

29 May 2006

Ms Sonia Palmieri  
Inquiry Secretary  
Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters  
PO Box 6021  
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Ms Palmieri

## **Inquiry into Civics and Electoral Education - Young People**

Thank you for your letter dated 18<sup>th</sup> April 2006. The Local Government Association of Queensland (LGAQ) welcomes the opportunity to provide feedback to the Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters in relation to civics and electoral education in Australia. We would like to take this opportunity to reflect upon the current status of government engaging young people.

### **Background**

In Queensland, young people aged 12 - 25 years constitute approximately 20% of the population. Whilst those over 18 are able to vote and legitimately engage in the Australian political system, there is a substantial percentage of our community who are under 18 years with limited opportunity and no formal system in which to engage. When young people are interested in the well being of their community, it is often deemed illegitimate and they are provided with limited opportunity, process or mechanism in which to express it.

The LGAQ Youth Policy Project Officer has regular contact with 43 Youth Development Officers and 23 Community Development Officers who work specifically with the young people and local government issues. Often the work conducted by the workers includes the building of relationships within a community via policy and program development, implementation and processes. The primary focus is connection to community via the engagement and education of young people into local government civics.

**The LGAQ believe that if we are going to provide civics and electoral education to young people, we must provide a range of mechanisms that can utilise these skills. Government needs to explore ways of engaging young people to ensure education is not tokenistic or grounded in rhetoric. Further, LGAQ believe that if you want young people to feel connected to government and community, you need to firstly extend an invitation to participate, actively providing a role for them within.**

LGAQ acknowledge that not all young people choose to engage in the formal processes provided by government sometimes opting for informal, yet legitimate engagement processes. By advocating for access and diversity, and by providing a range of engagement models, government have an opportunity to connect with young people from their community. By engaging young people, providing an opportunity to inform, consult and participate in local government, we can actively contribute to young people's civic and electoral education.

Please find a number of initiatives undertaken by the Local Government Association of Queensland to enhance young people's civic and electoral education in local government.

## 1. Policy

The Association has two important policy statements in relation to young people and engaging in Local Government Governance processes.

The current Youth Policy for Local Government states that:

*Local Government, in partnership with the State Government, is committed to actively encouraging the contribution, participation and engagement of young people in the development and implementation of policy, programs, opportunities and services that directly impact upon young people exclusively or within broader community agendas.*

To further compliment this policy, LGAQ has recently adopted an Engagement Policy which states that:

- *Local Government recognises that community engagement is vital to the democratic process and contributes to building balanced healthy communities.*
- *Local Government understands community engagement contains the core elements of information, consultation and participation.*
- *Local Government will apply the core elements of community engagement, where appropriate, to facilitate meaningful community involvement in the decision making process.*

To ensure that Local Government meets the objectives of the policies, LGAQ provides access for councils to support, information and resources.

The LGAQ has identified a range of strategies that utilises the engagement continuum from information through consultation and participation to collaboration and empowerment. These strategies include youth councils, advisory groups, action groups, mentoring programs, fact sheets, web pages, focus groups and surveys. Each of these contribute to providing a range of strategies to young people within a community.

The LGAQ has a focus on developing the skills and capacity of local government to ensure representation and diversity in Youth Engagement Strategies, including young people who identify as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, Cultural Diversity and young people who are identified as "at risk".

## 2. Three Year Strategic Plan

The LGAQ Youth Policy Project Officer recently developed and implemented a three year strategic plan exploring youth development and local government throughout 2005 - 2008. The strategy identified that the Youth Policy Project Officer role aims to build the capacity of local government to acknowledge and engage young people as legitimate community members and stakeholders who possess the rights and responsibilities of citizenship.

The objectives of the conference are to:

- Increase Youth Development Officer Professionalism in a Local Government context
- Foster connections: Development of networks, communication strategies and resources
- Build the citizenship of young people as legitimate community members and stakeholders
- Advocate for Youth Policy, Youth Strategies and Youth / Community Development Officers

- Increase the engagement practices of young people and Youth/ Community Development officers across the whole of Local Government

### 3. Young People and Local Government Conference

Each year, LGAQ develops a conference that explores the topic of young development and local government. The event this year is being held in Townsville City, 12 -14 September, for Youth / Community Development Officers, Local Government Workers and Elected Members from across Queensland. The theme, "Enliven, Enrich, Engage: Youth Development and Local Government" will provide a forum in which to reflect, enhance and explore young people's participation in Local government across various rural, regional and urban communities. Civic engagement strategies are core to the conference.

In relation to this conference, LGAQ will aim to build the skills and capacity of Youth Development Officers, Elected Members, Council Staff, youth service providers, key stakeholders and key service providers to respond to issues affecting young people across Queensland.

The conference will:

- Provide networking and relationship building opportunities.
- To explore and showcase Local Government better practice engagement strategies.
- To showcase, where possible, international, national, local government trends and better practice.
- To showcase the host Shire or City and its surrounding areas.
- To develop skill and capacity in relation to the top 5 topics identified by the Conference survey including, Planning and Evaluation, Youth Councils / Reference Groups, Youth Leadership / Mentoring, Engaging Strategies Generally and Hard to Reach Groups

### 4. Online Resources

Local Government Online (LGOnline) provides a forum which promotes and provides access to resources that explore working alongside young people. This includes information ranging from policy initiatives, to project ideas, engagement strategies, funding and resources.

### 5. Speakout Youth Conference

Speakout is an annual 'get together' of young people involved in leadership within their local community and/or across their City or Shire. It is underpinned by the ethos that young people have unique and diverse gifts. Young People possess knowledge, skills and capacity and make valuable and significant contributions to community.

Speakout aims to provide an extended opportunity (weekend camp / retreat) for young people engaged with youth councils / youth advisory groups / youth reference groups etc to come together. Speakout currently aims to:

- Engage young people in activities and educative processes.
- Facilitate young people learning from each other through the sharing of ideas and information and involvement in local activities, festivals, events and programs.
- Develop youth leaderships skills, capacity and understanding
- Create an opportunity for young people to respond to government agendas
- Initiate matters for government consideration.

Speakout happens in northern and southern Queensland, and is generally attended by between 50 - 150 Young People, with one of the core issues with Speakout is forming, developing, enhancing and building the skills of young people to engage effectively with young people.

We hope that you find this information useful in the Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters inquiry into civics and electoral education, particularly in relation to young people.

In relation to Cultural and Linguistically Diverse Communities and civic and electoral education, please find a second LGAQ letter to address these particular needs. This has been completed by the Association's Community Relations Project Officer, Lindy Drew.

Should you have any queries please don't hesitate to contact **Rachael Uhr, Youth Policy Project Officer** on (07) 3000 2238 or email ([rachael\\_uhr@lgaq.asn.au](mailto:rachael_uhr@lgaq.asn.au)).

Yours sincerely

Greg Hoffman  
DIRECTOR  
POLICY AND REPRESENTATION