**Frankie:** Hi, I’m Frankie, a student from Ballarat Grammar and I’m passionate about young people being more involved in government.

Today, we’re going to be learning about why policy is so important.

So what is a policy?

A policy is a statement of intent, plan of action, or a set of guidelines. It outlines what an organisation thinks about an issue or topic. Policies help people make smart decisions. Or solve problems. For example, state governments will have a policy on education. The policy might be focused on improving student learning outcomes. Principals, government departments, and schools will then use this policy to help guide their decisions.

To learn more about how government policy is developed, I reached out to Jessica McWilliam, Senior Policy Officer at the Victorian Department of Education and Training.

Thanks for being here today. What skills do you need to have to work in policy development?

**Jessica:** Policy development is really about listening to people, trying to translate all of those ideas and their needs and their values into something that’s going to make a good policy that will help improve things.

**Frankie:** What is the policymaking process?

**Jessica:** The policymaking process is different between political parties and the public service. Political parties form policies based on their political values, and those policies come together into something that’s called a platform that then gets voted on at an election. The public service is impartial. It doesn’t represent any political party or any one group in the community. And once you’re happy with a draft of a policy it has to go through a process of being approved.

**Frankie:** What are your goals when creating a policy?

**Jessica:** In our work we want to create policies that make things better. That make things fairer, that make things more equitable and that create better learning environments for the children and young people in Victoria.

**Frankie:** How are the students’ perspectives displayed in these policies?

**Jessica:** We have regular meetings with VicSRC. There are also regular meetings between VicSRC and the Minister of Education.

**Frankie:** What can students do to influence policies?

**Jessica:** Students can always get involved in their own SRC or they could join VicSRC, and of course they can always call or email their member for parliament.

**Frankie:** It was great to hear everything about policies from you today. I definitely learned a lot and I’m sure all the students watching this will also learn.

**Jessica:** Thanks for having me. It was great to chat to you.

**Frankie:** Why do policies matter?

Policies impact our daily lives in many ways. For example, on a federal government level, policies determine who can come into Australia. On a state government level, they affect our schools, hospitals, and public transport. On a local government level, they affect our pets, our sports fields and recycling. And finally, on a community level, they affect how we are expected to behave at school, work, or clubs.

To get a young person’s perspective on policy, I sat down with Bri Hines. A student at Myrtleford P–12 College. Bri was a member of the VicSRC executive from 2017 until 2020. And the coordinator of the 2020 VicSRC Congress.

So what is Congress?

**Jessica:** So I think VicSRC Congress can be pretty neatly summed up as an explosion of student voice. So across several days, students from across the state all come together to sort of discuss and dissect the issues that we face in the education sector and propose solutions to these issues.

**Frankie:** What happens after students propose these ideas at Congress?

**Jessica:** After the issues are voted on at Congress and the VicSRC executive committee will typically work out the best plan of action for tackling these issues. So this can include things such as advocacy, working with other organisations as well as potentially campaigning government to make policy changes. So I think one of the biggest ones that we’ve had in the last few years was the introduction of having students on every school council across Victoria.

**Frankie:** Have you personally worked on any policies to change in your school?

**Jessica:** In the past couple of years, we’ve done work on changing the uniform policy to make it more gender inclusive. So students can wear the sort of uniform that they feel best represents them.

So as a fellow rural student, how did you sort of find the experience of interacting with all these sort of different cohorts?

**Frankie:** I think it’s really eye opening and it makes you see the bigger picture rather than just going, Oh, I’m a rural student. These are the rural issues. I’m a metro student, these are the metro issues. These are issues facing all of Victoria’s students.

**Jessica:** So Frankie, what do you think that students should do if they wanna change a policy in their school?

**Frankie:** Talk to your SRC and from there going to VicSRC, going to Congress, emailing the minister or your local member.

**Jessica:** Yeah, totally. I think people can be quite surprised by how much traction you could get. You just put yourself out there and say, “Hey, I feel passionate about this. What do you guys think?”

**Frankie:** Today we’ve heard from Jessica and Bri about why policy is so important.

Are there any policies in your school or community that you’d like to change?

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