



The Scotch College Blueprint for developing a student-led wellbeing conference

This guide synthesises insights shared by Ed McInnes in PESA's Digital PD, 'Inspiring Change: Co-Designing a Student-Led Wellbeing Conference in the Middle Years', providing a scalable model for educators to transition from classroom-based wellbeing theory to a student-led culminating event tailored to their own unique school context.

1. Purpose and Vision

A student-led wellbeing conference is a culminating learning experience that brings together inquiry, student voice, and authentic audience engagement.

Key goals:

- Provide a platform for student agency and choice.
- Position students as “wellbeing scientists”: Curious and active contributors.
- Enable students to research, design, and share wellbeing ideas with a real audience.
- Create a meaningful connection between learning and real-world impact.

2. Foundations: From Inquiry to Conference

The conference does not sit in isolation, it grows from a structured learning sequence.

Start with Inquiry

- In class, start by asking students what their definition of wellbeing is.
- Co-construct definitions and revisit them over time.

Build Knowledge and Context

Introduce a broad understanding of wellbeing, including:

- Historical perspectives (spirituality, philosophy, theology, public health).
- Contemporary wellbeing science.
- Exposure to experts, such as a wellbeing researcher or practitioner (or both!)

Purpose: This gives students multiple entry points for their own research topics.

Make Learning Experiential

Include practical, memorable learning experiences such as:

- A neuroplasticity experiment (e.g. learning to juggle).
- Reflection on how habits, effort, and mindset shape the brain.

Outcome: Students begin to see wellbeing as learnable and applicable.





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3. The Hook: Introducing the Conference

Frame the conference through a compelling identity: **“You are wellbeing scientists. Your role is to explore, test, and share valuable wellbeing concepts.”**

Strategy:

- Invite older student leaders to present (e.g. Year 9 leaders → Year 7), focussing on:
 - Strengths and how they shape identity and reputation.
 - Opportunities to grow and apply strengths.
 - Real examples of student leadership.

Impact: Creates aspiration, relatability, and momentum.

4. Framing the Challenge

Align the conference with a specific year-level goal. For Scotch College, this is “Embrace the Challenge”.

Students can choose to challenge themselves through roles such as:

- Keynote speaker
- Workshop facilitator
- Activity designer
- Research presenter
- Conference organiser
- Community/parent host

Key principle: The challenge is framed as positive and purposeful.



5. Co-Designing the Conference

Give students genuine ownership over the design, give them the “keys” to the event. Allow them to decide on:

- Conference format and structure
- Types of sessions (workshops, presentations, activities)
- Group sizes and logistics
- Use of spaces

Tip: Share examples or photos from previous events (Contact PESA or Ed McInnes if you would like to use photos from Scotch College conferences).

Outcome: Students experience authentic agency.

6. Conference Design and Structure: The Scotch College Format

- Duration: ~3 hours
- Spaces: Multiple classrooms and shared collaboration space.
- Set-up: Completed by students the day before.

On the Day:

- Students operate in defined roles as conference hosts and participants.
- Structured rotation ensures:
 - Equal attendance across workshops.
 - Smooth transitions.
- Include exploration time for students to experience other sessions





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Signature Feature:

- Research posters and hosts.
 - Students present findings visually.
 - Act as “research hosts” engaging in discussion with visitors.

Identity:

- Lanyards or badges for the conference team to build professionalism and a sense of belonging.
- Clear roles to promote accountability.

7. Engaging the Community

Invite an authentic audience:

- Parents and carers.
- School staff and leadership.
- Other year groups (with structured visitation).

Why it matters:

- Promotes a higher level of purposeful engagement.
- Validates student work.
- Strengthens school-community connection.

8. The Role of Educators

Educators act as:

- Designers of the learning journey (not the event owners).
- Facilitators of inquiry and reflection.
- Supporters of logistics and structure.

9. Outcomes and Impact

Despite the complexity, students consistently demonstrate:

- High levels of ownership and responsibility.
- Ability to collaborate and problem-solve.
- Confidence in public speaking and knowledge sharing.
- Deep understanding of wellbeing concepts in action.

With the right scaffolding, students rise to the challenge, especially when their work has a real audience and purpose.



“It’s amazing to see what they can do with a little ownership and some positive pressure, knowing their parents might be there”

Ed McInnes, Year 7 Wellbeing Leader at Scotch College