



THE UNIVERSITY OF
MELBOURNE

MDHS Student Forum 2026

Summary Report

Led by MDHS Students – for MDHS Students

The MDHS Student Forum 2026 is the first of its kind for MDHS, co-designed and delivered by the Student Advisory Council (SAC) in partnership with the faculty. Its purpose is to give students a direct and structured opportunity to shape decisions on the issues that matter most to them.

The forum is designed to surface authentic insights and actionable recommendations that the SAC and Faculty leadership can take forward in their ongoing work.

The Forum topics emerged from four SAC Working Groups, formed around areas of interest identified by SAC members. These themes reflected key priorities for MDHS students and were subsequently selected as the focus areas for Forum discussion, with each topic led by a Working Group leader.

3 Themes

Feedback Mechanisms

Career-Readiness

Student Wellbeing



Student Forum Day

3

discussion themes

8

table groups

50

students

15

senior staff

On 4 August 2026, more than 50 students across different year levels and disciplines, together with Heads of Schools representing MDHS Schools, attended the inaugural 3-hour MDHS Student Forum.

Opened by Interim Dean Mike McGuckin, the forum featured three rotating 45-minute sessions focused on each discussion topics.

Conversations took place at numbered tables comprising a mix of staff and students, with each discussion facilitated by SAC student leaders.

Each session included a problem statement, individual reflection, small-group discussion and optional whole-room share-back, with the SAC chairs and MDHS Student Leadership team coordinating and supporting the Forum throughout.

How the forum evidence was analysed



SEQUENTIAL DELIBERATIVE APPROACH

Frame the issue

A clear problem statement defined each student priority.

Explore at tables

Facilitated prompts broke the issue into focused discussion points.

Share key insights

Each table reported its main observations to the room.

Synthesis evidence

Recurring themes, distinct experiences and proposed actions were identified across sources.

EVIDENCE GATHERED

1

Table discussion notes

2

MDHS senior leader notes

3

SAC share-back notes

4

Post-event survey

REPORTS PRODUCED

Student Forum Report

Evaluation of the forum as a whole including structure, logistics and outcomes

Outcomes Report

Focuses on outcomes – detailed themes, student perspectives and recommendations

Summary Report

Concise synthesis for senior leaders and public audiences

One evidence base, presented at three levels of detail

What matters to students: Feedback Mechanisms

Problem Statement

Students across MDHS have access to multiple formal feedback channels, end-of-subject surveys (ESS), subject coordinators, student representatives, and LMS forms, but engagement is low and students broadly report that their input does not lead to visible change.

Questions

1. How do we remove barriers and improve access for students to provide feedback?
2. How do we ensure that feedback is genuinely received and acted on?

Key themes: Feedback Mechanisms



The feedback loop is broken

Students rarely see what happened after providing feedback—driving disengagement and a sense that input enters a 'black box'.

Postgraduate and PhD students' challenges are distinct

PhD students need safe, anonymous pathways for feedback about supervision and lab environments.

Timing of surveys is poorly designed

End-of-semester surveys compete with assessment pressure. Mid-semester feedback and protected class time were repeatedly preferred.

“

Constantly being asked for feedback with no closing of the loop.

”

Student/table notes

Current channels feel impersonal and unaccountable

Students do not always know who reads feedback, who is accountable, or how representatives influence decisions.

“

Knowing it's been actioned - contextualising changes and knowing what changed based on feedback.

”

Student feedback

Student responses to discussion questions



What gets in the way?

- Surveys coincide with exams and assessments
- Students cannot see whether feedback is read or acted on
- Student representatives can feel tokenistic
- Defensive responses discourage in-person feedback
- PhD students fear harming supervisor relationships
- Cultural differences affect comfort with honest feedback
- Feedback may miss those with power to make changes

What would make feedback worthwhile?

- A central portal with visible request status
- Automatic acknowledgement on submission
- Published action plans showing what changed
- Mid-semester surveys with follow-up before subject end
- Protected class time to complete surveys
- Anonymous channels, including for PhD students
- Students co-design action plans with staff and alumni

IN STUDENTS' WORDS

“Having a platform / portal would be great, AI can filter comments.”

“Knowing it’s been actioned, contextualising changes, and knowing what’s been changed based on feedback.”

“I find it hard to structure dedicated time to complete the ESS form when it’s released during assignment and exam period. But I still somehow find time to participate in club activities. The draw comes from being able to do those activities with a cohort, and having the time and space pre-structured.”

Recommendations: Feedback Mechanisms



SHORT TERM

- 1 Ask earlier**
Add mid-semester feedback in every subject, separate from ESS.
- 2 Publish a response**
Next semester, each coordinator states what was raised, what changes and what cannot, with reasons.
- 3 Make time**
Reserve the first 10 minutes of a lecture for survey completion
- 4 Confirm receipt**
Automatically acknowledge ESS and portal submissions.
- 5 Protect PhD students**
Establish a supervision feedback route without professional risk.

LONGER TERM

- 1 Track progress**
Develop an MDHS portal with ticket-style status updates.
- 2 Co-design action plans**
Students, staff and alumni jointly plan responses.
- 3 Strengthen representation**
Review roles so representatives have genuine influence and visibility.
- 4 Simplify channels**
Reduce overlap across UMSU, GSA and subjects.
- 5 Check accessibility**
Review cultural and language barriers for international students.

What matters to students: Career Readiness

Problem Statement

Many MDHS students arrive with broad career aspirations but report uncertainty about their direction and limited visibility of pathways available to them. Both curriculum and extracurricular supports exist, but students consistently indicate these are not meeting them where they are.

Questions

1. What would give students more clarity on what they want to do career-wise?
2. What barriers or opportunities exist in this space?

Key themes: Career Readiness



Authentic experience

Placements, shadowing, labs and internships help students test possible futures.

Curriculum connection

Students want subjects to make career relevance visible—not add another requirement.

People and networks

Alumni, postgraduates, peers and industry professionals are underused resources.

Equitable access

Time, cost and unpaid opportunities exclude students with work or caring commitments.

International guidance

Local job-seeking, networking norms and timing require culturally informed support.

“

More work experience rather than just hearing from experts - we need a taste of the job.

”

Student responses to discussion questions



What shaped career clarity most?

- Placements and labs provided direct field experience
- Conversations with professionals and alumni
- Clubs, peer networks and leadership experience
- Guest lecturers shared their own career paths
- Postgraduate connections, especially for undergraduates
- Exposure to careers beyond the obvious pathway

What students want more of

- Low-risk internships and University-organised job shadowing
- Guidance on what each major or subject opens and closes
- At least two career talks per semester: government, public service, research and clinical
- Alumni mentoring beyond medicine and clinical pathways
- Career readiness integrated into subject design
- Open-day style career booths during semester
- Career counselling students can actually access

IN STUDENTS' WORDS

"I just want there to be more breadth subjects and opportunities."

"There is a difference between employment and career. I feel like it takes a lot longer to find and establish a career. But it's also what is in a course that I think is part of the problem."

"We want to know what a day in the life of that position is."

Recommendations: Career Readiness



SHORT TERM

- 1 Promote existing support**
Audit awareness of Ask Alumni, peer mentoring and career counselling.
- 2 Run career talks**
At least two faculty-led talks each semester, across degrees and diverse roles.
- 3 Pilot job shadowing**
University-organised and relationship-managed, starting in labs and clinics.
- 4 Map career pathways**
Show what each major and subject sequence opens up.
- 5 Connect study levels**
Mentor undergraduates with postgraduate and PhD students.

LONGER TERM

- 1 Embed career learning**
Make it a design principle across MDHS degrees, rather than a separate subject.
- 2 Expand paid experience**
Grow internships and work-integrated learning that students can afford to take.
- 3 Support international students**
Address workplace culture, networking norms and timing.
- 4 Bring leaders to campus**
Create a faculty-wide Visiting Professor or Industry Leader seminar series.
- 5 Show postgraduate routes**
Clarify progression to honours, masters and PhD programs.

What matters to students: Student Wellbeing

Problem Statement

Students across MDHS are navigating demanding academic programs alongside the pressures of everyday life, including housing, finances, social connection, and physical and mental health. The relationship between academic experience and wellbeing runs in both directions: unmet basic needs undermine learning, and poorly designed academic environments generate stress that erodes wellbeing.

Questions

1. Are students' basic needs being met, inside and outside the academic environment?
2. What could MDHS do differently to provide more holistic support?

Key themes: Student Wellbeing



Course design

Assessment clustering, workload and inflexibility directly shape stress.

Belonging

Small-group, name-known communities matter - especially across cohorts and cultures.

Financial pressure

Placement poverty, cost of living and low stipends overwhelm other supports.

Placement wellbeing

Students need familiar contacts, clear escalation and support in clinical environments.

Service access

Counselling is known - but often unavailable when students seek help.

“ Reach out to students - make us feel seen in regards to our needs. ”

Student feedback

Student responses to discussion questions



What is hardest to manage?

- Financial stress and placement poverty
- Mental health services (CAPS) that are hard to access
- Assessment timing and clustering
- Feeling isolated from peers and staff
- Placement demands without nearby support
- Cultural isolation and cost barriers for international students
- Food access during exam periods

What would help most?

- Wellbeing built into course design
- Expanded CAPS or accessible first-contact support
- Financial help for placement students and PhD candidates
- Peer mentoring beyond first year and first semester
- Regular small-group contact with staff who know students by name
- Promote resources throughout the year, beyond orientation
- Non-alcoholic events and accessible places to eat

IN STUDENTS' WORDS

"Wellbeing is having a sense of self outside of the competitive nature of the degrees."

"Students are mindful of impacting those around them, they don't feel they can show struggle."

"Small group contexts: touch base, use names, get to know us."

Recommendations: Student Wellbeing



SHORT TERM

- 1 Coordinate assessments**
A faculty policy and shared calendars to prevent clustering.
- 2 Expand first-contact support**
Increase CAPS capacity or add mentors, trained volunteers and embedded advisors.
- 3 Promote resources year-round**
Repeat information beyond orientation at key student touchpoints.
- 4 Make staff contact routine**
Small-group touchpoints in every program, especially large cohorts.
- 5 Extend peer mentoring**
Scholar Connect and buddy models across year levels and programs.
- 6 Improve food access**
Restore microwaves in Alan Gilbert Building and examine affordable exam-period food.

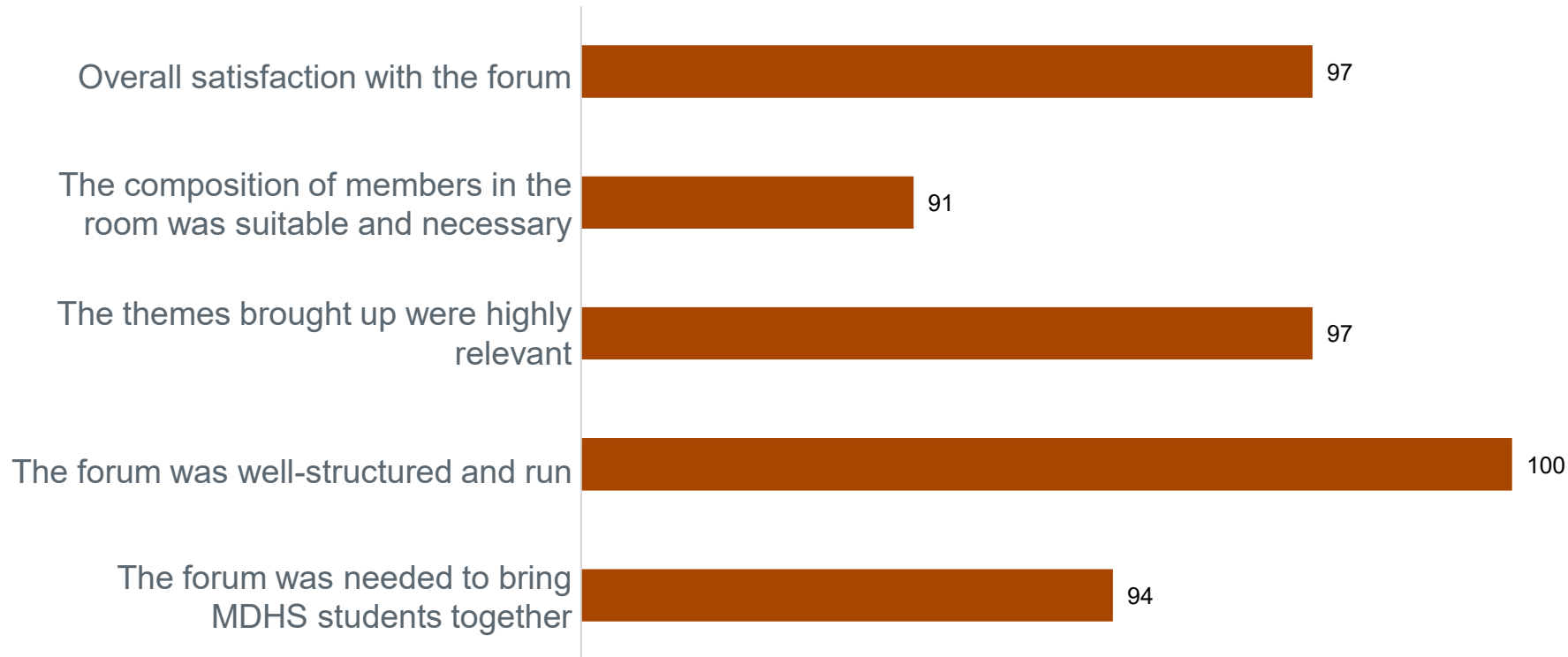
LONGER TERM

- 1 Review course design**
Examine workload, assessment, subject load and WAM incentives; set wellbeing principles.
- 2 Support students on placement**
Include 24/7 contacts, staff visits and clear escalation pathways.
- 3 Address financial pressure**
Explore help for unpaid placements and PhD stipends against living costs.
- 4 Tailor international support**
Culturally informed help and peer representatives by community.
- 5 Set supervisor expectations**
Formal agreements in placements to reduce subjectivity and power imbalance.

Participants strongly endorsed the forum



Proportion (%) of students selecting "Agree" or "Strongly Agree" on a five-point Likert scale:



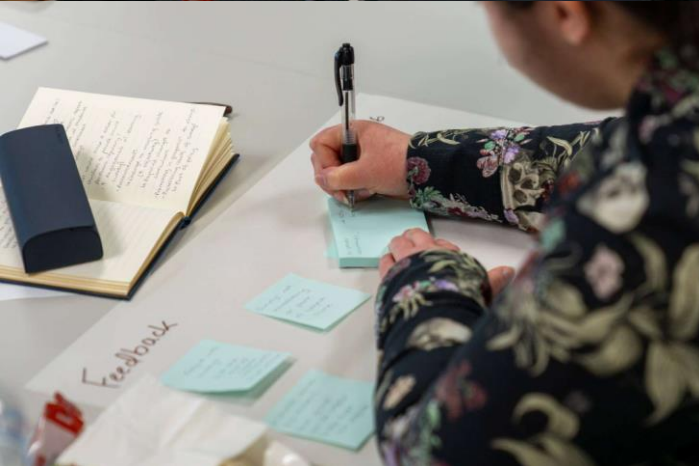
34 survey responses: 23 students, 11 staff

As the inaugural MDHS Student Forum, we are extremely proud of this initiative and what we achieved together. A sincere thank you to everyone who supported, contributed to and participated in the Forum.

For further information, two supporting reports were created and are attached to the email accompanying these slides

MDHS Student Advisory Council (SAC): mdhs-sac@unimelb.edu.au (Students)
MDHS Student Leadership Team: studentlead-MDHS@unimelb.edu.au (Staff)

We welcome you to explore these resources and stay connected with us as we continue to strengthen student voice and partnership across MDHS



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