

Dr Zareh Ghazarian

Head of Politics and International Relations
School of Social Sciences
Faculty of Arts
Monash University VIC 3800
[REDACTED]

Dr Jacqueline Laughland-Booÿ

Senior Advisor (Impact Priorities)
Office of the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research and Enterprise)
Australian Catholic University
[REDACTED]

17 May 2024

**Submission to the Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters
Inquiry into Civics Education, Engagement, and Participation**

Dear Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission. We make this submission in our personal capacities.

As researchers, we have focused on how young people build the skills, knowledge, and confidence to be active and engaged members of the community. A major focus of our work has been on the role of schools in building the political knowledge of young people through civics and citizenship education.

Over the last thirty years, governments have sought to enhance the political knowledge of young people through interventions in schools. In the 1990s, the Keating Government established the Civics Expert Group, and the Howard Government implemented the Discovering Democracy Program which ran from 1997 to the mid 2000s. Since then, a national curriculum has been implemented which features civics and citizenship as part of the curriculum for students from Year 3 to Year 10.

The way in which civics and citizenship is delivered, however, is not consistent. As Australia is a federation, states retain the authority to determine curriculum. As a result, the way in which civics and citizenship is delivered may vary across schools and jurisdictions.

National testing is undertaken every three years to understand the levels of students' knowledge in areas such as politics, government, and the legal system as well as their understanding of their rights and responsibilities as citizens. The results of the National Assessment Program – Civics and Citizenship (NAP-CC) demonstrate that existing approaches are leading to patchy outcomes.

For example, in 2016 and 2019 (the last two rounds of data that are publicly available), the national Year 6 proficiency rate continued to be just over 50 per cent. The more

concerning results are at the Year 10 level, as just 38 per cent of students achieved the proficient standard in 2016 and 2019.

This is a suboptimal outcome as Year 10 is the last year of mandatory schooling. Furthermore, unless students were to study elective subjects such as Politics or Legal Studies in Year 11 and 12, they were unlikely to build on their political knowledge through other subjects in high school.

These results suggest that many young people who are leaving school may be unclear about the structures and operation of government and their rights and responsibilities as citizens.

This has implications for the health of Australian democracy. Lacking political knowledge can impact on the capacity and confidence of young people to be active and engaged citizens. It can also potentially enhance the impact of misinformation in the community.

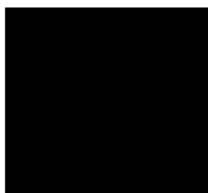
As part of our work, we have spoken with young people and have identified ways of potentially strengthening civics and citizenship approaches.

There is a need to support teachers design and deliver effective civics and citizenship classes. Teachers have a critical impact on learning outcomes in this space and it is crucial that they are supported through measures such as bespoke professional development courses for civics and citizenship education.

Furthermore, there is a need to offer students, especially in Year 11 and 12, targeted classes which act as ‘refreshers’ on the important elements concerning their rights and responsibilities.

The Committee’s review on civics education, engagement, and participation in Australia provides an opportunity to strengthen existing approaches and outcomes. We believe our research findings may help inform future decisions in this space and would be delighted to elaborate on them at the appropriate time.

Yours sincerely,



Dr Zareh Ghazarian



Dr Jacqueline Laughland-Booÿ