

Australian Government Department of Education and Training Submission to Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters' Inquiry into the Delivery of Electoral Education

The Australian Government Department of Education and Training welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to the Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters' Inquiry into the Delivery of Electoral Education.

Under its Students First policy, the Australian Government is working with states, territories and school communities on the priority areas of teacher quality, school autonomy, parental engagement and strengthening the curriculum. The Government is committed to ensuring that all school students can become active and informed citizens and supports this through a robust curriculum, national assessment and specific initiatives designed to support civics and citizenship education, particularly the Parliament and Civics Education Rebate (PACER) programme.

This submission focuses on electoral education as part of civics and citizenship education in schools. In that context, it discusses the development of the *Australian Curriculum: Civics and Citizenship*, the National Assessment Program – Civics and Citizenship, teacher quality, the PACER programme and related initiatives.

Australian Curriculum

In January 2014, the Government commissioned Professor Ken Wiltshire AO and Dr Kevin Donnelly to evaluate the robustness, independence and balance of the Australian Curriculum. The review explored whether the Australian Curriculum was delivering what students needed, parents expected and the nation required.

On 12 October 2014, the Government released the *Review of the Australian Curriculum Final Report* (which can be viewed at www.studentsfirst.gov.au/review-australian-curriculum) and an initial response to the recommendations in the report. Among other things, the response focused on overcrowded curriculum issues and a rebalancing of some of the learning area content.

The Review was discussed at Education Council with federal, state and territory education ministers. All ministers agreed to refer the report's recommendations outlined in the Australian Government's initial response, to the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA), which is now addressing the issues of overcrowding and rebalancing.

ACARA has been developing an Australian Curriculum in eight learning areas: English, mathematics, science, humanities and social sciences, the arts, technologies, health and physical education, and languages. Civics and citizenship is part of the humanities and social sciences alongside history, geography, and economics and business. The *Australian Curriculum: Civics and Citizenship* developed by ACARA for Years 3 to 10 has not yet been endorsed by ministers but it has been published on the [Australian Curriculum website](http://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au) and is available for use in states and territories.

This curriculum is organised into two interrelated strands: Civics and Citizenship Knowledge and Understanding, and Civics and Citizenship Skills. Knowledge and Understanding includes three key focus areas: Government and democracy; Laws and citizens; and Citizenship,

diversity and identity. Skills focus on questioning and research; analysis, synthesis and interpretation; problem solving and decision making; and communication and reflection.

Electoral education, focusing on an understanding and appreciation of electoral processes and voting procedures, is an important component of a broader civics and citizenship education. In the curriculum developed by ACARA, electoral education is generally covered under Government and democracy and, to a lesser extent, under Laws and citizens. A list of electoral-education-relevant content descriptions in the curriculum developed by ACARA is provided below.

Year	Content description	Focus area*
3	How and why decisions are made democratically in communities	GD
5	The roles and responsibilities of electors and representatives in Australia's democracy	GD
	The key features of the Australian electoral process	GD
6	The key institutions of Australia's democratic system of government based on the Westminster system, including the monarchy, parliaments, and courts	GD
	The roles and responsibilities of the three levels of government, including shared roles and responsibilities within Australia's federal system	GD
	How state/territory and federal laws are initiated and passed through parliament	LC
	Who can be an Australian citizen, the formal rights and responsibilities, and shared values of Australian citizenship	CDI
7	The key features of government under the Australian Constitution with a focus on: the separation of powers, the roles of the Houses of Parliament, and the division of powers	GD
	The process for constitutional change through a referendum	GD
8	The freedoms that enable active participation in Australia's democracy within the bounds of law, including freedom of speech, association, assembly, religion and movement	GD
	How citizens can participate in Australia's democracy, including use of the electoral system, contact with their elected representatives, use of lobby groups, and direct action	GD
9	The role of political parties and independent representatives in Australia's system of government, including the formation of governments	GD
	How citizens' choices are shaped at election time, including the influence of the media	GD

* GD: Government and democracy; LC: Law and citizens; CDI: Citizenship, diversity and identity

The Review received over 1600 submissions from the general public, held consultations with key stakeholders and drew on Australian and international curriculum research. The *Review of the Australian Curriculum Final Report* (p 193) noted that the submissions were "almost entirely highly supportive of including civics and citizenship" in the curriculum although there were there were "concerns about the level at which certain content was being introduced and suggestions for particular additional content and emphases". The report (p 198) made seven recommendations on civics and citizenship:

- Civics and citizenship should be introduced at Year 3 and in Years 3–6 as part of a combined humanities and social science subject, then should be a separate learning area from Years 7–10.
- This curriculum should be rewritten and considerably re-sequenced along the lines advocated by the subject matter specialist¹.
- Serious gaps which have been identified should be filled, including the foundation values of the Australian system of government and the importance of personal values and ethics, the balance between rights and responsibilities, the importance of British and Western influences in the formation of Australia’s system of government, the role of the founders and the key features of constitutional development, the historical functioning of the federation, the role of the Prime Minister and Cabinet and the executive arm of government, the hierarchy of laws and the policymaking process, the key elements of public finance, and the importance of community service as a key component of citizenship.
- The civics and citizenship curriculum should better recognise the importance and contribution of the many community, charitable and philanthropic bodies and organisations – especially religious – in areas such as health, education and social welfare.
- Cross curriculum priorities should be reduced in the content of this learning area and properly integrated only where relevant.
- The notional time allocated to this learning area needs to be reviewed and increase as the years progress.
- Civics and citizenship should be mandatory to Year 10.

As well as recommending that civics and citizenship education should be mandatory to Year 10, the reviewers argued that there was “also a very strong case for it to be mandatory in some form to Year 12 which is, after all, just prior to the age at which students will be voting.” (*Review of the Australian Curriculum Final Report* p 198)

The National Assessment Program – Civics and Citizenship

National Assessment Program sample assessments in civics and citizenship (NAP-CC) have been conducted with students in Year 6 and Year 10 every three years since 2004, most recently in 2013. ACARA administers the assessment, which was delivered online for the first time in 2013. The [2013 NAP-CC Report](#) is available on the ACARA website. The next NAP-CC assessment will be delivered in 2016, again online.

An Assessment Framework governs what is tested for the NAP-CC. The assessment is not yet aligned to the Australian Curriculum. The *Australian Curriculum: Civics and Citizenship* was in the early stages of development when the NAP-CC 2013 assessment was being planned, so “the NAP-CC Assessment Framework has not yet been revised with reference to it” (2013 *NAP-CC Public Report* p 5). However, the *Australian Curriculum: Civics and Citizenship* developed by ACARA and the NAP-CC Assessment Framework overlap to a considerable extent. The aims of the civics and citizenship curriculum are “congruent with and reflected in” the Assessment Framework (2013 *NAP-CC Public Report* p 4).

The NAP – CC Assessment Framework has four aspects:

1. civics and citizenship content;

¹ Gaps identified in the specialist report by Professor Anne Twomey, University of Sydney, included discussion of the Executive and Executive power, public finance and responsible government in a Westminster context.

2. cognitive processes for understanding civics and citizenship;
3. affective processes for civics and citizenship; and
4. civics and citizenship participation.

Aspects 1 and 2 are assessed through the test itself and aspects 3 and 4 through the accompanying student questionnaire. The civics and citizenship content aspect is organised into three content areas. These content areas partly overlap with the three key Australian Curriculum focus areas (Government and democracy; Laws and citizens; and Citizenship, diversity and identity):

- *Government and Law* (includes how governments and parliaments are elected and formed; specifically the generalised responsibilities of individuals, groups and governments in making decisions and electing representatives, as well as the specific operation of institutions, systems and processes in contemporary Australian democracy)
- *Citizenship in a Democracy* (includes the rights and responsibilities of citizens in local, state, national, regional and global contexts; specifically making decisions and problem solving in a democracy)
- *Historical Perspectives* (which explores the impact of the past on contemporary Australian civil society)

Through the *Measurement Framework for Schooling in Australia*, education ministers have endorsed a “challenging but reasonable” proficient standard for achievement in NAP-CC. Approximately half of the students at Years 6 and 10 achieved this standard in 2013. At the national level, the proportion of students achieving the proficient standard at each year level remained relatively unchanged over the assessment cycles (2004, 2007, 2010 and 2013). The following table indicates student achievement over the four cycles. A decline in achievement in Year 10 from 49% in 2010 to 44% in 2013 was not deemed statistically significant.

Year	Year 6 Proficient	Year 10 Proficient
2013	52%	44%
2010	52%	49%
2007	54%	41%
2004	50%	40%

The *2013 NAP-CC Report* highlights some important and relatively achievable conceptual content that was demonstrated by fewer students than might be expected as illustrated in the table below.

Conceptual Content	Demonstrated by
Identifying the specific historical event recognised on Anzac Day	46% of Year 10 students
Recognising a definition of a trade union	39% of Year 10 students
Identifying that the Queen is Australia’s Head of State	19% of Year 10 students
Identifying that the Governor-General represents the Queen in Australia	46% of Year 6 students

Results since 2004 consistently show a gap in performance between Indigenous students and non-Indigenous students. Regarding achievement by gender, female Year 6 students in 2013 outperformed male students by 21 score points on the NAP-CC Scale. In Year 10, they were 14 points ahead. In relation to social background, Year 6 students with parents who were senior managers or professionals had scale scores that were 97 score points higher than those with parents who were recorded as unskilled labourers or office, sales or service

staff. The difference among Year 10 students was 84 score points. These differences are consistent with previous patterns.

In 2013, as before, students showing more positive attitudes towards Australian diversity in the accompanying survey have higher levels of knowledge in civics and citizenship. Students who had participated at school in school governance and extra-curricular activities also tended to have higher scores.

Quality Teaching

Teachers have a significant responsibility in preparing young people to lead successful and productive lives and become citizens that positively contribute to society. Effective teachers provide a dependable and consistent influence on young people as they make choices about further education, work and life. They are crucial for enhancing student engagement and achievement, and play a vital role in establishing productive, safe and supportive learning environments.

Quality teaching is crucial to improving student outcomes in civics and citizenship education as it is in all other learning areas. All governments, universities, school sectors and schools have a responsibility to work together to support high-quality teaching and school leadership, including by enhancing initial teacher education.

The Australian Government is providing \$16.9 million from 2015–16 to 2018–19 to lift the quality of initial teacher education in Australia as part of its response to the Teacher Education Ministerial Advisory Group (TEMAG) report, *Action Now: Classroom Ready Teachers*.

In response to the TEMAG recommendations, the Australian Government has tasked the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) with strengthening the Initial Teacher Education Accreditation Standards and Procedures (the Accreditation Standards) to make sure teacher education courses produce graduates that meet the Graduate level of the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers.

The work being undertaken by AITSL to strengthen the Accreditation Standards will ensure that initial teacher education courses equip new teachers with skills and content to be successful from their first day in the classroom.

A key part of AITSL's work is to also provide national leadership for the Commonwealth, state and territory governments in promoting excellence in the profession of teaching and school leadership. AITSL has responsibility for supporting the ongoing implementation of the *Australian Professional Standards for Teaching* (the Standards) and the *Australian Professional Standard for Principals* as well as fostering and driving high quality professional learning for teachers and school leaders.

Teachers have responsibility for an increasing diverse cohort of students with broad cultural and socio-economic backgrounds and the Standards recognise this. Standard 1.3 expects that proficient teachers are able to design and implement teaching strategies that are responsive to the learning strengths and needs of students from diverse linguistic, cultural, religious and socioeconomic backgrounds. Diverse classrooms may include students who may, for example, have a very limited exposure to or experience of, Australia's

parliamentary and judicial system, requiring teachers to have specific knowledge and pedagogical skills to effectively support all students learning.

The Australian Government acknowledges that teachers need access to evidence-based professional learning and resources to ensure that their content knowledge and pedagogical practice is thorough, effective and up-to-date. This is vital to the effective teaching of the Australian Curriculum. The provision of professional learning and development for teachers and school leaders is the responsibility of the state and territory regulatory authorities or teacher quality institutes and is guided by the nationally endorsed *Australian Charter for the Professional Learning of Teachers and School Leaders*.

The Australian and state and territory governments make available to teachers a range of targeted civics and citizenship curriculum resources aligned to the Australian Curriculum through *Scootle*, the online professional learning network hosted by Education Services Australia.

There is a range of online resources that support teachers to understand the challenges, issues and opportunities for young people living and learning in the 21st century. These include resources to enhance teacher’s skills to deal with their broader teaching responsibilities such as supporting student’s social and emotional competencies. The Australian Government funded *Safe Schools Hub*, for example, houses resources for teachers and school communities that help build and sustain a positive school culture that encourages active citizenship and social cohesion.

Parliament and Civics Education Rebate (PACER) programme and related initiatives

The Parliament and Civics Education Rebate (PACER) is a demand-driven programme that assists students’ civics and citizenship education at national institutions in Canberra. PACER has provided over \$38 million in rebates for over 800 000 students on over 16,000 school visits since it commenced in 2006-2007.

Year	Students	Schools	Rebates (\$m)
2006-07	73,207	1426	3.203
2007-08	82,610	1662	3.679
2008-09	88,993	1715	3.884
2009-10	97,980	1901	4.497
2010-11	95,722	1859	4.329
2011-12	99,265	1915	4.776
2012-13	103,465	1980	4.969
2013-14	99,617	1938	4.890
2014-15*	105,835	1960	5.030
Total	846,694	16,356	39.246

* 2014-15 figures not final as not all schools have acquitted payment. The figures may fall slightly if some schools fail to acquit or acquit for fewer students than anticipated.

The rebate ranges from \$20 to \$260, depending on distance from Canberra, for students in Years 4-12. They visit specified national institutions in Canberra, including Parliament House. The rebate is provided as a contribution to assist with travel costs, not to cover them in full. No eligible school has been declined access to rebates under the PACER programme.

A total of \$23 million is allocated to PACER over the next four years (2015-16 to 2018-19).

Year	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	Total
Allocation (\$m)	5.725	5.758	5.758	5.759	23.000

A correlation can be observed between on-site learning, such as that supported by PACER, and student performance as measured by NAP-CC. The 2010 NAP-CC report showed that the average NAP-CC Scale score of students who participated in an excursion to a parliament, local government or law court was 43 points higher than scores for Year 6 students who did not take part in such excursions and 42 points higher for Year 10 students. Comparable information was not provided in the 2013 report. However, further analysis requested by the department from ACARA found that in 2013, students who participated in these types of excursions again had higher NAP-CC Scale scores than students who did not (on average higher by 40 points for Year 6 students and by 36 points for Year 10 students). While other school and student level circumstances may also be factors, these correlations suggest on-site learning can make a positive contribution to student learning in civics and citizenship. Overall 47% of Year 6 students and 41% of Year 10 students participated in excursions to parliaments, local governments or law courts (2013 NAP-CC Report, p 93)

PACER is administered by a contracted service provider, currently the BUSY Group, which has administered the rebate since 1 July 2013. Applications for PACER are received throughout the school year. They are processed in order of receipt within available funds. The criteria for rebate payments are specified in the PACER guidelines, which are available on the PACER website maintained by the BUSY Group (www.pacer.org.au) and the department's website.

The Government also supports civics and citizenship education in schools through related initiatives such as the National Schools Constitutional Convention, the National History Challenge and the Simpson Prize.

The *National Schools Constitutional Convention* (NSCC) brings around 120 students from state and territory conventions to Canberra each year to discuss constitutional issues. The theme for the 2015 NSCC was *Checks and balances: do we need an Australian Bill of Rights?* It included a focus on the Magna Carta, in the year of its 800th anniversary.

The *Simpson Prize* and the *National History Challenge* are history competitions. Over 7000 primary and secondary school students took part in the 2014 National History Challenge. Over 2200 Year 9 and 10 students took part in the 2015 Simpson Prize. Eight winners (one from each state and territory) attended Centenary ANZAC Day commemorations in Turkey.

Future

The department is looking forward to a strengthened curriculum and high quality teaching across Australian schools as part of the Government's Student First policy. In turn a strengthened curriculum and high quality teaching will support improved learning in civics and citizenship education, which is also supported by the PACER programme and the related initiatives discussed in this submission.