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JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE ON

ELECTORAL MATTERS

Monday, 23 October 2006

Members: Mr Lindsay *(Chair)*, Mr Danby *(Deputy Chair)*, Senators Brandis, Carr, Hogg, Mason and Murray and Mr Ciobo, Mr Griffin and Mrs Mirabella

Members in attendance: Senator Brandis, Mr Danby and Mr Lindsay

Terms of reference for the inquiry:

To inquire into and report on:

The adequacy of electoral education focusing on but not limited to:

- the current status of young people's knowledge of, and responsibilities under, the Australian electoral system;
- the nature of civics education and its links with electoral education;
- the content and adequacy of electoral education in government and non-government school programs of study, as well as in TAFE colleges and universities;
- the school age at which electoral education should begin;
- the potential to increase electoral knowledge through outside school programs;
- the adequacy of electoral education in indigenous communities;
- the adequacy of electoral education of migrant citizens;
- the role of the Australian Electoral Commission and State and Territory Electoral Commissions in promoting electoral education;
- the role of Federal, State and Local Governments in promoting electoral education;
- the access to, and adequacy of funding for, school visits to the Federal Parliament; and
- opportunities for introducing creative approaches to electoral education taking into account approaches used internationally and, in particular, in the United States, Canada, Germany, United Kingdom and New Zealand.

WITNESSES

Committee met at 9.42 am

McFARLANE, Ms Lesley L, Assistant Secretary, Research, Queensland Teachers Union

CHAIR (Mr Lindsay)—I declare open this public hearing of the Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters inquiry into civics and electoral education. I remind you that the committee does not require you to give evidence under oath. However, it is a legal proceeding of the parliament and has the same standing as proceedings of the respective houses. I know that you will not be giving any false or misleading evidence. There are members of the media present, but they are not going to record anything while you are giving your evidence.

Ms McFarlane—In writing or verbally?

CHAIR—Either. Do you have any comments to make on the capacity in which you appear?

Ms McFarlane—I am a research officer with responsibilities in the matters of curriculum and teacher education.

CHAIR—We have Senator Brandis with us this morning. He is a Senator for Queensland. Michael Danby, who is the deputy chair and the member for Melbourne Ports in Victoria, is on his way from the airport and will join us in due course. Do you wish to make an opening statement to the committee?

Ms McFarlane—No, not really. I have prepared notes to answer the sorts of things that were in your letter of invitation. I was one of the people who helped put together the Australian Education Union's submission. I thought I would be better off spending the time answering your questions about those issues.

CHAIR—Thank you. This inquiry is looking into both electoral and civics education. You have seen the terms of reference. We are getting towards the end of the inquiry. We have taken evidence all over the country and we have had a lot of very good evidence, but we thought what we would do here in Brisbane would be get some practitioners in, both from the public sector and the private sector, and basically hear what the real world is about. This will just flow, I guess, this morning, as we talk to each other. In relation to Queensland, perhaps you might like to start off and tell me how well you think Queensland manages civics education and electoral education, where you see the difficulties—the warts—and what we might be able to do about it.

Ms McFarlane—I have been talking to practising teachers in preparation for today. I am not a practising teacher and have not been for a while. I have been told that the syllabuses are very good, very useable, and the modules are clearly written; the modules for teachers are very helpful. So, as far as the assistance given in the form of written resources for teachers is concerned, that is extremely good.

There is a need for further professional development. There is a slight difference in secondary and primary areas as far as the knowledge of the teachers is concerned. In secondary schools, you have people who are trained history teachers or SOSE teachers—the study of society and environment. The teaching of civics and citizenship is dealt with in the lower secondary area. Sometimes for the teachers who are assigned to those grades it is their second or third teaching

area for which they are not specifically trained. So there is a need for contemporary resources—and online is a great for keeping resources contemporary—for them and professional development for those people who are assigned a class that is not their area of expertise.

The Centre for History Education operates out of Melbourne uni. There teachers can do a graduate diploma in history education HECS free, so that is great. I am not sure what the take-up rate for that is, but it would be worth investigating to find that out and to find a way of encouraging people who are teaching outside their area to do that course. I think time is probably the thing that people are short of, particularly if they are teaching an area for which they are not trained; they are probably spending all their time preparing for it rather than enrolling for a course that would take more of their time. So some encouragement for secondary teachers who have to teach outside of their area to take up that opportunity to do a Graduate Diploma in History Education would be excellent.

CHAIR—You may not know, but is that a distance education subject?

Ms McFarlane—It would be. I assume it would be because it is operating out of Melbourne uni and I know Queensland teachers who do it.

CHAIR—It is interesting that you say it is HECS free.

Ms McFarlane—Yes.

CHAIR—I have never heard of a HECS-free course before.

Ms McFarlane—I had not either until I spoke to a friend of mine yesterday, the head of a history department, and he told me about it.

CHAIR—That is really valuable information. We have not heard of that during the course of our inquiry.

Ms McFarlane—Yes, it is a Graduate Diploma in History Education. Civics education comes into the history department or the SOSE department; however, it is structured within the school.

Primary people are not trained specifically as history, SOSE or civics people; they have to teach everything. They need good resources and, as I have said, the resources that are provided through the syllabus here I have been told are excellent and clearly written. Their challenge is that it is one of many competing areas. It is an important area, but there are many important areas in the curriculum for primary teachers. I would say that they need, I suppose, motivation to focus on civics. I know the New Basics curriculum in Queensland, which is not done by many schools—like, fewer than 100—has a focus on active and informed citizenship. In the curriculum framework that is one of the four areas and so it is done very well in New Basic schools. It would be interesting for you to go to a New Basic school and talk about your terms of reference or get some input from people in New Basic schools. It is well done there.

CHAIR—Did you find that some of the people you spoke to felt they were not properly capable of teaching civics and electoral information? It is not a criticism of teachers, but did they find that is how they felt?

Ms McFarlane—I suppose, as I have said, in the secondary area, if they are teaching outside of their area of expertise, they need a lot of support and help to do it. They do not say, 'No, I can't do it,' because they will have a go at it. But for it to be done well and for them to know about all the agencies involved in citizenship, you really need to spend time delving into that—and, as I said, as a teacher you do not have time to do like a research study into one area. Teachers often have five or six different areas to teach across in secondary. So it is the in-service opportunity, the time to do the research and the provision of the resources that would be very helpful.

I have had feedback from people who have been to the national forums that are provided by DEST each year and they say they feel privileged to go, because it is an opportunity to hear about the work of citizens' agencies like HREOC and World Vision, to hear excellent speakers, to really get inspired. That is the sort of thing that I think is very helpful too for teachers. It is what happens whenever you go to, say, a national conference and you hear excellent speakers—you come away feeling inspired, feeling motivated to put the extra effort in.

While we are on those national forums, they are also excellent for kids. This is the civics and citizenship forum that is run and the schools constitutional convention for senior kids. Actually, when I was preparing for today, I rang up the group that run those forums to find out about their feedback. They say that the feedback they get from kids is that—particularly the constitutional convention—really inspires them to get involved in civic life.

CHAIR—How would you respond to this? We have had evidence that says that schools ought to have a whole-of-school approach to civics education, meaning that it pervades all sorts of things.

Ms McFarlane—Yes, I agree thoroughly. It is not just a little area that you study. The best way to learn about democracy, civics and involvement in the community is to do it. It is not just something whereby you sit down, have a dry lesson and get taught facts. It is something whereby involvement in decision making needs to be part of the whole culture of the school for teachers and kids. This could be through things like student representative councils and class meetings—I can remember my daughter being involved in a class meeting when she was in year 3—where decisions are made about the operation of the classroom, choices that kids will have and negotiating the curriculum. From those experiences, kids learn meeting procedure, for a start. There are many adults who do not know about meeting procedure. So children learn those things. All those experiences build on each other, and children get used to being active. I have a daughter I am very proud of as a really good citizen—an activist. That has stemmed right from primary school, which was really good. It is not just my activism. I have friends who are active like me in citizenship things but their children do not necessarily do that.

CHAIR—How do you respond to this? We have had a bit of evidence that says that, where class elections are conducted for whatever reason and where the students perceive a bias in the elections—for example, a teacher might have two votes for a student's one vote—

Ms McFarlane—Well, that is silly.

CHAIR—That is what I would have thought. But this is not in Queensland.

Ms McFarlane—Of course not.

CHAIR—So what you are saying is that if you are going to do this it has to be absolutely transparent and it has to achieve the outcome?

Ms McFarlane—Absolutely. Not only that. The positions of responsibility to which students are elected need to be positions of real responsibility. They must not be token things. The issues that they deal with need to be issues that the kids are genuinely interested in and not something dreamed up just to have people called prefects with hats on and so on.

CHAIR—I agree entirely.

Senator BRANDIS—You have followed the debate, no doubt, about history teaching in Australian schools?

Ms McFarlane—Yes.

Senator BRANDIS—I want to concentrate on the civics education rather than the electoral education side of this. I want to look at civics education in the broad sense. Are you familiar with the Prime Minister's speech—I think it was given on Australia Day this year—about the importance of history teaching in Australian schools?

Ms McFarlane—Yes.

Senator BRANDIS—What is the Queensland Teachers Union's position in relation to the importance of Australian history teaching in Australian schools and, in particular, the importance of teaching history as narrative and not merely in a modular fashion?

Ms McFarlane—We strongly agree that Australian history should be taught, but we do not entirely agree with the narrative version of it. History is written by the winners, isn't it? So there is more than one story.

Senator BRANDIS—Do you think all facts are relative?

Ms McFarlane—No, not all of them. But history is more than teaching a story.

Senator BRANDIS—I agree. I am sure that is true.

Ms McFarlane—Students need to be taught the processes of uncovering history.

Senator BRANDIS—What does 'uncovering history' mean?

Ms McFarlane—History is ongoing. Students need to be taught that you go to primary sources to find information, that you do oral histories. History is not just a story that you teach kids; it is methodology as well.

Senator BRANDIS—Yes, indeed. I am sure that is right. I agree with that completely, but I want to take it from the obverse point of view. I have children at Queensland schools in primary and middle school. It does trouble me that there has been such a, as it were, fashionable concentration on methodology, 'history being written by the winners' and these sophisticated ideas. But we risk losing sight of some basic concepts, including the fact that history, apart from anything else, is a story—a sequence of events. You can analyse the events from all sorts of different perspectives but, before you even get to the point of analysing the events, you need to know what the events were. Is it the position of your union that history teaching ought to equip students with a politically unbiased set of knowledge of facts and events in a narrative sequence?

Ms McFarlane—I think you are trying to get me to say something and I do not know what it is.

Senator BRANDIS—I am just wondering what your answer to my question is.

Ms McFarlane—I think I have tried to answer it.

Senator BRANDIS—I will put a proposition to you; tell me if you agree with it or not. Tell me what your response to it is. The proposition I put to you is that, fundamentally, students are entitled to be told the narrative sequence of events about Australian history, without political, ideological or sociological bias or spin—just the facts. What do you say to that?

Ms McFarlane—The fact that you say 'sociological bias or spin' says to me that you are thinking something and trying to get me to agree with it. I am saying that there is a narrative but it needs to be told from the points of view of the different groups of people who were involved in that event, not just one point of view.

Senator BRANDIS—It seems to me, with respect, that you are alluding to two different things. I do not have any doubt that the interpretation of events is something which good history teaching should encourage, but, before we start interpreting the events and their meanings or causes, surely students need in the first instance to be equipped with an unbiased knowledge of what the sequence of events was. Take Federation. Before we analyse what might have been the economic, social, cultural or political causes of Federation—for example, why did the Australian Labor Party in its early years oppose Federation, whereas the non-Labor side supported it; those sorts of questions—and start looking at those interpretive issues, don't we need to teach children about the Tenterfield speech, the Federation conventions, the referenda and the event of Federation itself, just as facts?

Ms McFarlane—It would be very dry, dull and boring if you did it that way.

Senator BRANDIS—Would it?

Ms McFarlane—Yes.

Senator BRANDIS—Have you read the Tenterfield speech?

Ms McFarlane—No.

Senator BRANDIS—I assume that you know what it is. That is as close to one of the great soaring declarations of Australian nationhood as there is.

Ms McFarlane—You have to make a judgement. Professional history teachers make the judgement, and the writers of the syllabus do too, as to when you introduce that—at what age.

Senator BRANDIS—Sure; I understand that.

Ms McFarlane—You do not get children involved and liking history by doing it in a very boring fashion.

Senator BRANDIS—Of course you do not. That goes without saying.

Ms McFarlane—The way you do it is to engage the children in real stories.

Senator BRANDIS—Surely one of the ways to engage children's imagination—and we see this in the way that children's fiction is written—is to talk about personalities, the great personalities of Australian history. We can use the example I have been giving of Sir Henry Parkes. Don't you think that illustrating famous historical events—such as our political history—through luminous personalities like Parkes, Curtin and Menzies is a way of capturing children's imagination?

Ms McFarlane—Not young children; it would be students.

Senator BRANDIS—Okay, students—lower secondary, for example. Gough Whitlam, John Curtin—these great figures. Isn't there a role for teachers—

Ms McFarlane—Yes, there is a role.

Senator BRANDIS—to tell the kids about all of that?

Ms McFarlane—Yes, but telling them about it is not the way to do it.

Senator BRANDIS—Educating them about it.

Ms McFarlane—Yes. History has to be brought to life.

Senator BRANDIS—Indeed; I agree with you. But there seems to be a relativism about your position, though, when you say, 'Well, let's face it: history is written by the winners.' Would you say to a teacher of European history that we should give equal treatment to the point of view of Louis XVI and the point of view of the French Revolutionaries?

Ms McFarlane—It depends on which element you are teaching. If you are teaching the French Revolution, you treat all aspects of it.

Senator BRANDIS—Indeed. I want to hear what you have to say about the criticism that is made by some, including the Prime Minister, Mrs Bishop and the federal minister for education,

that our teaching of history has been affected by cultural relativism—that all values are just as good as each other. What do you say? You would be familiar with that debate, no doubt, as a professional. What do you say about that?

Ms McFarlane—I suppose that to say that all values are just as good as each other is not quite right, because clearly that is—

Senator BRANDIS—Quite wrong.

Ms McFarlane—That is wrong in our value system. But it is good to understand what has led to certain events in history.

Senator BRANDIS—Indeed; I agree. But surely you would accept that we need to educate our children that there are some things that are absolutely wrong and other things that are not to be countenanced. For example, going back to European history, you would not recommend a relativistic interpretation of German history between the 1930s and the 1940s, would you? You would not say, 'Well, the Nazis were just as good as the liberal democracies,' would you?

Ms McFarlane—No, but it would be worthwhile knowing what led to the Nazi movement.

Senator BRANDIS—Sure.

Ms McFarlane—I am saying that just giving bland facts, dates and figures does not really teach kids much.

Senator BRANDIS—I understand that, but you can see where my concern lies. We do not want our children to be taught, in the name of a variety of different perspectives, that the Nazis were as good as the democracies, do we?

Ms McFarlane—It is being a bit extremist, though, to say that, isn't it?

Senator BRANDIS—It is the most important event in European history in the 20th century. We do not want to teach that Hitler was as good as Churchill or Roosevelt, do we?

Ms McFarlane—As good at what?

Senator BRANDIS—I am talking about a moral judgement. In other words, I am troubled that you seem to be resisting the suggestion that this is a black and white suggestion. You seem to be suggesting that there are shades of grey about this.

Ms McFarlane—No, I am not doing that at all. I am saying there are clear moral things and ethics that you teach kids. But you seem to be trying to put me in a situation of agreeing or disagreeing, and I do not know what you are really getting at.

Senator BRANDIS—I see statements from various teachers' unions, including yours, which trouble me and suggest that this sort of post-modern cultural, relativist approach seems to be still regarded as being at the cutting edge of teaching. That troubles me. So I am taking an extreme case, as you say—Hitler and Churchill—and seeking to expose the folly of relativism.

Ms McFarlane—Yes, that is taking the extreme and that is not very useful.

Senator BRANDIS—I disagree. I think that, if one wants to illustrate the point, one needs to choose the starkest examples. We could take Stalin or Mao Tse-tung. It would not be your view that, for example, Chinese communism should be regarded as morally equivalent to liberal democracy, would it?

Ms McFarlane—No, but I would not want to say to students that one is very black and one is very white and not teach them anything about communism, for instance.

Senator BRANDIS—We need to know about communism, because communism is one of the most important phenomena of the 20th century. My point is that we also want to equip our students with the capacity to be morally judgemental, don't we?

Ms McFarlane—Yes, I would strongly agree with you.

Senator BRANDIS—In equipping our students to be morally judgemental, do we not want to encourage in them the view that the liberal democracies, for all their faults, represent a good political system—

Ms McFarlane—Absolutely.

Senator BRANDIS—and totalitarianism represents a bad political system and that there is no such thing as moral equivalence between them?

Ms McFarlane—Absolutely.

Senator BRANDIS—I will tell you what has got me particularly bothered about this. I was in Mount Isa earlier this year and one of the teachers at a particular school in Mount Isa drew to my attention this book, of which this is a photocopy—I will show you—in the school library. This is the library of a primary and middle school. The book is *100 Greatest Tyrants*. It is a book with one page per tyrant illustrated by a short essay and pictures. We go through the book and we see, among the 100 greatest tyrants, Adolf Hitler. Then we see another page devoted to Benito Mussolini. We see another page devoted to Joseph Stalin. We see another page devoted to Kim Il Sung. We see another page devoted to Idi Amin. We see another page devoted to Pol Pot. We open the next page and we see a page devoted to Robert Menzies. You can have a look at it; glance through it, if you like. This is a shocking thing, is it not, for students to be taught that our own Prime Minister—whether you are Liberal or Labor is not to the point—is to be treated as being of a piece with Pol Pot and Adolf Hitler and Joseph Stalin?

Ms McFarlane—This is a book in the library, so surely the criticism is of the publisher, not of teachers and what they teach.

Senator BRANDIS—The criticism is not of any individual teacher; it is of the notion—and presumably that book is used by this particular school as an educational resource, otherwise it would not be in the library.

Mr DANBY—You are not suggesting that it is published by the teachers union, though, are you?

Senator BRANDIS—No, I am not suggesting that it is published by the teachers union at all. The criticism is of the notion that in teaching history—

Ms McFarlane—The thing is that, if a teacher wanted to use that, you teach the kids to be critical about that. That is what critical literacy is about—teaching kids to understand that just because it is in there it is not true and that you analyse what things are in there. You would know, for instance, how the media can trivialise politics and politicians. Part of teaching kids citizenship is teaching them critical literacy as far as the media is concerned and why certain things are treated in the way they are treated.

Senator BRANDIS—I do not have any problem with the notion that part of the equipment we should give students is a capacity to critically assess what is presented to them. I agree with you about that.

Ms McFarlane—That is right. What do you do? Do you tear the page out or burn the book?

Senator BRANDIS—Well, you do not have the book, do you? There is no place in an Australian history curriculum for a so-called resource which treats a liberal democratic leader—in particular, an Australian, Australia's longest serving Prime Minister, who is both admired by the non-Labor side of politics and respected by the Labor side of politics—as being equivalent to genocidal maniacs like Hitler, Stalin and Pol Pot. That is inappropriate, isn't it?

Ms McFarlane—But it is an excellent opportunity to talk about that with the children.

Senator BRANDIS—Would you have a book like that as an educational resource in history teaching in Queensland?

Ms McFarlane—I do not know. I am not a history teacher. I am not a secondary history teacher. That would be the judgement of the secondary history teacher and how—

Senator BRANDIS—You think there might be a place for it, do you?

Ms McFarlane—As I said, I do not know. I would defer to a teacher. If a person did buy this—and possibly the librarian who bought it did not read every single page before they bought it—usually with these sorts of things they look at it and think, 'This looks pretty good,' and they might have missed one page.

Senator BRANDIS—That is a different thing. There might have been an error in the acquisition and everybody makes mistakes. But now that we know what is in this book, I am a little—

Ms McFarlane—It would be an excellent opportunity to have a debate in the classroom about tyrants and democracy; it would present an excellent opportunity.

Senator BRANDIS—To make what point?

Ms McFarlane—To have the debate, for children to think critically about these things.

Senator BRANDIS—To think critically about what particular issue?

Ms McFarlane—About democracy and about totalitarianism.

Senator BRANDIS—To produce what conclusion in their minds?

Ms McFarlane—You do not aim to produce a conclusion; you aim to get them to think critically about it.

Senator BRANDIS—So do you say that one of the acceptable educational outcomes of using something like that as an educational resource might be to encourage children to conclude that Pol Pot, Stalin or Hitler was better than Menzies?

Ms McFarlane—No.

Senator BRANDIS—But why do we have the debate when what we want to do, I thought you said earlier, is to encourage an appreciation of the moral superiority of liberal democracy to totalitarian forms?

Ms McFarlane—And the question is?

Senator BRANDIS—Why do we have the debate we have discussed?

Ms McFarlane—What do you think should be the approach?

Senator BRANDIS—I am asking you the questions. Why do we have this debate which puts liberal democracy and liberal democratic statesmen on one side of the equation and genocidal autocrats on the other side of the equation and we have a debate about who is better? Doesn't that imply even the legitimacy of the comparison?

Ms McFarlane—I suppose 'debate' might have been the wrong word—'discussion'.

Mr DANBY—Senator Brandis, how extensively is that book distributed in Queensland schools?

Senator BRANDIS—I do not know, Mr Danby. I found it in a particular school in the library. I hope it is not extensively used, but the answer to your question is that I do not know.

Mr DANBY—If it is just in one school, it could be a mistake that a librarian just picked it out and did not see that Menzies was compared with all these other people.

Senator BRANDIS—That is one thesis. I do not know. I am merely using the book to dramatise the point that I have been seeking to make about moral equivalence and cultural relativism and the vice of those notions in our history curricula. Perhaps I will pass the ball to you.

CHAIR—Can I just change tack? We have run right over time, but it has been an interesting discussion. Thinking about a national curriculum, which has been on the agenda recently, do you think a national curriculum would improve the chances of Australian students receiving civics education right across the country? It is not a trap question.

Ms McFarlane—Generally speaking, states have very similar curricula. You have things like national history and SOSE teachers' associations that have their conferences—and it is teachers in each state and territory that write the curricula; they are people seconded in from schools to write curricula. We had in the late eighties and early nineties the national statements and profiles from which the states then developed their own curricula to suit the specific context of the state or the territory. They tend to be quite similar anyway.

The danger with national curricula is that they get too specific about the content. What should be similar are the concepts to be taught. The content to be taught needs to be adapted to the particular context of the kids—where they are. So I am giving an answer that says it is good in this way, but you have to be careful that you do not prescribe the content. What happens is that, when you have the different states with their different syllabuses, they tend to learn from each other when it comes time to renew; they look at what the other states are doing. So, where the states are free to be innovative and develop their own work, it tends to grow and develop.

CHAIR—So you are saying that for the QTU's part they are interested in this debate.

Ms McFarlane—Yes.

CHAIR—They can see some positives.

Ms McFarlane—Yes.

CHAIR—They can see some downsides.

Ms McFarlane—Yes.

CHAIR—And it is appropriate for the country to have this debate.

Ms McFarlane—It is. As I said, it is largely a misunderstanding that the syllabuses are very different anyway.

Mr DANBY—I want to apologise to you for being late.

Ms McFarlane—That is fine.

Mr DANBY—We have received evidence about the Electoral Commission's role in schools, and it varies according to state and according to school. But we have received evidence that they have been refused admittance to schools. Are you aware of any schools in Queensland that do not allow the AEC access? I have a couple of related questions. What kind of relationship does the AEC have with schools where they are allowed in; and do you see a role for AEC officers in running student council elections? They do it in other states.

Ms McFarlane—Going into a school and running a student council election?

Mr DANBY—Yes.

Ms McFarlane—As a demonstration of how it should be done, or to have control of student council elections? Why would you do it?

Mr DANBY—To show the students how it works.

Ms McFarlane—Sure; that is great. But you do not mean that a student council election could not take place without the AEC going in, do you?

Mr DANBY—No, it is not compulsory. I am just saying that it could be used as a device for civics education.

Ms McFarlane—That would be a wonderful resource for people to assist teachers and students to understand the electoral process, particularly how preferential voting works.

Mr DANBY—What about refusals?

Ms McFarlane—I am not aware of that; I am sorry.

CHAIR—Thank you for your evidence today. It has been very useful for the committee. Do not feel stressed about it.

Ms McFarlane—There were a couple of other things I wanted to say.

CHAIR—Please.

Ms McFarlane—I spoke about primary school teachers of civics having competing priorities in that they have to teach everything and everything is important—literacy, numeracy et cetera. Secondary school people tell me that they have been finding it difficult—this is the history teachers—with the emphases that are being put on values education, then history and Asian education and that sort of thing. So when these things get priority—and emphases have changed in quick succession in the last couple of years—it makes it difficult for them. I have talked about the national forums and how valuable both students and teachers find them.

CHAIR—We have noted that.

Ms McFarlane—I believe that for the citizenship and civics forum the funding is only assured until next year and I think that needs to be ongoing, because it has received nothing but positive feedback.

I spoke before about the importance of dealing with the media and getting kids to be critical consumers as part of their civics education. If they are going to make considered votes, they need to know that the media has a strong influence on—

Mr DANBY—Do you find that they are using the internet and blogs and things like that more and more—

Ms McFarlane—Yes.

Mr DANBY—and dropping the traditional media?

Ms McFarlane—I do not know; I cannot make a judgement on that. One thing that I think was a recommendation that has not been taken up of a report that was done last year was about lowering the voting age. If kids could vote, say, before they left school, at 17, for instance, there would be a greater opportunity to engage kids in the enrolment process, in the electoral process—if they had not left before that happened.

CHAIR—What do you think about the Canadian model where students vote in the national elections with real ballot papers? Their vote actually does not count in the election but they do it exactly as if it did count, and then they count the vote exactly and they distribute the preferences and the school gets an outcome. What do you think about that?

Ms McFarlane—That sounds like a wonderful idea. It is engaging in something that is nearly real, yes.

Mr DANBY—Do they give a school result, do they?

CHAIR—Yes.

Ms McFarlane—Yes, it would provide a focus for students to engage with the issues of the time rather than just thinking, 'It's happening out there but we know nothing about it.' I will tell you one little anecdote. I was at the hairdressers the day before our last state election and said to the young woman there, conscious that she would be working all the next day, 'Don't forget to vote tomorrow.' She said, 'I'm not old enough to vote.' She was a student doing a new apprenticeship thing that they do while they are still at school. I said, 'Well, you can enrol now, you know, for when it's time to vote,' and she said, 'Oh, I don't know that I'll bother.' I gave her a quick lesson on suffragettes and how women had died for her right to vote and she said, 'Oh, I think I'll do it for the women.' That is what I mean about engaging kids, engaging their hearts—not just their minds but their hearts. That sort of motivation is really important, not just the dry facts.

CHAIR—Did you have anything else? Otherwise we need to wrap up.

Ms McFarlane—No, that was it.

CHAIR—Thank you for the evidence that you have given us today. We do appreciate it, and your attendance today.

Ms McFarlane—Thank you very much.

[10.29 am]

DREW, Ms Lyndelle, Community Relations Project Officer, Local Government Association of Queensland

UHR, Ms Rachael, Youth Policy Project Officer, Local Government Association of Queensland

CHAIR—Welcome. We have had two written submissions from you. Do you want to present any additional submissions or would you like to make a short opening statement to the committee?

Ms Drew—Not additional. We can make a short opening statement.

CHAIR—Please proceed.

Ms Drew—We are grateful to have this opportunity to put in this submission. In my work, which is significantly with migrants and refugee communities and supporting local government to be more engaged with those communities across the whole of Queensland, we are in touch with community members and realise that there are gaps in their knowledge about electoral systems and civics education—probably in some cases not more than there are across the whole community but, because that is the community we are in touch with and that is the content of what we are talking about today, we want to address that. We have not done significant consultation about this but, rather, an initial focus group, and we reported on that in the submission to you. We are happy to take any questions on that.

CHAIR—Ms Uhr, do you want to make a statement?

Ms Uhr—I think that is fine. The reason why there are two submissions from the LGAQ, which looks a bit strange, is that our roles are quite different in lots of ways but they cross over in many ways. My role is obviously around young people and in contact with youth development officers across Queensland in a local government context.

CHAIR—Thinking about the members of the LGAQ, how many councils would be interested in these issues and how many councils would not see it as any sort of priority?

Ms Drew—We might have to answer separately each time. Is that okay?

CHAIR—That is okay. We will charge you extra for that!

Ms Drew—In terms of migrant and refugee communities and their engagement, there would be mixed interest from across councils. The program that I coordinated has been in place for seven years and, during that time, we have really increased the knowledge base and understanding of these issues across Queensland—so it is much higher than it would have been. But since the increase in skilled migrants across the whole of regional and rural Queensland, this

issue has really increasingly become something of significance and interest to councils across the board.

CHAIR—That is interesting. Ms Uhr?

Ms Uhr—Across Queensland we have about 60-odd workers who are specifically placed to work around young people's issues in the local government context. So, with 125 local governments and 33 Aboriginal and Islander councils, that is well over half who are actively engaging young people in multiple ways. What methods they use vary, and some probably more so than others. I would not know a number specifically.

CHAIR—Which sorts of councils would be disinterested?

Ms Drew—Councils that to this stage have—speaking from our area—a very low level of migrant and refugee intake. Perhaps their larger numbers would be Aboriginal community members. So it has just not been an issue for them.

CHAIR—And rural councils?

Ms Drew—No, I would not say so since the skilled migration intake. I would say that most rural councils would now see this as something that they were involved with.

Ms Uhr—I believe that it varies across the state. It is very difficult to identify who are the people who are most interested in engaging young people specifically. As Lyndelle said, it is when issues come up that councils tend to look at ways of engaging young people. So if an issue comes up in their community that they want to actively seek young people to participate in the process, that is when we find that.

CHAIR—Switching tack now, we have the ECQ and AEC here today. Do you know who I am talking about?

Ms Drew—Yes.

Ms Uhr—Yes.

CHAIR—The Electoral Commission of Queensland and the Australian Electoral Commission. How well does LGAQ and its members relate to those organisations? What is the relationship between local government and the electoral commissions, state and federal?

Ms Drew—I could not answer that question.

Ms Uhr—I could not answer it either; I am sorry.

Ms Drew—Not that I would think that it would not be a good working relationship, but I do not have that knowledge across the state; I am sorry.

CHAIR—So in your respective roles you have not thought of involving the electoral commissions in the work that you are doing.

Ms Uhr—I know that, in trying to get young people onto the electoral roll, youth development officers have certainly taken an active role, and we try to support that process as much as possible. I know some councils are far more proactive with that than other councils. In that sense, we try to connect with those organisations—but I have not personally, no.

CHAIR—You do not know whether you are getting the support you need?

Ms Uhr—I think that probably as workers we need to connect with workers who are doing similar sorts of processes. So it is about making those connections. I am not sure whether it is about the level of support; it is about the need for these workers to come together and work out a strategy together.

CHAIR—In your role with the development of youth, is it fair to say that you do not know what resources are available to you from the two electoral commissions?

Ms Uhr—I would say that I do not necessarily know all of the information, no.

CHAIR—Is that your fault or the fault of the electoral commissions?

Ms Uhr—I can take some responsibility for that, surely! I think we could all take responsibility for things. We are not here to know everything. Certainly we can always educate ourselves better on those things.

CHAIR—I just wonder if it means that the electoral commissions are not talking to local government sufficiently. Here you are, the peak body, and you do not know of resources that might be available to you. Is that a fair comment?

Ms Drew—We are just being careful because we are aware that there are higher levels of the Local Government Association of Queensland that we are not engaged with. So we possibly do not know the level at which they are involved. But, from our point of view, where it is hitting the ground in terms of migrant refugees and young people, there is more to be done, for sure.

CHAIR—Certainly—and we have had evidence about this across the country—there is a need to engage migrants in the electoral process. It is sounding like you are practitioners, you deliver the programs, but you are not aware in any specific detail of what resources are available from the electoral commissions.

Mr DANBY—How many migrant officers are there at the local government level, or refugee officers like you? We have heard there are 68 out of 120 or so—

Ms Drew—For my particular project, we have 16 councils that are signed-up members of the Local Area Multicultural Partnership Program. My role is to support those councils but then to take what we have learnt and pass that back out to all 125 councils. But, with regard to people on the ground, they are in key councils with higher migrant populations across the state, from Cairns down to Ipswich.

Mr DANBY—Would they employ a full-time person in a similar position to you?

Ms Drew—I coordinate the program state-wide, but they do have a full-time position in all of them, except for position which is shared between Hervey Bay council and Maryborough council.

Mr DANBY—I will ask Ms Uhr the same question: do you think for youth workers and people who work with you it would be worth while if the AEC had a seminar to talk about enrolment and the kinds of issues that would interest you?

Ms Uhr—I think it is always important to educate people around issues of enrolment and how people can do that and how we can streamline that process—so, yes, definitely.

Mr DANBY—Maybe it would be something not only worth while doing in Queensland but in all states—

Ms Uhr—Potentially, yes.

Mr DANBY—With youth workers with councils.

Ms Uhr—It makes sense because they are the people who are connecting with young people in lots of different ways—so, yes.

CHAIR—Which councils in Queensland do you think are outstanding examples of how to engage youth in the electoral process? It may be just in relation to local government elections, but it is still an electoral process. Which councils in your view are outstanding councils?

Ms Uhr—I think it often varies and depends on the person and not necessarily the council. So it depends on the worker and their level of interest in civic engagement, I think, which is the issue that you folks are coming across throughout Australia, I assume. I know one very good example of this stuff is the Brisbane City Council, which has a youth space called Visible Ink. It is a space that actively engages young people in small businesses and mentors them through a process. I know that they align themselves with some of the online engagement strategies—I cannot think of the name. Vibewire is the service that they connect themselves with. So, rather than them delivering it, they actually connect themselves to other agencies that do more of that development.

CHAIR—You have chosen the biggest council as an example. Does that mean the smaller the council, the less engagement there is?

Ms Uhr—No, not necessarily. I am just saying that as an example around the last state election they actually did a really great job in trying to raise the profile with the group that access that service. That is one service of obviously a very big council.

CHAIR—When is the next local government election?

Ms Drew—Next year.

Ms Uhr—Next year.

CHAIR—I do not think that is right, actually. It is March 2008. That is a worry: you do not know! Where I was coming from in asking you that was that I was going to investigate what the LGAQ might be doing in the run-up to the next local government election to engage people and to engage young people.

Ms Uhr—At this stage we have not made any proactive roles around that stuff. My position is not actually fully funded. We are waiting on funding, which is about to cease in about three or four days.

CHAIR—Who provides your funding?

Ms Uhr—I am funded by the Department of Communities' Office for Youth.

CHAIR—State.

Ms Uhr—The state government funds my position. It has been a yearly funded project position. At the moment we are just trying to get—we get yearly funding at the moment.

CHAIR—Is that hopeless that there is no ongoing certainty? Clearly what you do is useful for local government; why wouldn't it just be ongoing? Why does the state government do it on a yearly basis?

Ms Uhr—You would have to talk to the state government about that. I am not sure.

CHAIR—That was your opportunity to say that they are dreadful demons!

Ms Uhr—They are not. We have a good relationship with the state government around that stuff and we hopefully will be in a position where we can continue that position, but at this stage it finishes on 4 November.

CHAIR—I will put my position on the record. I think having those sorts of funding arrangements is not helpful to the ongoing development of these programs. So I am supporting it.

Senator BRANDIS—We are very interested in this, Ms Uhr, because it is a little-acknowledged fact that 47c of every dollar that the Queensland government spends comes from grants from the Commonwealth government.

Ms Uhr—I see.

Ms Drew—Adding to that in relation to migrant refugee communities, I have mentioned in my submission the way we have worked with the Australian Bureau of Statistics to prepare for the census. That was a good case study of how we really worked on connecting the Australian Bureau of Statistics with the communities, letting the ABS know what languages they needed to have interpreters for and how to engage with them and then letting the communities know, helping to set up workshops, making sure that the ABS people went to where the communities were rather than just having a separate session. The workers in my focus group—in answer to your question earlier, Mr Danby—were saying that migrant and refugee communities often will

not come to a specific electoral or civics training session. It needs to be something that they are already interested in or going to. Citizenship is certainly a key one.

CHAIR—Do you think LGAQ, or local government, has an obligation to educate people in the electoral process?

Ms Drew—I do not know whether I would go as far as saying 'an obligation'.

Senator BRANDIS—Is it one of their policies to do so? Is it a policy of the LGAQ to do that?

Ms Drew—I have not seen a policy that says that is our policy. I know that the Queensland Department of Local Government, Planning, Sport and Recreation does a lot of work in training people about electoral processes and I think we see that more as their role at this stage. However, councils have a role in this.

CHAIR—Let me put this scenario to you—and I put it to you from personal experience: a person decides to stand for the local council. The person usually has no idea what that involves. Does the LGAQ offer advice and information and whatever?

Ms Drew—Yes, and I should say that we offer extensive training to new councillors. It is really an enormous undertaking that we do every year—and updates every year, like the new councils, of all the issues they need to know about: what is the code of conduct, how they need to go about doing their business. Yes, in terms of elected representatives, we do a huge amount of work.

CHAIR—That is terrific. I was a councillor before you were born, and I am only 23! Does the LGAQ—Ms Uhr, you might like to answer this—have strategies in place to get young people along to council meetings?

Ms Uhr—Sure do.

CHAIR—Talk to me about that.

Ms Uhr—Quite a number of councils opt for the youth council or the youth advisory group, and that is quite extensive throughout Queensland. Most councils will choose that as the primary mode of engaging young people. Often it happens in a formal process where they have councillors along or they participate in council chambers.

CHAIR—In the youth council model, is that just window dressing or is it real?

Ms Uhr—It can be very tokenistic, incredibly. That is the challenge of any engagement process—it can be tokenistic or it can be something that is actually meaningful for young people. In some communities they do that incredibly well and in other communities it is quite tokenistic. It is: 'Tick-the-box—we are engaging young people.'

CHAIR—Which council has a great youth council?

Ms Uhr—The one at the moment that I think is the most interesting—it is in a regional community—is Tara Shire council.

CHAIR—Really?

Ms Uhr—It is amazing. They are doing a really great job. The worker there has done a fantastic job at building that up. He started off as a trainee and he has a youth council that is incredibly active and participates in local government business. It is connected with their strategic planning and organisational planning and young people participate in that process. It is very clever.

CHAIR—So it depends on the person on the ground who is running it.

Ms Uhr—He has develops those skills. Yes, he has done a really great job, but he has a very supportive council that is really keen to get young people. They had quite a lot of young people leaving their community and there is quite a lot of crime, I think, for the region. So, as a community, they got together and said, 'How do we need to address this?'

CHAIR—Does the LGAQ have a budget for providing an education program and resources and is the budget sufficient?

Ms Uhr—To whom?

CHAIR—To the local government communities.

Ms Uhr—We provide a range of education strategies to local government communities.

CHAIR—So there is a budget to do that?

Ms Uhr—A lot of it is self-funded, actually. From my perspective, I deliver a conference to youth development officers and it is self-funded. The participants pay to attend and we do not have any budget extra to that.

Ms Drew—If I understand the question correctly, we do have a very extensive training wing that trains across the state on a whole range of local government business—a very extensive program.

Ms Uhr—That is a conference a month, really.

Ms Drew—To councillors, to the elected representatives and to council staff.

CHAIR—We are out of questions. You did well. Thank you very much.

Ms Drew—Thank you for having us.

[10.52 am]

KEAST, Ms Lone Veirup, Manager (Policy), Strategic Policy and Research, Commission for Children and Young People and Child Guardian

REDDEL, Dr Tim, Executive Director, Policy, Research and Employment Screening, Commission for Children and Young People and Child Guardian

SCHNEIDER, Mrs Adrienne, Senior Policy Officer, Commission for Children and Young People and Child Guardian

CHAIR—Welcome. The committee does not require you to give evidence under oath, but I should advise you that these are legal proceedings of the parliament and they have the same standing as the proceedings of the respective houses. We have received a written submission from you. Do you want to present any additional submission or make a short opening statement?

Dr Reddel—We are happy to make a short opening statement.

CHAIR—Please proceed.

Dr Reddel—Our submission from the Commission for Children and Young People and Child Guardian in Queensland was made jointly with the New South Wales Commission for Children and Young People, and the Tasmanian Commissioner for Children. We saw this as a very important piece of work for our commission—jointly with the other commissions—given our role to promote the rights, interests and wellbeing of children and young people in Queensland, particularly the most vulnerable. We saw the committee inquiry's focus on electoral education and civics as a really important platform to raise some issues that we have been looking at across the commissions over the last number of years. In particular, we are working actively to try and develop better engagement with children and young people in terms of our own activities and, more broadly, the policy process.

In terms of an overview of our approach, rather than responding to some of the specific questions raised by the inquiry we sought to highlight what we thought were some underpinning issues about young people's participation in our country's democracy. We proposed three recommendations that you have had a chance to examine. They go beyond what we see as some of the more fundamental issues. I will just run through in brief terms some of our key issues and then the background to our recommendations.

Our first key issue challenged the historical assumption that education results in young people participating more actively in civic society. We pointed to some academic research that raises doubts about this assumption and shows that electoral education issues do not necessarily lead to increased political participation.

Our second key issue questioned whether civic literacy is the main problem that requires to be addressed. Our consultations with young people indicated that inadequate civics and electoral

education may not be the main problem. This is supported by academic research, both nationally and internationally, and also by bodies such as the European Commission.

We found—and this is both from the research and from our day-to-day policy work—that young people are knowledgeable on the whole about key political issues of the day and particular political parties' positions on these issues. Many young people are already active citizens engaged in charity and community work perhaps outside formal politics but involved in civil society. Some choose activist participation on issues rather than formal political participation, in a sense trying to see a broader sweep of what political participation entails.

Our third key issue highlighted that Australia's political system can at times discourage young people's participation if they perceive that politicians do not care so they believe that their vote will not make a difference. Often, unfortunately, they lose faith in that system.

Our fourth key issue highlighted that many of Australia's young people do feel at times excluded and ignored by governments that do not adequately understand or address young people's issues.

Our fifth key issue suggested that we need to look beyond civics and electoral education as being the only solution.

In summary, our joint submission made three recommendations. Firstly, we proposed programs to provide young people with explicit reasons to engage with governments and the political process. In that sense we saw engagement as a two-way process of accountability between young people as citizens and the political system: the political parties, the bureaucracy and other aspects of our democratic process such as our institutions, parliaments et cetera. For example, we suggested holding mock elections, in conjunction with federal and state elections, which would involve young people in political and electoral processes. We also suggested that civics and electoral education should emphasise the actual applications of civics and electoral knowledge in a way that meets young people's engagement and communication preferences. We did not offer any simple solutions, but it would perhaps be examining with young people some innovative ways that might match more directly their lived experiences in terms of how they saw the political process working.

Secondly, we called for visible evidence that local, state and federal governments are genuinely seeking to engage with and represent children and young people. As I mentioned earlier, we would see it as a two-way process of accountability in terms of the political and policy process and how it makes a difference and how those views and issues are dealt with. That does not mean necessarily that engagement means that people get exactly what they want all the time. It is also a process of communication and deliberation whereby people can see that perhaps their views are properly considered and whereby reasons are provided as to why a particular issue or approach might or might not be undertaken by governments.

Governments at all levels must establish substantial youth engagement as a core practice in their policy development and practices. To facilitate this, practical and accessible youth participation tool kits and guidelines must be developed and made available. We are looking at some of that work as part of our youth engagement. In highlighting these issues for the committee, we are conscious that we have to get our own house in order. How we actively

engage more directly with children and young people is something that we are actively considering.

We have called for the federal government to re-establish a national peak body for youth affairs, with a mandate to be the national coordinating centre on youth engagement advocacy and research, and to re-establish a ministerial or parliamentary secretary portfolio of children and young people at a national level.

Finally, we have recommended the implementation of programs that can help people to perceive that their involvement can make a difference. Governments need to identify how the current culture, institutions and practices of the Australian political and government system act as barriers to engagement and also the changes required to better engage children and young people so that their needs are responded to.

We ask that the federal government consider developing a national youth engagement strategy in full consultation with young people. It should include clear goals, performance indicators and an implementation plan. In conclusion, current comprehensive evidence should be developed by which to examine feasible reasons for youth disengagement which might not be restricted to civic literacy as a basis.

CHAIR—Thank you for a very comprehensive opening statement—one of the better opening statements we have heard for some time. We appreciate that.

Senator BRANDIS—Thank you very much. I found that very interesting and the submission itself to be of a very high quality. I want to engage you on the question of the manner in which one encourages young people to get involved in civic affairs. You said in your opening remarks—I wrote it down—that some choose activist participation on particular issues rather than more formal modes of political participation. But what you did not speak about particularly and what your submission does not speak about to any great extent are the political parties.

Dr Reddel—Yes.

Senator BRANDIS—I am sorry if this is a fairly long prologue to my question, but let me explain to you what concerns me. Take the Commonwealth parliament. I think we would acknowledge that the height of political participation and the ultimate emblem of our democracy is the parliament. There are 226 members of the Commonwealth parliament: 150 members of the House of Representatives and 76 senators. Of those, all but three are members of political parties. If you take the 223 who are members of political parties, all but nine of them are members of what are called the major parties—the Liberal Party, the Labor Party and the National Party. So, of the 226 people who sit in the Commonwealth parliament, 214 are members of one of the major parties. And yet, if one looks at the other end of the generational scale to intake into the major parties among young people, they each have youth wings.

Dr Reddel—Yes.

Senator BRANDIS—I do not know about the Young Labor party or the Young National Party, but my guess, just from my own knowledge of the Young Liberals here in Queensland, is that there might be—what would you say, Mr Chairman?—a few dozen new people in an

average year who would join the Young Liberals. Certainly I would not have thought there would be more than 100. I dare say it is much the same for the Labor Party and the National Party and I dare say that is pretty much the same around the states. That is a very small number.

My concern is that it is all very well to talk about our democracy and what a good democracy we have. It is all very well to talk about active civic participation. It is all very well to talk about involvement in activist participation on particular issues through particular lobby groups. But what we do not seem to be fostering in this country is a culture of young people actively getting involved in political parties. It may well be that political parties have a bad name. We read about factionalism, branch stacking and all these other pejorative claims. But, for whatever reason, it seems to me that, at the heart of having a healthy civic culture and at the heart of having really significant engagement of young people in the political system is the encouragement of actual participation through the more formal avenues for political participation—that is, encouraging young people to join political parties. After that prologue, can I invite your response—and others as well—to those observations? Can I more particularly ask you: do you consider that educating young people about and encouraging them to join political parties is a good thing?

Dr Reddel—I think that is a really interesting question you have raised. I suppose I would say at the outset I do not see them as mutually exclusive.

Senator BRANDIS—No. I do not suggest they are.

Dr Reddel—I suppose that one of the things we are calling for is to look at how active civic engagement—whether it is activism through more formal interest groups and peak bodies or through other community activities—feeds into the formal political process. There is a lot of research on that and the links. There are numbers of examples. People talk about focusing political parties and looking much more at local community leaders and activists—using those terms in a general sense—becoming more involved and being linked to the political process. The pathways between that activist involvement—using that in a general sense—and formal political membership, whether it is through youth links to formal political parties or other formal political systems, appear to be becoming more fragmented.

Perhaps we need to look at all political parties, community organisations and activist groups to see how the links can be better made so that there can be that pathway between more participatory policymaking and the representative system, because the two have to go together. I think that is very much the strong framework we come from—how the institutions and groups of civil society link with representative democracy: both the parliament and the bureaucracy.

Perhaps, if you did an analysis of the membership of the political parties in the current parliament you would find evidence of the pathways by which particular members have entered the political system. You would find, I am sure, that many of them have come from being active in community issues, whether at a local level, in their local communities, or more generally around particular interests or issues.

Senator BRANDIS—That is true—and our distinguished chairman is an example of that—but you have another group of people who are, in a sense, self-selecting activists from a relatively young age in the political parties themselves. The whole point of my question to you is: everybody says that civic participation is an unqualified good; most people seem to say that

Australian democracy is an unqualified good, although it is not without a capacity to be improved.

Dr Reddel—Yes.

Senator BRANDIS—But the point of disjunction between civic participation and Australian democracy seems to be the parties. The general view is that the parties are bad. Political parties have a bad name and yet they are the gatekeepers; they are the point of crossover from civic participation to actual parliamentary decision making.

Dr Reddel—Some of the things we mention in our paper, particularly focusing on and using some of the evidence from the New South Wales Commission—they have a youth advisory committee—highlight a bit of that disconnect.

Senator BRANDIS—That is exactly what it is. I have asked you what the source of that disconnect is.

Dr Reddel—We argue that we want very much to encourage, as one legitimate avenue, the links with formal political parties as being a really important process of democracy. It is fundamental, as you have said, in terms of how our parliamentary institutions and the executive work. You have to have that. We would argue that civic engagement and participation is a good in itself.

Senator BRANDIS—Yes.

Dr Reddel—It should be linked to that representative system, anyway. But one of the by-products of that can be the links between people who are involved in those forums and processes feeding directly into Young Labor, Young Liberals and Young Nationals, or Independents and other political groups, and into the parliamentary system.

Senator BRANDIS—The political parties in this country used to be mass based movements. There was a time when our population was much smaller than it is now but you had tens of thousands of people in each state in the Labor Party or the Liberal Party. That just does not happen any more. I suspect that it is at the recruitment stage among younger people that that phenomenon is most evident. That is a real problem for our democracy.

Dr Reddel—It is. I suppose the way of seeing it is as a package of activity—that people see the parliamentary process as a career path on one level but also there are other avenues where the other aspects of civic engagement feed into decision making as well and people see that there are opportunities at those different levels.

Mr DANBY—I just want to come back to your idea about the mock election. When the previous witness was here, the chairman mentioned the fact that in Canada they have a student vote program in high schools at the time of national elections. How do you see this mock election working? Do you think it would have a positive impact on students' perception of the general electoral process?

Dr Reddel—Yes.

Mr DANBY—Who do you think would be responsible for running this mock election?

Dr Reddel—Firstly, it would not be seen as a stand-alone event; there would have to be preparatory work done to inform people in terms of selecting who would be involved so that people are informed about the process in the lead-up to it et cetera. I think it would be a positive if conducted properly, I suggest by the Commonwealth Electoral Commission itself, perhaps. There would need to be further thought, but it could be run by the Electoral Commission, as a suggestion. That is one avenue. I do not know if Lone or Adrienne have other ideas in terms of any other potential sponsors for this.

Ms Keast—Because it needs to be across the country or across the state, it needs to be the electoral commissions that conduct it. I agree with you, Tim.

Dr Reddel—But I suppose there is also the question of how that is then promoted. At the moment there are things like the Youth Parliament that meets in Queensland. There are examples of that that meet at the state parliament and so forth. But I do not think that gets a lot of publicity, perhaps because people are not actively involved in the process, but a mock election would allow that to happen.

Mr DANBY—Would you see the regular political parties or their youth sections participating in it, or would you have them banned?

Dr Reddel—I think back to the senator's earlier point. We have not given it detailed consideration, but I think it would be much better to involve the formal political parties—I suppose with some checks and balances, perhaps, on how that is done. We would want to see that it is an educative process as well as a political process. As I say, it is a mock election; it is not meant to necessarily involve people in formalised decision making, but you would want to examine how you would involve the formal political parties.

Mr DANBY—You recommend also comparing results. How would you do that? Would you do it by city, by Commonwealth electoral district? Would the results be important to the young people?

Dr Reddel—I suppose some comparative analysis would help people to see the level of participation in one area versus another. It would give some overview to bodies such as this of the political system more generally—where there is more engagement perhaps or where there is need for more focus and effort in particular regions. I have not given any specific thought to it. I suppose it would have to be manageable around size so people would see a community of interest. Doing it nationally, probably through Commonwealth boundaries of electoral districts, might be a way to proceed.

Mr DANBY—What would be the age participation for this—14 to 18 or 16 to 18?

Dr Reddel—I think 14 to 18 perhaps might be a grouping to think through.

CHAIR—How well are schools doing, in your view, in delivering civics and electoral education to students, to young people?

Dr Reddel—We do not have any detailed evidence to say that it is good or bad. There is a lot of debate at the moment around what is being taught in our schools. I think that part of the outcome of some of this could be an examination of how that is being undertaken within schools. Looking at it in a more holistic way as part of young people's education would be really important. I think one of the outcomes would be that you would need to do a detailed analysis of what is going on within each state's curriculum. Perhaps this could be considered as part of the current debate around a national curriculum and so forth.

CHAIR—You said that there is a bit of cynicism among young people because elected members are really not engaging with young people's views. What are young people's views? Where do they want the engagement?

Dr Reddel—This is what we are grappling with at the moment: you cannot see young people as a homogenous group. As we all know, various age groups have various issues in particular geographic locations. I suppose that one of the issues of young people is understanding things that are of direct relevance in their education, their opportunities as they get older—opportunities for employment—and their future: seeing their future and understanding their future. In a general sense, young people are being bombarded. It has become a general understanding that there is a lot more activity for young people in terms of inputs into them through the electronic media, their access to the internet et cetera. So, in a sense, there is more opportunity for them to be informed about issues—their understanding about their cultural pursuits, their identity. I think young people are grappling with some of those sorts of issues about who they are and what they are going to be in their future lives.

How do we engage at some of those levels? I suppose there are immediate issues that young people want engagement on, but also there is the future. I think it is important that we get right that balance between things that are impacting on them directly now and things to do with where they are seeing their future—their education, their career, their opportunities for relationships. Those sorts of things are really important for young people.

CHAIR—You say that young people think that their vote does not make a difference. How can we address that?

Dr Reddel—I think it goes back to some of that discussion before about people seeing that perhaps, as we have outlined in the submission, their activism has also a link to casting their vote and how their elected representatives participate: how those whom they vote—or do not vote—for and become their elected representatives engage between elections with them on the issues and how they take on board issues for children and young people through political debate, through policy development and legislation that is passed by parliament, to see how it impacts on young people. I suppose their vote is then viewed as meaning something: 'That's going to lead to that person being elected.' Of course in our system you might not vote for a particular person who is still elected by the general populace. But the young take it all on board in an ongoing way through some of those engagement activities and mock elections but also through seeing some of their issues being canvassed in parliamentary debate, legislation and policy development.

CHAIR—You have made a big point where you say:

... research based on broader interpretations of 'active citizenship' shows that a large percentage of young people are already active and engaged citizens ...

Dr Reddel—Yes.

CHAIR—We are finding the reverse as we go around the country. We are finding that cynicism and apathy are alive and well. We are finding that youngsters are much more interested in other things in life than civics and the political process. Who is right?

Dr Reddel—Maybe it comes down to a definitional issue of what people are seeing as 'activism'. I do not use that word in a radical sense. We would define people's engagement in community organisations, sporting bodies or local groups as being opportunities. Perhaps they are not fully realised, but they are opportunities for greater political participation. So it is seeing politics in that sense, not necessarily in some of the issues that we talked about—some of the cynicism that might exist about the formal political system.

Senator BRANDIS—I suppose it also reflects the fact that the actual practice of politics these days is much more something that is a marketing exercise during election campaigns. I am young enough to remember the days when there were actually political rallies and political meetings during election campaigns. You actually saw the faces of political leaders out among the community, and the local candidate stood on the back of a truck with a microphone. Nowadays the delivery of political messages is through the mailbox and through the electronic media. That level of sophistication of message communication has produced the result that politics has ceased to be an activity that happens within communities in a face-to-face way.

Dr Reddel—I would agree. I think one of the things—talking about the mode of how you might engender greater political engagement by young people—would be more direct and greater opportunities. I suppose there is a bit of a balance between the opportunities of electronic media through the internet et cetera that young people use very actively but also, yes, face-to-face opportunities for people to meet their local representatives to hear what they are saying—forums within their local communities perhaps.

Mr DANBY—It depends on where you are, Senator. Senators do not speak off the backs of trucks anymore.

Senator BRANDIS—Some of us still do, you know, Mr Danby.

Mr DANBY—In the last election, a local newspaper promoted a public meeting where I spoke against the Liberal candidate. We had 800 people show up, and there were a lot of young people there.

Senator BRANDIS—But that is an older style of politics, isn't it—and I think it is great. I wish it were still the paradigm. But that is not the paradigm of how political messages are delivered these days, and I think that is part of the problem.

CHAIR—You have commented that the rhetoric of youth participation does not seem to match the real-world avenue for participation by young people. Could you elaborate on that?

Dr Reddel—As I think we mentioned earlier, it has become a sort of populism that we need more engagement and more participation. But, as regards the actual pathways for what that means, engagement is not just consultation; it is actually people talking to each other. As I said in my opening statement, often it might mean explaining why you have not done something that people think is a good idea—because of the broader public good. I think there is a notion that young people just want their wants addressed, not necessarily their needs. Maybe it is about people within the political system understanding that part of it is: 'Yes, we're having a debate here. Here's something you might want, but in the end the public good means it has to go this particular way. Let's talk about that, rather than it just being something that's never discussed.' I think some of that openness and honesty about political decision making perhaps might lead to some negativity at the outset but it also might be a good in the end that people see it, as part of an educative process for young people. Often they might want things that in the end might not be in their best interests in the overall sense, but they can see what is happening with their ideas and issues.

CHAIR—Mrs Schneider, you have not said anything, so I am going to ask you a question.

Mrs Schneider—That is a bit cruel, isn't it!

CHAIR—Yes! In all of this—the engagement of youth and whatever—how important is their family in their engagement process? Is the family the key unit or is it governments, electoral commissions or schools? How important is the family?

Mrs Schneider—I think it is a combination of all of them really. I do not think you can just focus on a particular one. It depends on the individual. There are some individuals for whom their family and what their family has always believed or gone with is extremely important, but there are also other individuals who are influenced by their peer groups, their school or the organisation they are in as well, and that influences the way they tackle things. It actually challenges them in some of their traditional beliefs as well.

CHAIR—Do you have any criticism that you would like to offer of families and what they may or may not do for their children to make them good citizens?

Mrs Schneider—I do not know that I have any criticisms of the families themselves.

CHAIR—Come on, be provocative! No, don't be.

Mrs Schneider—I think it is just a matter of explaining, particularly to young people, in regard to the actual political system itself, exactly what the individual members stand for. They hear it on the media—and that is what they listen to a lot of the time and that is what influences them—but they also need to hear another side of things from the actual candidates themselves.

Dr Reddel—I suppose there are discussions in the family around politics. That is one of the issues that people see as a topic of discussion within the family.

CHAIR—Is the engagement within the family reducing over time? Do you think that families are not as in touch with youth as they used to be?

Dr Reddel—I think it is part of a broader issue and it is probably outside the ambit of our time today. But there is pressure on family life today in terms of time.

CHAIR—Is that a yes or a no?

Dr Reddel—I am not sure. I do not think you can give a generic answer. I think people have a lot of time pressure within families, as many of us would know, just in terms of grappling with the activities that young people have.

CHAIR—Is it that there is a declining link within families between youth and their parents in making them good citizens?

Senator BRANDIS—Is that right, do you think?

Dr Reddel—I would not say that. As I said, I do not think you can give a generic answer. I am sure there might be examples of that, but I think families on the whole are trying to grapple with the complexities of their child's life, their schooling, their identity quest and their relationships. So there are all those immediate things, and seeing how people see politics.

CHAIR—Your organisation is not picking up any trends; is that what you are saying?

Dr Reddel—I suppose this is a new issue, in a sense, for us, and something we really want to focus on. The role of the family with all that and what that means for people will be really important.

Senator BRANDIS—I think we know this much, though: the political sociologists tell us that, of the various causes to shape political opinions among young people at the formative stage, in their teens, far and away the principal influence is family structure, so that most children tend to vote the same way their parents vote. That is not absolutely true, of course, but the family has always been regarded by political sociologists as the principal opinion-forming mechanism. But the second—and we have not discussed this nearly as much as we could—is the school.

Dr Reddel—Yes.

Senator BRANDIS—There are some schools in Australia which have been identified with a very high level of civic participation—we might think of the Perth Modern School; that is famous for that, as is Fort Street in Sydney. De La Salle in Sydney is famous for having educated an extraordinarily large number of Labor politicians in the City of Sydney. Here in Brisbane, Churchie has educated probably more non-Labor politicians than any other school. So there are individual schools that you can identify that have, as part of their school culture, a very conscious level of civic—and, indeed, political—participation, but that seems not generally to be the case across schools. Do you want to say something about that?

Dr Reddel—I think that is part of what we were talking about before. How do we embed this in opportunities for children? Clearly, I think, through formal activities within schools and that then feeding into more informal activities within schools—for instance, those of the peer group. I have a 17-year-old daughter, and her group does talk about politics because of the nature of

their group and the school they go to. Civic involvement and civic issues are discussed, and not only as a stand-alone subject but, I think, embedded within discussion around different topics. I know that that could be a controversial issue, but it could be in how you look at it. People could have a discussion so that it was not just party political but about the substance of policy development and policy issues.

Senator BRANDIS—Absolutely. But—just closing the circle and going back to the point I made to you initially—perhaps it is not party political enough. Perhaps talking around policy and talking around civic education in a generic sense is not enough to make the link between having an opinion and actual involvement in an influential way.

Dr Reddel—Yes, though coming back to what I said, probably in response, it is also perhaps that they see that joining of a political party—if it is people coming there because of a particular issue or set of issues—as an avenue to further that, or to develop further their career as a political activist or a political leader.

CHAIR—We have gone over time, but that I think is an indication of the interest we have had in the evidence you have given. We appreciate your frankness and straightforwardness and the quality of your evidence. Thank you for your attendance.

Proceedings suspended from 11.30 am to 11.41 am

RASMUSSEN, Ms Melissa, Private capacity

Evidence was taken via teleconference—

CHAIR—Thank you for joining us via this teleconference. Your submission exudes enthusiasm for We the People.

Ms Rasmussen—I love it.

CHAIR—Would you just talk to us about that program and tell us why you are so excited about this inquiry and how We the People might be incorporated in what we might recommend.

Ms Rasmussen—I will just give you a bit of background on how I ended up getting to know the program. Last year there was a premier's award and basically they have funding grants. Those grants can be used to research particular areas of interest. I came across We the People. I applied for the grant and received the grant and went across last year to attend their summer school. That went for about two weeks and it was a really in-depth kind of professional development program. Teachers from all over America come together and they, firstly, learn about the American constitution—because it seems to be a big problem that a lot of people do not know the basics and the theory behind civics—then, for the second half of the summer school, they learn about the actual program. The program is focused on teaching the American constitution explicitly to students. It runs over the course of a term—which would be the equivalent of our term over here—so it is a 10-week program. It starts by looking at the fundamentals of democracy. It goes right back to ancient Greece and looks at Socrates and so on and then it looks at the development of the US constitution.

CHAIR—Do students find it dry and boring?

Ms Rasmussen—The feedback that I received from the teachers whom I interviewed and interacted with over there was that the kids really enjoyed it. The program does come with a very comprehensive textbook, and I discussed this with Sonia. I have been trying to get her a copy. It comes, as I say, with a textbook. It is free to all of the teachers. You get class sets that are sent to the school. It is sectioned off into things like—and I will just give you an example—'What was the antifederalist position in the debate on ratification?' That probably does sound very dry, but it is generally a very good text. It is sectioned nicely and there are lots of dot points, lots of pictures and then some really good cognitive questions and extension questions at the back of each chapter. To answer your question, I would have to say: no, the feedback I received was that it was a very stimulating program.

Mr DANBY—Were there any other foreigners apart from you at that summer school in California on We the People?

Ms Rasmussen—No. I was the only foreigner, so to speak. But, as part of the Center for Civic Education, they do have an international program; they do lots of civic education style programs in other countries. Indonesia is one that I was looking at. A couple of reports were done on how Indonesia had accessed the program and incorporated it into their current curriculum.

CHAIR—Is there anything that Australian can learn from the experience in Indonesia?

Ms Rasmussen—Indonesia has a program called Pancasila.

Mr DANBY—Pancasila is actually more of a nationalist ideology whereby people's loyalty is firstly to Indonesia and secondly to other ideologies. Interestingly enough, the very capable Pugh research people just did a survey in Indonesia which showed that, despite the fact that people thought Pancasila was an old-fashioned doctrine, 83 per cent of all Indonesians value Pancasila higher than Islamism. That was a big surprise and a very encouraging development. Basically, it means that the Indonesians consider themselves to be more Indonesian than Muslim.

Ms Rasmussen—That is quite encouraging, isn't it?

Mr DANBY—That is not an anti-Muslim statement; it is an objective fact that that is how people define themselves.

Ms Rasmussen—The school system in Indonesia used to have that as their central civics program. But, since coming along and meeting with the Center for Civic Education, they have refined that and incorporated the principles of We the People and Project Citizen—Project Citizen is the curriculum program for primary students—so that they have something that goes from pre-primary right through to year 12. The studies they have done have shown that, before they started looking at civics and including it in their curriculum, Indonesian people did not understand or appreciate that being a part of a democracy meant that you could vote and seek to influence public policy. The studies they have done have shown that, since incorporating that, people are now aware that when they vote it has some bearing on their immediate political circle.

CHAIR—When you say 'people', do you mean young people?

Ms Rasmussen—Yes. It was a survey done on youth.

Mr DANBY—In your submission you say that countries other than Indonesia have civic education programs. I found it interesting that both Pakistan and Russia, countries which have all kinds of issues with regard to people participating in civic society—have civic education programs. The rollback against democratic reform in Russia seems quite extensive. Do you know anything about the programs they have there?

Ms Rasmussen—Unfortunately, I do not. The only thing I do know is that the centre has had some involvement in the development of curriculum, but I do not have anything concrete on that.

Mr DANBY—It is interesting that they have one in Germany, because Germany is an advanced country like Australia. I do not know whether the program for Germany is in German, but perhaps we should get an English translation of it for our inquiry.

Ms Rasmussen—I think that would be a great idea.

CHAIR—You say that the program attracts the support of private donors. What kinds of private sector donations are made to the program?

Ms Rasmussen—Once again, that is something that I cannot answer; sorry if I sound as though I do not know much. I can look into that though and find out.

CHAIR—I think that would be interesting. It would be valuable if you could find out and email a response back to us. Do you think we could convince the Australian private sector to support this kind of program?

Ms Rasmussen—I think we could. There is a man over here that I deal a lot with; his name is Ron Manners. Do you know him?

CHAIR—No, I do not.

Ms Rasmussen—He owned a few mines here in Kalgoorlie and he is quite well known. He was part of the Institute of Public Affairs, the IPA. He started another organisation called Mannkal, which is dedicated to furthering free-market ideas. That is not quite in our area, but Ron Manners is the kind of person who is very interested in donating to and furthering these types of ideas. I use that as an example to show that there are certainly people out there who are interested.

CHAIR—You would be aware of the Discovering Democracy program.

Ms Rasmussen—Yes, I am very aware of it.

CHAIR—What sort of features of We the People do you think could be incorporated into that?

Ms Rasmussen—I think the structure of Discovering Democracy is very good; however, as a program, it is very underutilised and not teacher friendly. As a result, it does not really get used. What we could do, as a result of mixing the two together, is look at putting in place something like the do in the We the People national competition program. Another element of that program—which I probably have not made very clear—is that, at the end of the program, students participate in a congressional hearing which is almost like a debate. It is organised at a state level and then at a federal level. Basically, the students compete within their district and, if they are successful, they move on to the federal level. I trialled something similar in my classroom, but I did it more in a traditional debate format. That is the sort of thing that you can incorporate into Discovering Democracy. We could use and utilise some of the theory content and then look at adding the debate/Senate committee hearing style competition. That will also attract kids who obviously have that competitive edge and it will give a lot of publicity to the competition itself. But it is very possible for us to do something with what already exists.

CHAIR—You have told us that you have basically tried to sell We the People to DEST. Tell us about your discussions with the department—warts and all. How receptive have they been?

Ms Rasmussen—I have had very limited contact. Ljiljanna Ravlich is the Minister for Education and Training here in WA. I have probably sent her about 15 emails with lots of encouragement about the program, but unfortunately I have not had any response.

CHAIR—Did I misunderstand that? You have spoken to the Western Australian Department of Education and Training, not the Commonwealth department?

Ms Rasmussen—Yes, that is right. I did have some discussions with someone—I forget his name—at a national civics and citizenship inquiry last year in Canberra.

CHAIR—Was it Declan O'Connell?

Ms Rasmussen—That is familiar, but it was not him. He was an older guy and he administered a citizenship and civics website. There was something in my research about the $4 million he had been allocated for his website and it had something to do with the Discovering Democracy week. Does that ring a bell?

CHAIR—Not really.

Ms Rasmussen—I can look into it. Anyway, I did discuss it with him and he basically said, 'Look, we don't have room in our funding budget to pick up anything else, but you are more than welcome to post your research on our website.'

CHAIR—Do you think Australia is disadvantaged by the fact that its constitution and system of government were not developed following a period of revolution, as occurred in the United States?

Ms Rasmussen—Yes, definitely. Much of the literature that I have been through in preparing this research really does focus on that period. In America, there are two books that they distribute to all students: the Anti-Federalist Papers and the Federalist Papers. You probably know about those.

CHAIR—Yes.

Ms Rasmussen—They were a result of the end of the revolution and the civil wars and so forth over there. Much of the debate about their constitution really focuses on that. I am not sure whether American students get some sort of pride out of the fact that their constitution was very hard fought or hard won, so to speak. But I think that certainly bears relevance.

Senator BRANDIS—I just wanted to say, arising out of your last answer, that I am sure that is right. The birth of Australian democracy was not characterised by those exciting events that are mythologised in American history, including the ride of Paul Revere and all those sorts of things that can convey strong messages to children and young people in very bold colours, as it were. But I wonder whether we might not be able, in a more modest way, to take some pride and inspiration in the very opposite proposition—that is, from the very fact that Australian democracy did not need a revolution to succeed and that, as I always tell kids when I go out to talk to schools, Australia is the only democracy in the world which was actually created by a referendum, a ballot in the 1890s. Don't you think that the very fact that Australian democracy

was itself created by a democratic act and created without civic discord is itself, as I say, in a slightly less dramatic way, an inspiring story?

Ms Rasmussen—Most definitely. Through my teachings, I do try and convey that to our students: 'Aren't we lucky that this is the way that our democracy came about?' So there is certainly room for us to focus on that.

Senator BRANDIS—That is one of the rather cynical but reassuring remarks that comedians make about Australia—that, even in times of relative civil turmoil, the idea of a revolution in Australia is unthinkable because nobody would bother to show up. That seems to me to suggest not a lazy democracy but a very contented one.

Ms Rasmussen—Absolutely—that there are no inherent problems in our system. The other thing I will quickly add is that, going back to the point that the senator made about stories, there are many colourful stories, as you would know, about the construction of our Constitution. My kids always love stories, and I always love to tell them, and I have spent many a night preparing things where I could sit for 15 minutes or half an hour and explain a really interesting story about how some component of the Constitution came about or about somebody who was involved in its construction. So there is certainly scope for us to look at doing that too.

Senator BRANDIS—I think that is right. I think we need to find these stories. We do not have a ride of Paul Revere type event in our democracy that illustrates the point through a story, but we have the *Lucinda* voyage during the 1891 convention, when the founding fathers took the Queensland government's steam yacht for a cruise up the Hawkesbury River one long weekend with a couple of bottles of scotch and came back with the Australian Constitution. That is a lovely story.

Ms Rasmussen—That is a great story. Kids, especially kids out here in Kalgoorlie, would love the scotch!

Mr DANBY—Could you tell me what you observe the differences are between the We the People program and Discovering Democracy?

Ms Rasmussen—They are major. I do not want to sound cynical about the Discovering Democracy program, but I will list a few things. The first thing that stands out most impressively is the text. As I described to Sonia, it really is not an over-the-top textbook. It is not full of colour or anything like that. It is quite cheaply produced but very well produced. When you as a teacher decide to undertake the We the People program, basically you call the Center for Civic Education, you register and they will send you out a class set of textbooks for every class that you teach. So, if you have two classes of year 9s, which is typically where we have been focusing our civic education here in Kalgoorlie, they will send you a textbook for every student. It might sound a little bit expensive and a little bit simple but, from a classroom point of view, there is nothing harder, as a teacher, than trying to pull together resources. When you live out in the country or when you are busy, when you have five TE classes and you have meetings every day after school—and when, if you are a working mum, you have kids to get home to—getting resources together and getting textbooks is really quite difficult.

Mr DANBY—Do they send those to you all the way from the States?

Ms Rasmussen—These ones I have I brought back from my summer school. But, if you were in America, yes, they would send them straight to your classroom, no questions asked, every time you wanted to deliver the program. In my experience of teaching, after so many years teachers get really lazy. Unless something is there in front of them that they can just pick up and have a read of and then go in and deliver, a lot of this really exciting stuff gets lost. So that is first thing: this textbook is really outstanding and there is one for each year level. As I said, I am in the process of getting you guys some copies so that you can have a look through them.

They also come with very comprehensive teacher guides. That is the second problem that we face: most teachers do not even know about the Australian Constitution. They do not know what it is. They would not even know where to begin teaching it. In my experience, I have actually sat and delivered kind of theory to teachers just to give them the confidence to feel that they can walk into a classroom and talk very confidently about the subject matter; otherwise they prefer to teach geography or history or whatever they have in terms of resources.

Mr DANBY—I can implicitly understand, from what you are saying, that no similar booklets or teachers' guides are prepared for the Discovering Democracy program.

Ms Rasmussen—No, there is nothing like that. They did distribute what they called a Discovering Democracy reader. The readers are very abstract kind of documents that you really cannot use in a classroom environment. Many times on teachers' networks, I have seen them advertised: 'Would anybody like 32 copies of the Discovering Democracy reader?'—or whatever it is called. So they really do not get utilised. That is the first major difference.

In terms of classroom dynamics and getting teachers to accept these programs, the uptake on We the People is much better. Teachers are a lot more willing to give it a go because they have the support, they have the knowledge and, at the end of the day, they also have access to these summer schools. As I said, the first half of the summer school is explicit teaching of democracy. That would certainly be the first thing.

Mr DANBY—So do you think that the Discovering Democracy program needs summer schools and more teacher-friendly and classroom-friendly guides and booklets?

Ms Rasmussen—Definitely. I could not have said it better myself. When you are at the coalface actually teaching there are demands. I know teachers always go on about how busy they are but a lot of it is reality. But this is there and readily available; it gets sent out to the classroom and you have lots of support. Then, of course, you have the added dimension of the competition—something that has a state-wide and then a federal kind of exposure—and a lot of kids really like that. Does that answer your question?

CHAIR—Thank you very much for your enthusiasm.

Ms Rasmussen—I am very keen to get this out there.

CHAIR—We have certainly read that in what you have said to us and we are very much interested in what you have had to say. Please come back to us with that information that you are going to get in relation to donors.

Ms Rasmussen—I will write that down, because I do not want to get off the phone and forget. The first thing I will get for you are the textbooks, which are on their way. Is there any preference for the year level? Do you want to see the Project Citizen, which is year 1 to year 7 and We the People? Would you like the whole lot?

CHAIR—No, just the upper school years. Thank you.

Ms Rasmussen—You would also like me to look into private funding and donor issues.

CHAIR—Yes.

Ms Rasmussen—The last thing I was going to do was to find out a little more about international programs.

CHAIR—Yes. Thank you for your enthusiasm. We really appreciate it. We will send you a copy of the *Hansard* transcript of this particular appearance.

Ms Rasmussen—That would be great. I hope that I have answered your questions and passed on my enthusiasm. After coming back from those three weeks, I was totally enthralled with this program. After trialling it and giving it a go with kids, I saw the results and they were good.

[12.06 pm]

PAUL, Mr Stephen, Private capacity

CHAIR—Welcome. Although the committee does not require you to give evidence on oath, I have to advise you that these hearings are legal proceedings of the parliament and therefore have the same standing as the proceedings of the respective houses. Normally, we would ask whether a witness wants to make an opening statement, but we have asked you to come along because you are a very experienced educator. You know what is happening in the system and you have an awareness of what this inquiry is about. We were hoping to get from you, as a practitioner, your thoughts on how well Australia is doing with its young people on electoral and civics education—where there is room for improvement and where we are doing well. We want to then use that to make recommendations to the parliament.

We have received a lot of evidence from across Australia and we are now coming to the end of our inquiry. We find that there is a lot of variability across Australia. Some schools are just outstanding. As an example of that, we were at an Islamic school in Sydney where children in the lower grades knew just as much about civics as I probably do. It was quite extraordinary, but it came down to the enthusiasm of the teachers, basically.

Mr Paul—It always does.

CHAIR—We have received evidence about variability in curriculums and so on. We have also received evidence about apathy and cynicism in young people and the reasons they do not engage in the process. We have just heard, for example, during that teleconference with Western Australia, from a committed teacher who participated in a program called 'We the People' in the United States, which tries to get people engaged. Perhaps you ought to lead off and tell us how you feel about civics and electoral education in schools and what your experience has been.

Mr Paul—I am at some distance from the classroom now, as you would appreciate. I have been in education for 35 years and a principal for 25 of those years. I think in my notes from when I was a history teacher I have Indira Gandhi running India and the Berlin Wall still up. So I cannot speak as a classroom practitioner but as someone, I suppose, who has been involved with young people in a variety of settings for 35 years.

There is absolutely no doubt that there would be considerable variability in relation to civics education. There is also absolutely no doubt that there is considerable buyer resistance amongst young people today in terms of civics education. I think it goes to the heart of generation Y and the nature of the young people who are coming through our schools who were born, say, about the 1990s. In generation Y, which is what is generally regarded as 1965 to 1979, I detect a greater commitment to civics. Certainly for the younger ones who are currently going through schools or who have recently left schools the notion of civic duty is not something that is natural to them. They have very little loyalty to literally anything. Plenty of studies of generation X would indicate this: they do not even have loyalty to particular brands in the commercial setting.

I find it a curious contradiction. I find them to be quite patriotic, and I find the manifestations of that at times to be a worry—and one only need witness the Cronulla events. My son was one of 16,000 young Australians at Gallipoli about four years ago—there he lurched into Mr Downer and introduced himself, I am told—so there is an incredible amount of patriotism. I have seen this developing through VP50—which we here would know about—through the Sydney Olympics, through the 100th anniversary of nationhood. I believe there is a degree of patriotism and a great degree of Australian pride, but they do not see that as necessarily a requirement to be knowledgeable about government, knowledgeable about civics and to undertake civic duty by voting responsibly and regularly.

Senator BRANDIS—Just to clarify, are you talking about generation Y and not generation X?

Mr Paul—I think there is a difference. Generation X are far closer to the baby boomers that I represent, but generation Y are quite different.

Senator BRANDIS—But the remarks you have just been making in the last few moments—those remarks were about generation Y, were they?

Mr Paul—Yes.

Senator BRANDIS—And that would be those post '79?

Mr Paul—Yes, that would be those post '79, people currently in their 20s and still coming through. There is a new generation coming through again that are so terrifying that I cannot speak about them in this setting.

CHAIR—Am I right when I say that, for the independent schools, there is a different union from the Queensland Teachers Union?

Mr Paul—There is.

CHAIR—How committed are the teachers unions to civics and electoral education? Do they have a philosophy that perhaps you might disagree with? I guess this will all link into whatever the curriculum might be. You have seen probably public comment about some teachers wanting to teach a view that is theirs, not what the other view should be. This probably also has as a side-issue the professionalism of teachers. What is your view on all of this?

Mr Paul—If you are talking about the so-called history wars, as I think the *Australian* has called them, there is certainly at the moment a greater assessment of what is actually going on in schools in any curriculum. I think it is long overdue. There is absolutely no doubt about that. The Australian education system is somewhat akin to the railway gauge system earlier this century. The differences between the states, with 80,000—I think—young Australians moving from one state to another in the course of the year, are still quite unbelievable to me.

I was deputy principal of a school on the Gold Coast in the state system. We had enormous trouble convincing some students coming from New South Wales in their first year of high school that they had to go back to primary school in Queensland. That is the most memorable example I can think of. It is absolutely crazy. I think the efforts of the current government, the

current minister with whom I met, to do something about this are long overdue, particularly as to the articulation area of the curriculum at the end where there are significant differences between states and I believe Queensland students are disadvantaged. But, in terms of curriculum content, civics and civic-mindedness, I have not seen any evidence that the teachers union of Queensland, at any rate, believes that this is a priority; nor have I seen any evidence of them resourcing or supporting any attempt to introduce that into the curriculum.

Senator BRANDIS—Do you detect resistance to the reinstatement of more orthodox methods of history teaching among the teachers unions?

Mr Paul—Yes.

Senator BRANDIS—Do you share my view that much of that resistance to orthodox methods of history teaching is driven either consciously or perhaps subconsciously by ideological agendas within teachers unions?

Mr Paul—I think that is possible.

Senator BRANDIS—Do you agree with what the Prime Minister had to say earlier this year about the importance of reinstating narrative as the core method of teaching Australian history?

Mr Paul—My position is this: I think that, if one looks at the popular consumption of history, it is very high—the novels of Bryce Courtenay, the TV shows, the recent film *Kokoda*. There has been an upsurge of interest in going to Kokoda; it is replacing Gallipoli as the rite of passage. I have no doubt that the popular consumption of history has always remained high; it is the presentation of it to students I am talking about.

Senator BRANDIS—Can I invite you in your own words to offer your critique of that presentation?

Mr Paul—My concern with what the Prime Minister and the minister are saying is that there certainly needs to be a redressing of some of the ideological idiosyncrasies. There is absolutely no doubt about that. But, at the same time, the generations coming through our schools now, who are digital natives, who are used to the pervasive, ubiquitous deployment of hand-held gadgets, are not going to sit in a classroom in a sterile setting and listen to someone drone on for 40 minutes. They are going to bob like corks in a sea of ignorance. It is the presentation of it. The stories of Australia—and you referred to the *Lucinda* earlier, which is one—are absolutely fascinating. Young Australians have a very clear sense of their identity. Unfortunately, we see it only generally galvanised and demonstrated in sporting settings—and it is great to see it at that time, but unfortunately it is limited to that. Young Australians today and young people in schools are very proud Australians, but they then do not make the extrapolation to say, 'I need to be conversant with what is happening in the political context.'

Senator BRANDIS—That is fascinating. Why is that?

Mr Paul—They are cynical.

Senator BRANDIS—Is it because politicians have a bad name?

Mr Paul—Yes.

Senator BRANDIS—Is it because what happens in parliament is reduced to the five-second grab of question time on the TV news?

Mr Paul—Yes to all of the above. It is the portrayal of politics in the media and, of course, the Australian government to many young people is confusing. We are arguably the most overgoverned country in the world. I will rejoice in telling a story I once heard. At an international school in Singapore, where the children of the various legations went, they had to write an essay on the elephant. The French ambassador's son wrote an essay on the mating habits of the elephant. The American ambassador's son wrote an essay on how to breed bigger and faster elephants. The British ambassador's son wrote an essay on the influence of the elephant on the development of the British Empire. The German ambassador's son wrote an essay on the role of the elephant in invading neighbouring countries. The Australian ambassador's son wrote, 'The elephant: is it a federal or state responsibility?' It is confusing.

Senator BRANDIS—I have to tell you, though—I have not, as the chairman knows, been to all of these hearings—that the hearings I have attended have not given me that message. I have been impressed by the level of sophistication of education about our parliamentary system, about the way democracy works. But what distresses me—I was asking one of the earlier witnesses this—is that there seems to be a disconnect between Australian democracy and the political processes, as if they operate in parallel universes. My impression is that Australian students—let's take lower secondary—have quite a good awareness of the way the democratic system works in this country and a respect for it, but they then do not connect that with the political parties, the politicians or the political process. Can I invite you to comment on that.

Mr Paul—I would agree. I think it is the point I am making. I would entirely concur.

Senator BRANDIS—It is as if people say, 'Democracy, good; parliament, good; politicians, bad; politics, bad.' You have mentioned the media, and perhaps the conduct of politicians is not without room for improvement either, but there has to be more to it than that as to why there is that disconnect.

Mr Paul—I think the trivialisation in the media you referred to is a major factor. But I think you have to remember that there are a million Australians living overseas at any point in time—1/20th of our population—and they are very peripatetic. I now have teachers who resign in the middle of the year because they are not happy about something. In my day, it was unheard of. But you go to the next gig and you abandon a class—this is in an independent school with a good reputation. I think it is that they do not see themselves as having a duty or a responsibility to be aware of the political process, to be aware of what civic-mindedness means. They have an opinion on political issues and they can argue them in a quite sophisticated way. But then, if you get to understand how they can translate that position or opinion they have through the political process into a policy decision that actually affects the societal outcome, they are very hazy on that.

Senator BRANDIS—We have to write a report, and I wonder whether one thing we should not be recommending is that, in civics education, there be greater concentration than there seems at the moment to be on educating students about the political parties, because they are the bridge

between the public and the parliament. As I said to one of the earlier witnesses, there are only three of the 226 members of the Commonwealth parliament who are not there because they are members of political parties. This just seems to be a big hole in our education system. We describe the formal structures—the parliament, the chambers of the parliament, the role of the cabinet and all that constitutional stuff—but then we seem not sufficiently to describe the way in which it actually works, in particular through the political parties. Can I ask you to comment on that?

Mr Paul—Some information about the legislative, judicial and executive arms and how they operate should be known by everybody—

Senator BRANDIS—Indeed.

Mr Paul—but then we did have a Queensland premier some years ago who allegedly did not understand the separation of the powers.

Senator BRANDIS—He would not be the only one.

Mr Paul—No. So that certainly must be taught. But I would not want us to get to a stage, as in America, where, almost in a catatonic state, they can recite the presidents in strict chronological order.

Senator BRANDIS—No, I am not—

Mr Paul—I know that you are not saying that, but we need to be careful that that is not the outcome in the teaching. It needs to be dynamic. It needs to be very media based. It needs to involve contemporary heroes that they would look up to. It needs to be digitalised. If it were presented in that form and presented as something that they need to do to be fully rounded citizens—not social celibates, but to actually contribute and have a say in a society, because they will all have a say and they all believe they should—I believe that would be a far better way to go than what we have been doing traditionally.

Senator BRANDIS—That is true, but I want to make two related though different points. One is that we should be spending more time than we do talking not merely about the formal structures but also about the political parties themselves—

Mr Paul—Yes.

Senator BRANDIS—so that kids have an awareness of what political parties are and what they do. The second point I want to put to you is that we should be telling stories that are woven around great historical figures, as the Americans do.

Mr Paul—Yes, they do.

Senator BRANDIS—The story of Sir Henry Parkes; the story of John Curtin lying awake at the Lodge, having sleepless nights in his last illness worrying about the Australian troops on the ocean; the story of Gough Whitlam; the story of the current Prime Minister—they can be prosaic at one level, but they can be inspiring if they are told as stories, don't you think?

Mr Paul—Billy Hughes turning off his hearing aid in parliament. But you are right: they are, and they can be presented in that way. You are quite right. The point obviously needs to be made that, if they want to have and make a difference, they have to do it through the vehicle of a political party. There is virtually no other way—

Senator BRANDIS—I do not think that is taught much.

Mr Paul—I would agree. I do not think there is a cognisance of that. I do not disagree.

Mr DANBY—I was concerned with your pessimism about generation Y.

Mr Paul—If I can interrupt: I am not pessimistic; I am just saying that they are different. I have great confidence in them actually—I think they are great—but the old precepts and the old paradigm do not apply to them.

Mr DANBY—Hasn't that been said about every generation?

Mr Paul—Yes.

Mr DANBY—Won't they just become more like us as they get older?

Mr Paul—So we are told. That is why our development officers at independent schools stroke them in the legacy years! Yes, Socrates had similar things to say several thousand years ago, sitting under the olive tree. But the reality is that the context has changed dramatically.

Mr DANBY—I know what you mean, though, because attention spans and that kind of stuff are becoming smaller and smaller and there is instant gratification with media and wanting to do things. I have observed it as well. Perhaps one of the problems we have is communicating issues of civic education, issues of politics via the traditional media. Fewer and fewer young people I know read the main quality newspaper in the city that I come from. In fact, a lot of young people call it 'the Aged' because it does not appeal to them.

Mr Paul—It is interesting though—

Senator BRANDIS—They would all read the *Age* in Melbourne Ports, Michael—that would be the main demographic, wouldn't it?

Mr DANBY—You would be surprised. It is an over-40 thing.

CHAIR—What were you going to say?

Mr Paul—I wanted to say that we are what is called a notebook school, and we have been for 14 years. So every student from year 4 to year 12 at our school has a notebook computer, and that is about 2,200 students. But we are finding great resistance to the absence of the tactility of paper. It is really interesting. Even in our office, we were trying to create a paperless office, people need somehow to feel the paper. While they can take information from multiple inputs at any one point in time and while they can operate on several levels—and you are right in terms of what we would call attention span; although they can sit in front of a computer game for a pretty

prolonged period of time, if it suits them—that is different. So the messages are different. We need only look outside our schools to see that. I wrote an essay once that was published nationally. The subtext was that when a student goes from his or her bedroom to their classroom they go backwards technologically. That is very true for the vast majority of students.

Mr DANBY—But there is also a sense that a lot of younger people prefer to live in the cyber world rather than in the reality of discussing politics, having a classroom discussion or speaking to Senator Brandis about how they ought to change the Young Liberal's policy on X. It is much easier to sit in this computer games world and sort of prolong your adolescence, in a sense.

Mr Paul—That is a danger.

Mr DANBY—When you have students doing research projects, do you find that they all do them off the net? Do they get their information from reference books or newspapers, or do they use the net more and more?

Mr Paul—All of those are available online. All encyclopedias are now online and all newspapers are now online. So most information would come from online. The difficulty is training them—and they have to be trained—to separate the wheat from the chaff, so to speak.

Mr DANBY—That brings me to my next point—that is, blogs. What is your experience with blogs and younger people?

Mr Paul—I think that, again, within certain parameters they have educational benefit. They can be escapist, as you say, and a complete waste of time. But that is their world and we ignore it at their peril. Going back to the point the senator made before, there are deep syntactical structures of knowledge which are imperishable; and that will never go away. But at the same time the presentation of that and the contemporisation of that is extremely important—and the two are not irreconcilable.

CHAIR—Does it worry you that a lot of the information presented on blogs, for example, may be incorrect?

Mr Paul—Yes. A lot of it is rubbish; you are quite correct.

Senator BRANDIS—It is not just blogs. That is your point, Mr Danby. Teaching children how to discriminate between quality and rubbish on the internet is a great problem, I think.

Mr Paul—Yes.

Senator BRANDIS—In the pre-internet age, to get something published required at least a level of respectability.

Mr Paul—Yes.

Mr DANBY—You are onto a very important point.

Senator BRANDIS—Whereas something published on the internet can be the scribbled drivel of a lunatic, and yet it has the respectability of form.

Mr DANBY—And even on a very prestigious site. For instance, you could look up 'Senator Brandis' on Wikipedia and find the most defamatory absolute rubbish—because the man in Florida who founded that site has decided that he needs to invent a new encyclopedia that is peer reviewed before you can write an entry on it. It used to be that everyone just entered information. It really worries me that younger people are not being trained to discriminate in the information they get on the net. This area of being discriminating in the use of information is one that I think schools have a very important role in.

Mr Paul—Absolutely. It is a major headache for schools such as ours.

Mr DANBY—Can you give me an example of why is it a major headache? What kinds of things does it result in?

Mr Paul—It is just unproductive, for a start. I think Michael Thornburg said, 'Everything worth knowing is not necessarily on the internet and everything on the internet is not necessarily worth knowing.' So it is basically teaching them that and to be discriminating with information—to apply what it is that they are researching and using to the particular hypothesis they are dealing with so that it has academic credibility. The thing is, for example, that you have to provide a very filtered internet access as well and so most schools have pretty strong filters on their websites. We deal with cyber bullying. It is quite conceivable for a student in Australia—and I know I am getting off the track—to host a website in America that can, third hand, bully a student in a school.

Mr DANBY—Really?

Mr Paul—It is the technology three-step—that is what I call it—it is two steps forward and one step back.

Senator BRANDIS—There is another thing here too I think—and we are a bit off the track, but it is an interesting discussion—and that is to encourage the orthodox habit of reading books. I have a grade 7 child and a grade 9 child and we have these dramas in our household. The extent to which students are internet dependent seems to me partly a function of the extent to which they are not habituated to reading in the orthodox fashion. I would hope that one of the most important things that good schools still try to do is to encourage their students to get into the habit of reading books.

I remember when I was a schoolboy in the city of Villanova being told by a very wise teacher, 'The thing to do with kids between about the ages of 10 and 12 is to get them into the habit of reading books.' It does not matter if they read complete rubbish. Once they are in the habit of reading books, you can then teach them taste. I hope that is not being lost sight of in an increasingly internet-dependent world.

Mr Paul—I do not think it is—just witness the phenomenon of Harry Potter. I think reading is still there but less so than was the case when you and I were at school. There is no doubt that it is diminishing as a form of accessing information. Certainly in our library we have beanbags and

chairs and Harry Potter and we quite often see students sitting there, reading for pleasure; and we strongly encourage that. That is extremely important.

Mr DANBY—I would like to come back to the issue of email. How extensive is email amongst young people? Would everyone have their own email address?

Mr Paul—I could not give you a percentage, but I would think that most would, yes.

Mr DANBY—If we were to ask the Electoral Commission, when they are enrolling people, to get people's email addresses and ask people to change their electoral enrolment by email—to advise us of their change of email address when they are changing their electoral enrolment—would that be a more valuable way of staying in constant contact with young people.

Mr Paul—Absolutely, and you could have a series of pop-ups on their email to remind them—because they are going to need to be reminded two or three times. If you put something in the mail, they do not even open the envelope and the object of the exercise is wasted. From the beginning of next year, virtually all of our communication with parents will be digital. We will not have any newsletters and all absentees will be texted; and it will be the same with permission forms. That is increasingly the way it is.

Mr DANBY—So you actually text them; do you mean SMS?

Mr Paul—Yes.

CHAIR—Coming back to the issue of civics and the proposed national curriculum, the QTU witness this morning basically said that curriculums around Australia are very similar; but she felt that there should still be individual state curriculums because of local issues. We could not get it out of her what a local issue might be. What is your view on a national curriculum?

Mr Paul—I think it is going to be an enormously difficult exercise. I am not suggesting that the curriculum be uniform. I do not want a return to—

Senator BRANDIS—Nor is the minister, by the way.

Mr Paul—No, as long as we are not at that end of the continuum. I do not want a situation where the director-general of education could walk out to the Treasury building, as he could 30 years ago, look at his watch and at 10 o'clock know that every student in grade 5 in Queensland was at that time studying 'Horatio defends the bridge' out of the Queensland reader. We are not talking about that, but certainly there is an enormous amount of overlap and duplication. The inefficiency of it is mind boggling.

I am not a particularly strong supporter of the Queensland system of articulation. Less than 40 per cent of students are now using an OP to get into first-year university in Queensland. A recent DEST study conducted by your own department indicated that 38 per cent are either going to change their course or have changed their course by the end of the first year. We really have to look at a whole range of things. There is enormous duplication and enormous overlap in it all. Unions, of course, at the moment—and I am quite happy for this to be recorded in *Hansard*—are concerned about one thing and one thing only: that is, the implication of Work Choices that they

will be out of a job. I am currently going through an EBA negotiation. They are not interested one bit in the log of claims from the staff; they are concerned about the jurisdiction.

Senator BRANDIS—You should be fairer to them; they are also interested in other left-wing causes.

Mr Paul—I am stopping there. I have not seen any evidence in my 35 years that the unions have had any interest of an educational context in anything other than the working conditions of the staff.

Senator BRANDIS—I thought it was extremely revealing this morning. Were you here?

Mr Paul—No.

Senator BRANDIS—A lady from the Queensland Teachers Union gave evidence. There were lots of references to teachers, but I think I am right in saying that there was not one reference to students.

Mr Paul—It is a bit like taking the omelette apart when looking for some synthesis and some correlative similarities between the states. It has gone down a long way in terms of its current centrifugal nature, but there is clearly a need for that to happen. The history conference was one attempt. There is wastage, when in fact we could be using the same resources in the same states. I do not have to tell you gentlemen: if you talk to someone from Perth and then to someone from Brisbane, there is not very much difference; whereas you can go to certain parts of the United States and there are significant cultural differences. There is no reason why a curriculum that operates in Western Australia could not operate equally effectively in Queensland.

Senator BRANDIS—Other than local area or state history, there is no reason why the story of Federation, the story of Anzac or the story of the Second World War could not be taught identically across the country

Mr Paul—Certainly.

CHAIR—We are getting evidence that teachers do not feel confident teaching electoral or civics education. Would that be your experience?

Mr Paul—No. I cannot think of any reason why they might say that.

Senator BRANDIS—It all depends on the calibre of the school, I am sure. Some schools are very good and some schools are not.

Mr Paul—I cannot think of any reason why a teacher would not be confident about teaching it, particularly a trained social science teacher.

CHAIR—So you are saying that the professional development is there if it is needed by teachers who do not feel confident?

Mr Paul—Yes.

CHAIR—What is your view on a whole-of-school approach to civics education rather than just an element of a course?

Mr Paul—I think all education is most effective in continuing through the school, but it would need to be very broad concepts and very broad principles with the younger children. We have children in our schools now who are our political peers. I have quite a number of students who are 19 and 20, so they are exactly my political peers. We should be able to have quite significant discussions with senior students in schools and with guest speakers on topics of political interest—local, state and federal.

Senator BRANDIS—Doesn't that happen?

Mr Paul—Not often. We have a visit every year by David Jull, who is our local member, by Craig Emerson more recently and by Senator Ludwig, who is a parent of two children at our school. They come in every year. Also, our students in year 7 visit Canberra. We have a pretty high retention rate, so nearly all of the year 7 students would go on. That is when we mainly do it. It is particularly apposite in the context of a trip to Canberra and a visit to the House of Representatives and the Senate. The students are met there and, as part of the preparation, Senator Ludwig and our local MHR, currently Dr Emerson, come in and speak to the students. That is where we think it is most effective.

Mr DANBY—It is a very good program.

Senator BRANDIS—You will be interested to know that it is a program that seems to have more coverage in Queensland than in any of the other states.

CHAIR—Are you aware, as a principal, of the resources available from the AEC, where an AEC person may come to your school and provide information to students?

Mr Paul—Not intimately, no. I would leave that more to my heads of department.

CHAIR—Do you think the school has taken advantage of that?

Mr Paul—I am not aware, to be honest. Most of our efforts are focused on that year-7 trip with the preparatory work, the work they do down there and then the reports that they write. In a way, the study of civics is enmeshed within that experience. It is a bit of a rite of passage for year 7s at our school and we think that is when it is done most effectively. Other resources, to be perfectly honest, could be there. I am at some distance from that, I regret to say.

CHAIR—We have gone way over time because you have given us such interesting evidence. Is there anything that you think we should know that we have not covered?

Mr Paul—No, I do not think so.

Senator BRANDIS—Just to make it clear on the record—I do not want to verbal you, however—were you agreeing with me that there is a greater role for teaching about the political parties than currently happens as part of civics education?

Mr Paul—I think as part of civics education the point could certainly be made that the political party is the most appropriate and effective vehicle if you want to have a say in the political arena.

Senator BRANDIS—That is my point. I will be urging the chairman to put something about that in our report.

Mr Paul—Irrespective of what that party might be.

Senator BRANDIS—That goes without saying. I just wanted a clear statement on that from an educator that we might be able to point to.

CHAIR—Thank you for your attendance today. Your evidence has been most valuable. We appreciate your giving us your time. We will send you a copy of the *Hansard* transcript, which you can check to see whether it reflects what you said.

Mr Paul—Hopefully the EBA will be over by then!

Resolved (on motion by **Senator Brandis**):

That this committee authorises publication, including publication on the parliamentary database, of the transcript of the evidence given before it at public hearing this day.

Committee adjourned at 12.41 pm