussed, so that the students can consult with others and form a position in readiness for the vote.

The Youth Council is made up of its student members. In addition to this, there are other participants that need to be clearly defined. The TOR states: *“The Youth Council may, at its discretion, invite Councillors to attend Youth Council meetings as observers”*. However, the meeting minutes list Councillors and Council officers as “Ex-Officio” participants. That status would technically give them a vote, and it may also affect the meeting quorum.

The quorum is an issue that may need to be redefined, because it is shown as *“half of the members plus one”* in the TOR. The minutes of the meeting held on Wednesday 28 November 2018 records only three student members present. If the membership is only made up of students, then this meeting could not officially proceed. On the other hand, if the Councillors and Council staff present have their positions included in the TOR as Ex-Officio members (which is not the case), then the meeting could proceed regardless of a minimal number of students in attendance.

Given that the objective of the group is to provide advice to Council, there is no point in Councillors or Council officers having a vote. They should therefore not be considered to be Ex-Officio members, but guests (if specifically invited to attend) or observers of the meeting.

Section 9 (media) of the TOR deals with media releases about the Youth Council. It says that these are to be *“managed by the Community Development Officer – Families and Youth, in consultation with the Chair and/or the Youth Council where appropriate”*. Care should be taken, and probably stated, that any such media statement is the result of deliberations of the Youth Council only, and may not necessarily be the position of Council.

In regard to changes to the Terms of Reference, section 10 (Alteration of Terms of Reference and Operating Guideline) states that *“The Terms of Reference may be altered or amended by Council on the recommendation of the Youth Council at any ordinary meeting provided due notice is given”*. This suggests that the Council may only change the Terms of Reference if the Youth Council recommends that it do so. This seems unusual and impractical. It should be within Council’s power to change the Terms of Reference at any time it chooses to.

### **3.2.2 Value of outcomes for participants**

Participants mostly found that the outcome of the program was that the students were given an opportunity to be heard by Council on youth issues. The schools also identified the opportunity for students to gain an understanding of local government process as a positive.

### **3.2.3 Issues affecting program outcomes**

Comments were made in some cases by students and teachers that the number of meetings restricted the ability to get into more detail on issues, or to cover more ground across a broader range of topics. This was balanced by comments that reflected on the four meetings being enough for year twelve students with their intense school study load and work commitments. However, the possibility was raised by one teacher that the program may be more valuable in a setting of year ten students as their commitments are not as great.



The projects taken on by the students are school based rather than Youth Council activities. While very valuable activities, these could be organised and handled outside of this committee process. Based on the meeting minutes, there seems to be no advice given to Council, or votes taken on these projects, and many of these projects seem to be outside of Council control in any case. However, they do represent good opportunities for advocacy to other levels of government in some cases.

To bring this more into line with the reason for having the Youth Council, ie an advisory committee, student members could report to the Youth Council on their outside activities and seek a resolution to be voted on by the Youth Council, which would raise the matter as a recommendation to Council.

### **3.2.4 Improvement in student's skills to advocate for youth issues to local government**

Student survey responses state that they are satisfied with the Council being interested in their feedback. While there is evidence of members of the Youth Council advocating on youth issues through the projects they undertake, these seem to be mostly done on an individual basis through their schools, and not as activities of the Youth Council as such. It is also noted that their projects are generally more related to state government responsibilities rather than those of local government.

There is certainly agreement from the students and from their teachers that they are gaining valuable skills in understanding the local government decision making process. They are also gaining skills in communication, and in working within a committee environment.

## **3.3 Summary of surveys and feedback**

The student participants and teachers were asked to complete a survey on the Youth Council program. Students were provided with a link to a survey through the online Survey Monkey portal, while the teachers were provided with a survey form directly by email. There were ten questions to both surveys, which were mostly similar for both groups.

Councillors gave their comments via a Councillor Workshop that was organised specifically for the purpose of the Youth Council program evaluation.

Feedback from all stakeholder groups was generally positive about the content and delivery of the program. There was particular attention given to praise the project coordinator, Sylvia Roylance, for her commitment and support to the students with their school-based projects.

### **3.3.1 Youth Council participants**

The survey questions to students were:

- Q1. What are your thoughts on the frequency of the meetings (ie, one per school term)?
- Q2. How would you rate the appropriateness of the meeting venues?
- Q3. How would you describe the involvement of Tweed Shire personnel?



- Q4. What are your thoughts on Council's willingness to consider Youth Council advice?
- Q5. Can you describe any barriers that may have limited the effectiveness of the program?
- Q6. What were the parts of the program that made it most effective?
- Q7. How would you rate the quality of the program content, compared to your original expectations?
- Q8. How would you rate your personal experience of the program and why?
- Q9. What is your understanding of the experience other Youth Council members had in the program?
- Q10. What suggestions can you make for improving the program?

A compilation of the responses from student participants is attached as Appendix A to this report.

Student participants were asked for feedback on the expectations they had for the program. The majority of student participants expressed that their interest in the program was to learn more about the local government processes that guide decision making for the Shire. They were also interested in sharing and exchanging ideas about youth issues.

It was noted that there were multiple responses declaring that they felt there were not enough meetings, but there was also the recognition that balancing the meetings with their workload of final year study and work commitments could be a challenge.

While there was overall agreement that the venues and the Council staff were excellent, there were a couple of comments about Council's willingness to listen to the Youth Council that were reserved. This may reflect the lack of actual advice flowing up from the Youth Council program to the Councillors in the form of recommendations on youth issues.

Overall, the responses were very positive to the program and the students enjoyed the experience.

### **3.3.2 Teachers of the participating schools**

The relevant teachers at participating schools were surveyed using the following questions:

- Q1. What are your thoughts on the frequency of the meetings (ie, one per school term)?
- Q2. How would you rate the appropriateness of the meeting venues (ie, Murwillumbah and Tweed Heads Council offices)?
- Q3. How would you describe any cross-overs, or duplications, with Student Representative Councils?
- Q4. What are your thoughts on the Youth Council providing Tweed Shire Council with advice?



Q5. Can you describe any barriers that may limit the effectiveness of the program?

Q6. What are the parts of the program that make it most effective?

Q7. How would you compare the program content to your expectations of it?

Q8. How would you rate your school's experience of the program and why?

Q9. What is your understanding of the experience of other schools with the program?

Q10. What suggestions can you make for improving the program?

They advised that their expectations for the program were that it would provide the students with an understanding of Council processes, and to develop leadership and communication skills. They were positive about the results they saw in the students from their schools.

There were some suggestions made that may contribute to future changes to this, or other similar programs. For example, there could be more coordination with the schools between Council's Youth Council program and the Student Representative Council (SRC) programs that they run in conjunction with the state government.

### **3.3.3 Feedback from Councillors**

A Councillor workshop was held to discuss the review of the Youth Council program and Councillors held a similar position to the participants – that the program would help the young people understand the process of local government.

However, Councillors also had an expectation that the program would provide an opportunity to receive direct feedback on issues from the participants in the form of an advisory committee. They saw a benefit in being able to have the youth representatives of the community analyse and make suggestions on issues that were currently being considered by Council. It is apparent that their expectations of this aspect of the program are not being met.

Councillors concluded that there may be another way of structuring this so that the students are able to participate in a process of giving more direct advice on matters affecting youth, and through that process learning more about the decision-making process of the local government.

It was also mentioned that there may be other opportunities within the various sections of Council to engage youth in activities where they can provide direct feedback and also gain a more in depth understanding of the work that Council does in the community.

## **4. Comparisons with other local government programs**

Four local government Youth Council type programs were investigated for the purpose of comparison with the Tweed Shire program. The programs were from the Brisbane City Council; Latrobe City Council; Southern Downs Regional Council; and the Blue Mountains City Council.





The following tables summarise the key aspects of these programs:

<b>Brisbane City Council</b>	
Name:	Lord Mayor's Youth Advisory Council
Composition:	Schools may nominate only one year 10 student
Purpose:	Develop young people as leaders, and specifically designed to provide an opportunity for young people to participate in decision making at local and citywide level. Students identify issues and engage with each other in a public forum, where they are encouraged to provide feedback and give their opinion about Council policies, local laws, services and programs that affect young people.
Additional tasks:	Delegates are also encouraged to work with their peers to generate and share ideas regarding initiatives that fulfil the environmental, social, creative and economic aspirations of young people in Brisbane.
Workshop component:	Young people are given the opportunity to provide input and share their ideas on three to four Council initiatives during the workshop component of each meeting
Nominations:	Nominations are taken at the beginning of the school year and finalised in late February.
Induction:	Informal induction meeting is held prior to the first official meeting
Schedule:	One meeting per term, for three hours during school times
Chair:	Chaired by Lord Mayor and facilitated by Youth Development team.

<b>Latrobe City Council</b>	
Name:	Latrobe City Youth Council
Composition:	14 to 22 years old with a community interest
Purpose:	Provide input into the future planning and policies that impact on current and future generations - also serves as a means of further developing the leadership skills and capacity of young people, building their connections with the community and one another
Additional tasks:	Report to the Council and provide appropriate advice, information and feedback on matters relevant to young people
Workshop component:	One formal meeting with Latrobe City Councillors, Latrobe City Leadership team members and other local leaders - One Project and Skill Development meeting
Nominations:	Annual expression of interest process – 2 year appointment
Induction:	Through interview process with first meeting in March
Schedule:	The Youth Council will meet up to 20 times throughout the duration of the year, two meetings per month - Tuesdays from 5pm to 7pm
Chair:	Youth Mayor



<b>Southern Downs Regional Council</b>	
Name:	Southern Downs Youth Council
Composition:	2 x year 10 students per school from 10 schools
Purpose:	An advisory committee whose role is to represent the voice of young people who live, work, study or volunteer in the Southern Downs region, to provide input into Council activities and decisions
Additional tasks:	Develop a better understanding of the role and function of local government, community and local issues - provide input in to Council planning, programs and services and influence local government decision making processes.
Workshop component:	Informal gathering to discuss current issues for 30mins prior to official start of meeting
Nominations:	Schools nominate their students and the Mayor has the final decision in the members of the Youth Council
Induction:	Induction workshop - Prior to first meeting of the year
Schedule:	Each meeting is held at a host school, which encourages the Council to meet with the local communities.
Chair:	The Mayor

<b>Blue Mountains City Council</b>	
Name:	The Blue Mountains Youth Council
Composition:	All young people aged 12 - 17years within the local government area for a two year appointment. Generally, there are less than 25 members and they are selected by the Advisory committee
Purpose:	Advocates, provides advice, and makes recommendations to Council on matters affecting young people and the community - Coordinates, plans and implements community activities and events - Participates in community activities and consultations - Promotes awareness to the community on issues impacting on young people
Additional tasks:	<p>The Youth Council may make recommendations to Blue Mountains City Council on issues relevant to young people.</p> <p>The Blue Mountains Youth Council is supported by an Advisory Committee that provides assistance in dealing with issues and understanding the role of Council. The Advisory Committee is comprised of the elected Councillors and the Community Development Officer - Young People.</p>
Workshop component:	No workshop component
Nominations:	Nominations are called by Council and membership is determined by the Advisory Committee.
Induction:	A Planning Day at the start of the year.
Schedule:	Meetings approximately once a month
Chair:	N/A



Although these initiatives are not exactly the same in composition and operation, there is a common theme of providing advice to the Council on issues that are important to the youth of the local area. This is the same objective that is proposed in the Tweed Shire's Youth Council Terms of Reference, but the reality seems to be that the groups works more on school based projects rather than developing recommendations to advise Council on the youth perspective and the hopes and expectations of younger residents.

In addition to the Youth Council groups shown above, an alternative approach developed by the Brisbane City Council is their "Student Environmental Leadership Network". This initiative is project based, and the students in this group are not there to provide Council with advice, they are there to learn about sustainability and support their own schools in becoming more sustainable. This is a model that aligns more closely with the school project based outcomes of the current Tweed Shire Youth Council model.

The key points on the Brisbane City Student Environmental Leadership Network are described in the table below:

	<b>Brisbane City Council</b>
Name:	Student Environmental Leadership Network
Composition:	Students are selected by schools - currently approximately 30 participating schools.
Purpose:	SELN is a unique learning and leadership program. It directly engages and supports school communities to take action to be cleaner, greener and more sustainable. The project-based, active learning model directly supports students to acquire deeper knowledge and skills. They do this by working on real-world challenges for an extended period. Each SELN school selects and implements an environmental project to improve their school's sustainability. This includes communication tactics and project documentation (e.g. surveys, audits, photos).
Additional tasks:	Nominated SELN student representatives must attend Council facilitated formal meetings once per term. At meetings, students gain knowledge, confidence and leadership skills. These skills equip them to develop and lead the behaviour change project and achieve sustainable project outcomes in their schools. Students share their learnings with their school environmental group.
Workshop component:	No workshop component
Nominations:	Selections made by school
Induction:	Additional meeting at the start of term one for induction.
Schedule:	One meeting per school term
Chair:	Lord Mayor



## 5. Summary

This evaluation of the Tweed Shire Youth Council program has used a comparison of an assessment of the Terms of Reference with the documented outcomes of the program to determine if the program is meeting its original intent. This investigation found that there are areas where the program has evolved into something more of a vehicle for practical school-based programs to be undertaken, rather than an advisory committee to Council as such.

Additionally, the survey of participants and feedback from Council personnel has raised the question of the possibility of other activities being run through the various branches of Council from time to time to involve the Shire's youth more broadly into Council engagement activities.

The comparison with other local government programs highlights that most use this type of youth engagement in an advisory capacity. Although there are various differences in the make up of these groups and how they meet and function, the overall result is that the youth committees provide advice to the local government body on policy, facilities, activities, etc, based on a young person's view.

While there are some very positive outcomes being produced in the form of school-based projects as a result of the drive and support of the Tweed Shire Youth Council program, these results are not what is anticipated in the Terms of Reference and Council now has a decision to make – should the TOR be amended to reflect the practical outcomes of the current program, or should the program be re-designed to better reflect the intent of the TOR.

## 6. Recommendations

Based on the documented information available, along with verbal interviews and discussions, the following recommendations are provided to Council. These recommendations are intended to assist in moving forward with a program that engages the youth of the Shire in Council decisions.

It is recommended that Council amend the Terms of Reference of the Tweed Shire Youth Council to reflect the following changes:

- That the Youth Council become an advisory committee to Council that meets to discuss and debate matters that have been previously provided to them in reports/information contained within the meeting agendas. These items are to be voted on and the outcomes form recommendations to Council from a youth perspective of the issue.
- That the Youth Council be composed of year 10 students, as they are able to more readily commit the time to the task.
- That the number of meetings be increased to six meetings per year to allow for more input to Council – with the addition of an induction workshop prior to the first meeting.
- That the first and last official meetings be held at Council facilities (Murwillumbah and Tweed Heads), but the four other meetings are to be held at host schools and within school hours to allow for better engagement with other students and school staff, along with



opportunities for Councillors and Council officers to embed Council activities within the community.

- That meeting agendas be provided to Youth Council members a minimum of one week in advance of each meeting, with relevant items to have reports or information attached that is appropriate for members to be informed and allow for healthy discussion/debate to take place at the meeting. Due to the level of experience of the participants, a list of optional recommendations may be included for discussion.
- That any changes to the Terms of Reference be approved by the Council.
- That the Youth Council be requested to identify youth related issues that require advocacy and that these be followed up with a recommendation to Council, or in the case of an external entity the Youth Council to make a written request for action/investigation to that entity.
- That Councillors and Council officers are not members (including Ex-Officio) of the Youth Council, they are either invited guests at, or observers of the meeting. The only exception to this should be the program coordinator as that position provides the secretariat role of the Youth Council.
- That voting may be made by consensus, but where agreement cannot be reached a majority vote will be required to pass a resolution. In a case where a vote is tied it will be passed on the casting vote of the Chair.
- That media releases issued by the Youth Council must not be contrary to Council policy, or to any standing Council decision.

In addition to these suggestions, it is also recommended that Council consider the following suggested actions:

- That Council investigate other activities/programs to be run through the various Council departments (as in the Brisbane “Student Environment Leadership Network” model), that will take over the external engagement activities – such as the current school-based projects that are undertaken by Youth Council members.
- That Council investigate ways that the Youth Council program (or other activity) can coordinate with and compliment the state government’s program for School Representative Councils.
- That Council investigate the possibility of Youth Council members also being sourced directly from the community rather than only as representatives of schools.



# APPENDIX A.

## Compilation of Youth Council Member responses to survey

All current and former Youth Council members were given the opportunity to participate in this activity.

Q1. What are your thoughts on the frequency of the meetings (ie, one per school term)?

- Pretty good. As I haven't had much experience I can't comment on this extensively
- I think that the frequency of the meetings is great as with 1 a term means that we don't need to talk to much time of our sport or studying commitments.
- Given that there has only been one meeting so far, I felt like this was a good introduction. It has been beneficial staying in contact outside of the meetings and I don't feel like it would be necessary for more frequency as it might be difficult for people out of close distance and with other commitments.
- Should be more often, one per term is not enough
- Good but sometimes to far apart
- Honestly? I would have preferred meeting more often so we could've kept better tabs on things.
- I believe they are good as we can discuss multiple things over a term
- I think this frequency is good because it allows us time to work on our individual projects and does not significantly impact our studies.
- Perfect
- I feel as though we may be able to formally network better with more meetings however the one per term meetings are good for people who don't want to N/A too many days off work

Q2. How would you rate the appropriateness of the meeting venues?

- Very appropriate
- The appropriateness of the meeting venues are great as they are not too far for many of us to travel.
- It is beneficial that the meetings are at two different locations
- 10/10
- Good
- A whole five stars



- Fine. Venues give good idea about how council works.
- I rate the meeting venues highly. It is an honour to be able to conduct a meeting at the council as it provides an authentic experience of how a council is run.
- 9/10
- The council chambers give the meetings a really formal feel and being in that setting is a good experience for people who want to go into politics

Q3. How would you describe the involvement of Tweed Shire personnel?

- Good. Minimal but allows students to run meetings. Which I think is good.
- I think the involvement is great many try to attend our meetings and are always open to helping assist us if we ever need any help.
- The Tweed Shire personnel have been incredibly involved, supportive and encouraging
- Brilliant
- Good but sad to not see the mayor turn up to most meetings
- There was pretty minimal involvement from anyone other than the one person who oversaw us.
- Fine.
- They are invested and eager to work with young people. Their encouraging atmosphere is motivating.
- Very good
- Sylvia is a really excellent mediator and brings a lot to the table and I personally appreciate the other TS personnel just being observers and listening to what we have to say

Q4. What are your thoughts on Council's willingness to consider Youth Council advice?

- Appropriate. The youth is part of the community and thus should have a voice
- I think that it is amazing that we get to have a say in the things that are happening in the Tweed Shire and it allows for us as young people to voice our concerns to them in order to make a change and improve the Tweed Shire.
- I really do feel like our voices are heard and this inspires me to feel more like a part of the community and create change, especially in areas that the Council might not have as much perspective on such as issues that involve youth
- I believe Council does their very best to facilitate the needs of all people within our Shire.
- Good to see they are listening



- When I participated (2016) I don't think there was much consideration of the Youth Councils ideas or advice.
- Excellent. I feel that council actually cares what the youth think and will do there best to include us in discussions.
- I don't think that council will take on Youth Council advice. I think there needs to be a feedback system where the council informs us in how our voice was useful and implemented into concerns that effect us. This would assist us in recognising that we have an impact and hold the council more accountable.
- It's good to see that they can help support us and our ideas
- I think it shows that the Council has a lot of faith in us and understands that we are the future. Giving us this opportunity shows real respect for what we have to say which is definitely appreciated

Q5. Can you describe any barriers that may have limited the effectiveness of the program?

- No
- I don't really think that I have experienced any barriers in this program everone is extremely supportive and helpful in assisting you to do tasks and limits the barriers in the program.
- The only barrier that comes to mind is location but given that there are two meeting places and that it has been easy to carpool, this isn't too much of a problem
- Possible lack in local councillors' attendance
- No
- There was a distinct lack of action from us, we never really got anywhere, we talked about things and went around in circles a lot and I think there was a bit of a lack of structure. (2016)
- Perhaps the limited amount of time between councillors and youth council members.
- I think the resources and support available minimises any potential barriers.
- None that I know of
- None that I can think of

Q6. What were the parts of the program that made it most effective?

- The agenda and the formal setting
- The part of the youth council that made it most effective were the parts when each school would discuss their projects and allow for other schools to get inspiration. I think that having other members of the Tweed Shire come in to ask us questions is also effective as we are able to have a say. Sylvia also has made this program extremely effective as she works with our timetables and always offers the m Ost help that she can.





- The council's willingness to listen to everyone and the ability to work on a specific project
- Open forum and the presence of some local councillors
- The program each meeting
- The fact that there was such a diverse range of students was really good and the freedom and encouragement that we were given to express our own ideas.
- The frequent helpful contact with Sylvia
- The following up with emails and collaboration across schools - the networking opportunity is invaluable.
- The ability of free speech between everyone
- Having us in council chambers and having a set agenda

Q7. How would you rate the quality of the program content, compared to your original expectations?

- Better than I expected. To be fair I didn't know what to expect
- The quality of the program excceeded my expectations
- The program has been a lot different to what I expected. I thought that we might not really get to have a say in local matters but I'm very grateful that hasn't been the case. I feel excited to work on the project of my group's choosing
- It was a pleasure to be a part of and overall very enjoyable
- Very good
- I was expecting a little more, to be completely honest but it was still a good experience/program
- Average. It didn't succeed my expectations or bore me,
- I did not come with any expectations although I was blown away with the professionalism and systematic approach towards making change and ensuring the voice of the youth can be expressed.
- It absolutely smashed my expectations
- I really enjoyed the meeting and being able to discuss issues pertinent to me. I wasn't sure what to expect so I didn't expect anything

Q8. How would you rate your personal experience of the program and why?

- Great. I am able to be a part of a meaningful group that can make a difference. I am able to improve public speaking skills as well.



- I would personally rate my experience as amazing as I have been able to do so much for my shire and have been able to have a say and make a change to the things that I'm passionate about. It has also given me so many connections and opportunities for the future.
- The program has been good for me as I usually feel pretty nervous in leadership positions but I've been feeling very passionate and a lot more confident throughout these early stages of this year's program
- I thoroughly enjoyed and continue to appreciate the role that council plays to facilitate youth involvement within our Shire. This is to be greatly commended. Council staff were most helpful and friendly.
- Good but missed out on the last meeting
- 7/10, meeting the students from the other schools was fantastic and hearing their different perspectives. The only downfall was the structure of the program.
- My personal experience would be a 7/10. This is because youth council is a great idea but you can only do so much with a bunch of busy teenagers and adults.
- I have really enjoyed the program and designing a project with my peers. It has made me feel more empowered to make a change.
- My personal experience was very good as I got to hear from people similar to me
- I really enjoyed the program because I was able to share my own experiences and help others with ideas for their school

Q9. What is your understanding of the experience other Youth Council members had in the program?

- I believe others have benefited from the program and have enjoyed the process.
- From my understanding many of my fellow youth council members enjoyed the program just as much as I did.
- I haven't had the opportunity to talk to too many other youth council members yet but I know the group at my school are also feeling quite inspired by the program. Everyone at the first meeting seemed to be looking forward to and positive about the program
- Very good experiences
- A positive impact to the community
- I think theirs was similar to mine, the people were good but the meetings were a bit iffy.
- I have no idea.
- I have only heard positives from my peers.
- Everyone enjoyed themselves



- I believe we all enjoyed the meeting and talking with each other

Q10. What suggestions can you make for improving the program?

- It's too early in the program for me to comment
- I don't think I can make any suggestions as every thing has been amazing for me
- At this point I don't feel like I have enough perspective on the whole extent of the program but I can't think of anything right now
- A couple more meetings (perhaps one or two formal or informal)
- A few more meeting times a year
- More structure for the meetings and possibly more frequent meetings.
- More effective youth council meetings with less formality and more discussions.
- In the meetings, implementing a method so that all voices are heard because I recognised that some of the more quiet/shy students were getting cut off or unable to express their opinions.
- None it's amazing
- None

## **APPENDIX B.**

**Teachers individual responses to survey questions:**



## TWEED SHIRE YOUTH COUNCIL EVALUATION

# SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE

### for School participants

Tweed Shire commenced the Youth Council program in 2016 as an action from Council's Youth Strategy. Now in its fourth year, an evaluation of the progress of the program is being undertaken to gain an understanding of the value to young people, Council, and to the greater community.

This questionnaire has been designed to gather information from School participants that will assist Council to consider whether any changes to the program are desirable. Other surveys will be sent to Youth Council members, Councillors, and Council staff. The information gathered will be used to compare the way the program operates now with the original Terms of Reference that were used in the creation of the program, along with feedback from all stakeholders to determine if changes to the Terms of Reference would be valuable.

This questionnaire has been written with school participants in mind. Completing the questionnaire will provide a better understanding of the effects for schools and might provide opportunities for changes to the program, with the intent of improving outcomes for future participants and the community.

We understand that your time is valuable, and limited, but we would appreciate your assistance in completing and returning this questionnaire. Thank you for your input into the evaluation process.

Responses below from St Joseph's College



QUESTION 1

What are your thoughts on the frequency of the meetings (ie, one per school term)?

This is ideal given our students are balancing their senior schooling

QUESTION 2

How would you rate the appropriateness of the meeting venues (ie, Murwillumbah and Tweed Heads Council offices)?

Very good

QUESTION 3

How would you describe any cross-overs, or duplications, with Student Representative Councils?

It works well and complements SRC skills that are developed.

QUESTION 4

What are your thoughts on the Youth Council providing Tweed Shire Council with advice?

It is a very good idea.

QUESTION 5

Can you describe any barriers that may limit the effectiveness of the program?

—

QUESTION 6



What are the parts of the program that make it most effective?

- Exposure to the workings of council.
- Skills developed in students.
- Opportunity for students to meet like-minded young people.

QUESTION 7

How would you compare the program content to your expectations of it?

On par

QUESTION 8

How would you rate your school's experience of the program and why?

Very good. Students are always happy to engage in the program

QUESTION 9

What is your understanding of the experience of other schools with the program?

N/A

QUESTION 10

What suggestions can you make for improving the program?

Keep funding it.



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[Responses below from Tweed River High](#)



## QUESTION 1

What are your thoughts on the frequency of the meetings (ie, one per school term)?

Students involved felt the meetings were reasonable and able to fit in around student's school commitments.

## QUESTION 2

How would you rate the appropriateness of the meeting venues (ie, Murwillumbah and Tweed Heads Council offices)?

It was suitable in enabling students to attend some meetings closer to their homes and schools, allowing equity of travel.

## QUESTION 3

How would you describe any cross-overs, or duplications, with Student Representative Councils?

This program took leadership to a different level and projects could be tailored to complement the work of the SRC.

## QUESTION 4

What are your thoughts on the Youth Council providing Tweed Shire Council with advice?

Our student felt that the local council did listen to feedback from the youth council, making them feel that their time was worthwhile.

## QUESTION 5

Can you describe any barriers that may limit the effectiveness of the program?

No





QUESTION 6

What are the parts of the program that make it most effective?

The opportunities available to participants made it very worthwhile, allowing them to develop their leadership skills and refine their communication skills.

QUESTION 7

How would you compare the program content to your expectations of it?

The program exceeded the expectations of students I have spoken to.

QUESTION 8

How would you rate your school's experience of the program and why?

Very positive. It led to wide ranging opportunities for the student involved currently and she has been particularly well supported by Sylvia Roylance.

QUESTION 9

What is your understanding of the experience of other schools with the program?

I am not aware.

QUESTION 10

What suggestions can you make for improving the program?

A very effective program



# TWEED SHIRE YOUTH COUNCIL EVALUATION

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Responses below from Kingscliff High School



## QUESTION 1

What are your thoughts on the frequency of the meetings (ie, one per school term)?

*This can make it difficult on students to follow through with any major projects as there are no regular check in times to ensure actions are being completed or student commitment is continuous between each meeting.*

## QUESTION 2

How would you rate the appropriateness of the meeting venues (ie, Murwillumbah and Tweed Heads Council offices)?

*The venues are good. I have not been to either myself but they seem accessible for students. Transport can be an issue at times and Tweed is closer in proximity to our school so that venue is easier for our students to get to.*

## QUESTION 3

How would you describe any cross-overs, or duplications, with Student Representative Councils?

*I've only recently been involved with this program and the SRC but I have noticed a lot of the same students do get involved in both and it can be overwhelming if projects are onerous on student time. It would be better if they complimented each other somehow?*

## QUESTION 4

What are your thoughts on the Youth Council providing Tweed Shire Council with advice?

*I think this is a must, Student Voice is essential if we are to create a community of young citizens who care about where they live. The Youth Council would be great if it could provide more opportunities for student leaders in schools to see the way council works. Perhaps Youth Council could develop a leadership development initiative where they facilitate a workshop/event for other student leaders in their own schools to see how council works. This would help to encourage future involvement in youth council and help to develop our older leaders capacity to work with youth.*

## QUESTION 5

Can you describe any barriers that may limit the effectiveness of the program?

*After school hours can make it difficult for teacher to support. Some students find it hard to commit due to other work and sport commitments although they'd like to be involved.*

*Projects being too big and students not really having the resources to make their ideas come to life. Or the other side is that students become overwhelmed due to competing priorities with senior*



*studies. I think Year 10 and year 11 are the best audience for youth council not year 12 based on my limited experience so far.*

## QUESTION 6

What are the parts of the program that make it most effective?

*The support from the community development officer Sylvia Roylance has been amazing. Without her support our students may not have been involved this year.*

*Another positive is that students get to work on something they are passionate about in the community and that is inspiring for young people.*

## QUESTION 7

How would you compare the program content to your expectations of it?

*Being fairly new to this program myself I do not know much about the program content but from the information I have been given the program looks meaningful.*

*So far I have not seen the program in its entirety and therefore have not witnessed first hand the effectiveness of the program, therefore I can't compare that to my expectations. I would hope that students develop a better understanding for council processes in general, are provided with advice and learning on being a great leader in the community and as a result of project coordination the students learn knowledge and skills in how to action an important issue.*

## QUESTION 8

How would you rate your school's experience of the program and why?

*So far I know the students are working on a project and have attended their first meeting. The experience has been positive for them but there has been little advice on how the school can be more involved. There is an understanding that schools may not have the staff or resources to be involved closely but I've been uncertain as to how involved staff are required to be. More information in the programs brief around teacher involvement and expectations would be useful.*

*This type of information would be useful the year beforehand to allow for organisation of staff. However, in saying that I took over SRC from the previous teacher and may not have been given a full brief from them and hence have come into this year not knowig much about the program. I have felt I have needed to rely on Sylvia quite heavily.*

## QUESTION 9

What is your understanding of the experience of other schools with the program?

*I am not aware of other schools experience to date so unfortunately I cannot comment.*

## QUESTION 10



What suggestions can you make for improving the program?

*More direction for schools for those teachers who are new to it all get a clear picture of what is expected from both teachers and students. Eg. Roles and responsibilities list would be handy - students, schools and program coordinators. This would make it very clear as to who does what and the expectations of all parties.*

*I look forward to the program continuing so that I can comment more specifically on positives and areas for improvement in the future.*

