



Education
Services
Australia

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Ms Rebecca Gordon
Inquiry Secretary
Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Ms Gordon

Inquiry into the delivery of electoral education

Thank you for the opportunity to provide a submission to the Commonwealth Parliament's Joint Standing Committee Inquiry into the delivery of electoral education.

Education Services Australia (ESA) is a national not-for-profit ministerial company owned by the state, territory and Australian Government education ministers. The company has been established to support and advance nationally agreed education initiatives, programs and projects. It develops, shares and deploys nationally-owned infrastructure on behalf of ministers and provides technology-based services to the early years, school, higher education and vocational and training sectors.

Education Services Australia has long standing involvement in the development and delivery of civics and citizenship education resources for the Australian Government including development of electoral education resources for the Australian Electoral Commission. The company's expertise in curriculum resource development and its understanding of current trends in digital resource usage in schools positions it well to comment on the delivery of electoral education in Australian schools, particularly as it relates to the compulsory years of schooling.

Electoral education to students and teachers is delivered in three ways: in person, through school incursions or by school visits to electoral education centres; in print, through the provision of teaching and learning resources and promotional materials; and online, via web-based digital channels. This response will focus on the latter methodologies.

Electoral education in the Australian curriculum

In Australia, electoral education while not a subject in its own right is taught across the curriculum but most significantly as part of Civics and Citizenship and History subjects.

The focus on developing students as active and informed citizens aware of their civic rights and responsibilities has been a recurrent element of national curriculum conversations since 1994 when the Civics Expert Group (CEG) delivered the *Whereas the People* report (Civics Expert Group, AGPS, 1994).

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This report revealed poor levels of knowledge and understanding about Civics and Citizenship education in schools and the general population and highlighted not only the need to teach it to students but also to develop teachers' professional knowledge of the domain.

In 1999, Ministers of education released the *Adelaide declaration on national goals for schooling in the 21st century* (Adelaide Declaration) which identified 'active and informed citizens with an understanding and appreciation of Australia's system of government and civic life' as one of its national goals. This emphasis has remained in the subsequent 2009 *Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians* (Melbourne Declaration).

In 2006, ESA (then Curriculum Corporation) published the *Statements of Learning for Civics and Citizenship* on behalf of the Ministers of Education as a response to the lack of consistency that existed in curriculums across the nation. This document mapped out agreed and nationally consistent statements that identified the essential opportunities to learn the knowledge, skills, understandings and capacities by Years 3, 5, 7 and 9. Key aspects of electoral education were articulated including the role and purpose of elections, the historical underpinnings and founding principles of Australian democracy and the civic rights and responsibilities of citizens.

From 2009, the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority commenced development of the Australian Curriculum. Electoral education is once more expressed through opportunities across the subjects, substantially in History (F-10) in Years 6, 9 and 10 through studies of the development of Australian democracy, suffrage, civil rights and freedoms. Students learn of the foundations of Australian democracy, and examine its practise. All states and territories are implementing this curriculum.

The Australian Curriculum: Civics and Citizenship is published but is not yet endorsed by the Education Council. This document articulates opportunities for students from Year 3 to 10 to learn about the processes and functions of elections and voting and to engage with these processes through classroom elections and School Representative Councils. Some jurisdictions have already begun to implement this curriculum.

As schools prepare for implementation of new curriculum it is important that contemporary, digital resources are easily and freely available to support teachers and students,

Resources for Australian Schools

Lack of engagement with Civics and Citizenship education in schools has been attributed to lack of availability of relevant, engaging and practical resources for classrooms. (Civics Expert Group, 1994 pp 63-64). This finding drove the development of the *Discovering Democracy* school resources programme (1995-2012).

In response to the Civics Expert Group's report, the Australian Government contracted ESA (then Curriculum Corporation) to publish *Discovering Democracy* programme resources from 1996 (which later became the Civics and Citizenship Education programme). The project delivered a range of inquiry-based print, multimedia and web-based resources for teachers and student that explicitly addressed key concepts including educating about Australian electoral and voting systems. Although originally produced in hard copy, many of the resources developed from this program are available online and remain popular with teachers. In addition to the development of the resources, a program of professional development was delivered at the local level by state and territory departments of education to engage and develop teacher knowledge.

An evaluation of the *Discovering Democracy* curriculum resources conducted by Erebus Consulting Partners in 2003 indicated that teachers regarded the materials highly valuable both for educating students and in supporting the professional practice of teachers.

Electoral Commission education resources

A wide variety of school education resources have also been developed by various Electoral Commissions in Australia. These resources include fact sheets, units of work, role plays and student activities.

Collectively, the resources provide support for teachers and students to understand the history and operations of Australian elections and voting procedures. Some programs are built to supplement face to face programs and to support schools to implement electoral education programs in the classroom, such as those delivered at the National Electoral Education Centre in Canberra and the Western Australian Electoral Education Centre

Typical of these programs is *Democracy Rules: an electoral education resource* by Curriculum Corporation (now ESA) for the Australian Electoral Commission (AEC) in 2012 that provides inquiry-based teaching and learning activities for classroom use. Targeting teacher learning and student engagement, this resource was designed for the middle years of schooling from upper primary to lower secondary. Originally delivered to all schools in hard copy, the resource remains a well-used online resource on the AEC education website.

A recent resource, *Making a Nation* (AEC, 2014) presents information in an inquiry structure to students in an online interactive format. Similarly, *Passport to Democracy* (Victorian Electoral Commission) deploys an action learning framework and focuses developing critical thinking skills through engagement with contemporary issues.

The Western Australian Electoral Commission provide an online Teacher's Pack of resources that support schools to conduct their own student election, this web delivered resources provides a range of nomination forms, ballot papers and a tally sheet that schools can customise.

In contrast, the Tasmanian Electoral Commission has developed an education gateway that draws together various external links with locally developed resources and professional learning networks for teachers.

There is a large amount of content available nationally which is distributed through numerous jurisdictional websites. Much of the content shares common alignments to the Australian Curriculum and while there are some local variations, much of the content would be valuable for a national audience. The issue for classroom teachers is locating these materials and in pairing their curriculum needs with educationally sound, relevant and reliable content quickly and easily.

The role of Scootle in delivering electoral education resources to schools

Scootle is the national portal for more than 50,000 digital curriculum resources and online professional learning opportunities for all Australian schools and higher education institutions. Education Services Australia manages the portal that enables more than 350,000 registered users from all Australian education systems to engage, discover, assess, track and share learning experiences and resources. (see www.scootle.edu.au)

Scootle also provides access to *Scootle Community*, an online professional learning network for all Australian teachers. This networking platform is deployed in all jurisdictions and is an information hub where teachers from any jurisdiction can share, collaborate interact and learn. *Scootle Community* also includes an online course facility that enables users to participate in structured and moderated professional learning. (see www.esa.edu.au/projects/scootle-community)

Education Services Australia supports schools to discover and deploy quality education resources as they need them regardless of their location or sector. It supports developers and works with other content developers to deliver high quality resources for teachers when they need them. Resources in *Scootle* are aligned to the Australian Curriculum and tagged with descriptors that have been developed specifically for Australian schools. This service allows teachers to search and find content sourced from a range of providers with the assurance that the resources are educationally appropriate, reliable and free for schools to use.

Scootle currently contains over 800 items related to aspects of electoral education. These resources include digitised resources from *Discovering Democracy*, resources from the Australian Electoral Commission, historical images and film from museums, video extracts from ABC Splash and units of work shared by jurisdictions. Not all curriculum materials developed by various electoral commissions are discoverable through *Scootle* and for time poor classroom teachers the search for reliable classroom content can be an issue.

What *Scootle* usage reveals about what teachers are using in classrooms

Patterns of *Scootle* search and resource usage provides insights into classroom practice through analytics of teacher resource usage.

Analysis reveals that topics that are most popular are those that are explicitly referenced in the Australian Curriculum subjects. Teachers are looking for and using resources that support what the curriculum demands they teach.

In relation to electoral education, this translates to relevant content in the History curriculum. Topics referenced in the primary and secondary History curriculums include Federation, Women's Suffrage, Referenda and Democracy. Usage indicates that teachers search for and access these materials throughout the school year.

The national collection of digital resources in *Scootle* contains a significant number of resources on historical aspects of Australian democracy including the development of electoral practices. Centenaries of events such as Federation and various statehood celebrations have yielded a number of purpose developed resources that are popular with teachers.

Electoral education topics in terms of Active Citizenship and Voting Systems are not ranking highly in search and resource usage trends at present. This may change when the Civics and Citizenship curriculum is endorsed and implemented by States and Territories. Usage trends following the implementation of the Australian Curriculum: History and Geography subjects suggests that there is likely to be an upsurge in interest in Civics and Citizenship related topics as teachers seek support and resource to use in the classroom. Trends also suggest that there will be strong interest in resources designed to support teacher knowledge in this new content area and a consequent increased demand for professional learning.

We also note that while there is an expected spike in interest for resources on voting, elections and parliamentary parties in the lead up to elections, typically the variation was less than 20 per cent compared to usage over a similar non-election period. This suggests that teachers are more likely driven by the demands of their curriculum program when seeking resources and demonstrate a preference for resources that are practical to implement and clearly aligned to the requirements of the Australian Curriculum.

Scootle usage also provides an insight into the resource design preferences of teachers.

Print as the traditional form of delivery of resources is a costly and is largely unsustainable. Lessons learned from major programs such as *Discovering Democracy* reveal that printed resources have a short life in schools and are often lost, culled or at worst languish in library collections and classroom cupboards. The Erebus report indicated that where resources were provided as companions to professional learning they had a better uptake.

Often, the digitised version of the resource has a much longer life if teachers can locate them, and the format is designed as to not present a burden on download speeds and school printers. Providing resources such as *Democracy Rules: an electoral education resource* as separate small chapters or chunks in Portable Document Formats (PDF) permits users to select and download only those elements they need to use when they need them. This format, though relatively simple to use can provide issues in terms of accessibility for users of assistive reading devices and consideration should be given to this audience in the preparation and delivery of content.

Interactive resources designed for direct use with students are most popular in *Scootle*. For example, the interactive resource for primary students entitled *Take a Vote: democracy* and its companion resource *Take a Vote: make it fair* are amongst some of the most popular resources in *Scootle*. This resource translates the key principles of voting in a democracy into a school context that is age appropriate and engaging.

Scootle also reveals a preference by teachers for video presentations as an effective device for teacher professional learning.

More users than ever are using mobile technology to search for and deploy resources. One in every eight users of *Scootle* are using mobile devices, highlighting the importance of developing and making accessible resources that are usable on a range of platforms. Resources that enable users to create, share and collaborate on tasks via digital media devices are highly valued by students and teachers. Interest in mobile applications 'Apps' is also growing rapidly.

Supporting online learning for teachers and students

Whereas the People and the Erebus reports highlighted the need to consider teacher professional learning pointing out that part of the reluctance of teachers to engage with teaching civics and citizenship related topics is lack of confidence in the topic.

Recent focus on the first five subjects of the Australian Curriculum has done little to focus attention on developing teacher capacities in Civics and Citizenship education. While professional activities are being delivered to greater and lesser degrees from electoral education centres, nationally opportunities for professional learning in this area are not widespread.

In addition, results from the sample National Assessment Program for Civics and Citizenship indicate that students in rural and remote schools perform less well than their metropolitan counterparts. While face to face learning delivered by the electoral education centres is ideal, the capacity of these centres to support all schools is overwhelming. High quality resources must be available, that are suitable for various audiences and easily located.

Usage patterns in *Scootle Community* highlight that teachers particularly access professional networks during school breaks and in the evenings. Consideration should be given to developing opportunities aligned to the *Australian Professional Standards for Teachers* that support and extend teacher practice in electoral education in an on-demand environment. A digital platform such as *Scootle Community* supports these opportunities easily and cost-effectively.

In Summary

There has been significant investment in the development of electoral education resources by national and local authorities in Australia. Much of this content is online and aligned to the Australian Curriculum. Assisting teachers to find suitable resources when they are needed is simpler if the resources are discoverable through the national online resource distribution platform, *Scootle*. Consideration should be given to developing resources for students in formats that are accessible on a range of mobile and desktop devices including mobile apps.

Education Services Australia recommends consideration be given to an audit of currently available resources with a view to identifying content overlap and gaps in resourcing. The outcomes of the audit would inform the development of a national digital resource roadmap for further development, reducing replication and coordinating investment in areas of greatest need.

Further consideration should also be given to supporting professional learning for teachers and in building cross-sector networks to support information sharing and professional dialogue. *Scootle Community*, is a free socially based professional network for teachers that is accessible to all teachers in Australia.

Using this national service that is supported by all States and Territories and the Australian Government would permit electoral education officers to extend their reach to teachers across Australia. In addition, *Scootle Community* provides a platform through which online courses for teachers could be readily delivered.

Education Services Australia wishes to thank the Joint Standing Committee for the opportunity to contribute to this inquiry.

Yours sincerely,

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