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Friday 2nd June, 2006.

Committee Secretary
Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters
Department of House of Representatives
PO Box 6021
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Committee Secretary,

Inquiry into Civics and Electoral Education

Enclosed is a submission to the Joint Standing Committee inquiry into Civics and Electoral Education.

The following submission calls for the establishment of longitudinal research into students' civic knowledge and for comprehensive cataloguing of civics resources.

I would appreciate any information on the outcome of the Committee's consideration of this submission.

Yours Sincerely,
Amber Sierek.

Submission to Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters Inquiry
into Civics and Electoral Education

Ready, Researched and Resourced:
***Recommendations for enhancing civic
education in schools.***

By Amber Sierek.

Friday 2nd June, 2006.

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1.Executive Summary and Recommendations

Civic education in Australian schools could be substantially enhanced through state level cataloguing of teacher resources and more longitudinal research into young people's civic knowledge.

Numerous studies and inquiries including those by the Senate Standing Committee on Employment, Education and Training (1989), the Civics Expert Group (1994), the Department of Science, Education and Training (2003) and the National Youth Affairs Research Scheme (2004) have gauged the civic knowledge of students through short-term research. However, no national long term research gauging how students' knowledge changes over time exists in Australia.

The Commonwealth should finance a longitudinal study into the civic knowledge of young people. The knowledge of a carefully selected national sample of primary school children should be tested and regularly re-tested throughout their secondary schooling to gauge their changing knowledge of civics.

Resources are available to Australian teachers to assist with delivering quality civic education in schools other than those initiated under the Commonwealth *Discovering Democracy* package (Department of Education, Science and Training and Curriculum Corporation and Curriculum Corporation 1997). However, inadequate cataloguing of these resources exists at a state and territory level where differing civics curriculums demand different civics resources.

The Commonwealth should encourage each state and territory to hold a literature review of existing resources. This revised catalogue of relevant resources should be prominently displayed on a relevant curriculum support webpage in each state and territory to allow for easy access by teachers.

By comprehensively cataloguing existing civic resources, any potential gaps in content or in specific mediums could also be more readily identified.

This submission recommends:

1a: That the Committee recommends the Commonwealth finances national longitudinal research into students' civic knowledge.

1b: That the Committee recommends the Commonwealth tenders this research contract to a suitable research body.

2: That the Committee recommends the Commonwealth finance a literature review and cataloguing of existing civics resources relevant to each state and territory curriculum.

3: That the Committee recommends the Commonwealth finance the redevelopment of curriculum support websites in each state and territory to include this newly developed civics resource catalogue.

2.Background

2.1 The Author

The author is a final year Bachelor of Communication student from the University of Newcastle. She has an interest in education policy and public affairs in Australia.

She believes a strong understanding of social and political practices is central in educating students to become active citizens.

She also believes further development in civics education is necessary to appease the apathy felt by many Australian students towards civic practices.

She graduated from high school in 2002.

Civics and electoral education is essential to producing socially informed and politically literate citizens in a democracy. Good civics education aims to produce the ideal citizen, who will be politically informed, believe in their right to influence political events and processes and open minded, “willing and able to listen to others and consider all sides before making up their mind” (Jaensch 1986:147).

Whilst schools are just one of many agents of education (Barcan 1991:3), “schools are the one institution which children and young people must attend for many of their formative years” and are hence well equipped to educate students on civics (Foskey 1999:35, see Appendix A). Quality civics education in secondary schools, taught by knowledgeable and dedicated teachers, is essential for producing informed citizens (see Appendix B).

This submission addresses the terms of reference concerning the current status of young people’s knowledge of the Australian electoral system and opportunities for introducing creative approaches into electoral education. It examines current research into young people’s civic knowledge and the current cataloguing of teacher resources.

This submission asks the Committee to recommend the Commonwealth finances both national, longitudinal research into students’ civic knowledge and the redevelopment of state resource catalogues.

This submission was compiled through literature research following informal discussions with civics teachers both at a secondary and tertiary level in the Newcastle district. The author particularly acknowledges the assistance of Mr. John Sutton, Lecturer in Communication and Public Affairs at the University of Newcastle, the staff of Newcastle High School, and the Newcastle High P&C Association.

4. Civics and Electoral Education in Australia

4.1 The current status of young people's knowledge of the Australian Electoral System

4.11 Research into young people's knowledge of civics and the Australian Electoral System

Since the late 1980s research has regularly gauged students' knowledge of key civic practices and institutions. However, most studies have focused on students' civic knowledge only at the time of research; little long term or follow up research into students' civic knowledge exists.

Opportunities exist today to initiate continual, longitudinal research into students' civics knowledge. Such research would help gain a better understanding of students' changing knowledge of civic practices, as well as complementing the numerous short-term research projects already in existence.

4.111 Background

Various researchers have conducted 'single-instance' research into students' civic knowledge via methodologies only used *once*. Most research was conducted over a year or less, and whilst the research may have looked at previous research in the field, either financial or time constraints may have prohibited a longer examination of students' civic knowledge.

Numerous surveys were undertaken as part of a major overview of civics education in the late 1980s. All surveys concluded "young people's knowledge of Australia's political history and of the country's political system [is] extremely limited" (Krinks

1999:online, see Appendix C).

In 1988, The Senate Standing Committee on Employment, Education and Training inquiry into civics education used public submissions and surveys to establish “remarkable ignorance” of Australia’s youth to political systems and government (Senate Standing Committee on Employment, Education and Training 1989:6, 9, 11; see Appendix D).

In 1994, The Civics Expert Group (CEG) inquiry into civics education used public submissions, a survey and discussions with elected members to establish “widespread ignorance and misconception” about political systems. 15-19 year olds were found to be least knowledgeable of all groups researched (CEG 1994:2-4,6, see Appendix E).

In 1994 the Federal Government announced a four year, \$17.5 million Civics and Citizenship Education Programme “to emphasise teaching students an understanding of the history and operations of Australia’s system of government and institutions, and the principles that support Australian democracy” (Dickson 1998:online, Kemp, 1997:3,7; also see Curriculum Corporation 1997:7). From 1997 to 2000, a *Discovering Democracy (DD)* program was rolled out to every Australian school (see Appendix F).

Some short-term research from around 2000 onwards began to centre on the implementation of the *DD* program in schools rather than gauging student knowledge (see Print, Moroz and Reynolds (eds) 2001, Kennedy, Jimenez, Mayer at al 2003).

The Department of Education, Science and Training (DEST) report *Evaluation of the Discovering Democracy Package 2000-2003* also used ‘single instance’ methodologies, including in-depth interviews, a national survey and document analysis to evaluate the effectiveness of the *DD* program (DEST 2003: viii). None of the research methodologies were used on the same sample in the evaluation process.

Short-term research projects into students’ civic knowledge were still ongoing at this

time. In 1999, 3331 students in 142 schools were surveyed for the Australian arm of an international study into the civic knowledge of fourteen year olds (Australian Council for

Social Research *IEA Civic Education Study* 2006, Mellor, Kennedy and Greenwood 2002 xiii, see Appendix G). The study found significant room for improvement in students' knowledge of "essential pre-conditions for a properly working democracy", civil rights, and "the impact of economic issues in the functioning of a modern democratic system" (Mellor, Kennedy and Greenwood 2002:xviii).

In 2004, The National Youth Affairs Research Scheme used a multi-methodological research approach including a literature review, national survey, interviews and focus groups to research the interrelationship of youth to citizenship (Manning and Ryan 2004:15-20). However, the report was again only a 'snap-shot' view of civics knowledge and attitudes at the initial time of research. The report noted a longitudinal study into the civic knowledge and attitudes of other demographic groups "would be a valuable contribution as it would track changes that occur over time as people age and have different experiences" (Manning and Ryan 2004:95).

4.112 Current situation

Current research into young people's civic and electoral system knowledge still lacks adequate longitudinal focus.

The ongoing Youth Electoral Study (YES) aims to determine "why many young people do not register on the Australian electoral roll [and to] investigate the impact of disengaged youth on Australian democracy" (Print, Saha and Edwards 2004a:online). A multi-methodological approach is being used, including case studies, a literature review, and a national survey (Print, Saha and Edwards 2004b:online).

A dimension of longitudinal research exists in YES as two surveys of Year 12 students are to be completed for the project, with the initial survey of students conducted in 2004 and the second due to be conducted in 2006 (Print, Saha and Edwards 2004b:online).

However, the current YES surveys will inadequately explain the long term changes of young people's knowledge in civics as *different* students are being surveyed in each

year. To completely gauge the impact of school civic programs upon the knowledge of students, longitudinal studies must note students' knowledge at regular intervals.

4.113 Opportunities

National, longitudinal research must be established today that will regularly monitor the changing civics knowledge of *the same* group of students over an extended period of at least twelve years. This research could also examine the changing attitudes of the sample students.

A cross-section of early primary school students from each state should be carefully chosen for the research as to represent the wider Australian population. These students should now have their current civic knowledge tested and then comprehensively *retested* at regular intervals throughout their secondary education. The research should also continue with testing after the completion of secondary education and into young adulthood.

It is only through testing the same sample of students over an extended time frame that students' changing attitudes towards civics and knowledge of civic practices be fully understood.

The Committee should determine a suitably qualified and interested body willing to undertake this research.

4.114 Recommendations

Recommendation 1a: That the Committee recommends the Commonwealth finances national longitudinal research into students' civic knowledge.

Recommendation 1b: That the Committee recommends the Commonwealth tenders this research contract to a suitable research body.

4.2 Opportunities for introducing creative approaches to electoral education

4.21 Teacher resources

Opportunities may exist for more interactive, creative resources in specific mediums to be used in civics education. However, current teacher resources must be comprehensively catalogued before more local or internationally sourced 'creative' approaches are proposed. If the current situation of teacher resources is established and access to these resources is increased, apparent gaps in resources would become increasingly obvious. This would allow for easier future development of resources, especially if resources are lacking in a particular medium.

4.211 Background

Educational Research Project Manager for the IEA Civic Education Study Suzanne Mellor notes multi-medium resources for civics and citizenship "are everywhere but not catalogued as we would expect with a regular curriculum" (Mellor no date:online).

Problems with civics teacher resources are not new; in 1989 Phillips noted "materials need to be relevant to the particular State which is being studied" (Phillips, cited in Senate Standing Committee on Employment, Education and Training 1989:58, see Appendix H).

After a 1989 inquiry into civics education, The Senate Committee on Employment, Education and Training recommended that adequate civics teacher resources be developed and monitored (Senate Standing Committee on Employment, Education

report *Whereas the People: Civics and Citizenship Education* (1994:25), see Appendix I).

4.212 Current situation

Currently, two catalogues of nationally distributed civics resources are found at the jointly run Department of Education, Science and Training (DEST) and Curriculum Corporation 'Civics and Citizenship' website (no date:online) and in the *Introducing Discovering Democracy: Schools Material Project* booklet (DEST and Curriculum Corporation 1997). This booklet contains several pages of resources, listed by author, medium (format), publication date, material type and schooling level of target audience (DEST and Curriculum Corporation 1997:30-41).

A national catalogue service in SCIS (Schools Catalogue Information Service, run as a business unit of the Curriculum Corporation) also catalogues educational materials (Curriculum Corporation 2003a:online). Access to catalogue records is via *SCISWeb* online, used by over 85% of schools in Australia (Curriculum Corporation 2003a:online). According to the SCIS website, SCIS aims to reduce the cost and effort of duplicating cataloguing resources in schools (Curriculum Corporation 2003b:online).

However SCIS access is by subscription only (Curriculum Corporation 2003c:online) potentially leaving teachers either unable to access resources at home or having to navigate through Dewey Decimal Classification numbers and SCIS subject headings each time a specific civics resource is needed (Curriculum Corporation 2003d:online).

Additional existing civics resources *other* than the nationally syndicated *Discovering Democracy (DD)* kits have also tended to be overlooked in the current cataloguing of civics resources (see Appendix J).

The existing DEST and Curriculum Corporation's 'Civics and Citizenship' website (no

date:online) and the *Introducing Discovering Democracy: Schools Material Project* booklet (DEST and Curriculum Corporation 1997) also inadequately explain which *DD* components directly link into different state curriculums.

4.213 Opportunities

The current national resource catalogues should be supplemented by individual state and territory catalogues specifically relevant to each jurisdiction's varying civics curriculum.

These catalogues should be established through a literature review of existing resources *other* than the national *DD* resources and conducted by educational researchers or academics.

The potential for using current affairs issues and media resources is particularly great, with the Department of Education, Science and Training *Evaluation of the Discovering Democracy Package 2000-2003* noting "across the nation a trend is now emerging to combine the materials within the kit with resources that focus on current affairs that have particular relevance for students" (2003:xi). 352 civics teachers surveyed in the *IEA Civic Education Study* also called "media: newspapers, magazines, television" the "most important" resources available in teaching civics (Mellor, Kennedy and Greenwood 2002: xxi).

This is an emerging area that state researchers would have to seriously consider in reviewing resources.

The current 'resources' section of existing state and territory curriculum support websites should be redeveloped to contain this civics resource catalogue. By redeveloping existing sites (such as in NSW, the NSW Department of Education and Training *Professional Support and Curriculum Website 2003a:online*), costs would be

minimised and there would be no need to raise industry awareness of new websites.

Whilst education is not under the direct jurisdiction of the Commonwealth, the Committee should recommend the Commonwealth finance the resource review and online redevelopment of resource lists in each state and territory. By ensuring all state and territories have an accessible, comprehensive and relevant list of civic resources in varying mediums, the Commonwealth would be assisting with the national deliverance of quality civics education.

4.214 Recommendations

Recommendation 2: That the Committee recommend the Commonwealth finance a literature review and cataloguing of existing civics resources relevant to each state and territory curriculum.

Recommendation 3: That the Committee recommend the Commonwealth finance the redevelopment of curriculum support websites in each state and territory to include this newly developed civics resource catalogue.

5. Conclusion

Civic education in Australia could be substantially enhanced by understanding how young people's attitudes towards civics and knowledge of civic practices changes over time.

By financing a long term study to repeatedly test civic knowledge amongst the sample, the changing patterns of young people's involvement with civics could be firmly established.

While there are substantial resources available to teachers to assist with civics education in schools, each state and territory should develop its own 'resource catalogue' specific to individual curriculum needs.

Any potential for future resource development would be enhanced by a detailed, accessible resource list thoroughly depicting resources already in existence.

6.Appendices

- A- Foskey specifically notes a study by Flanagan et al of adolescents in seven countries that concluded “schools are a major source of young people’s ideas about citizenship” (1999:35).
- B- As Jaensch notes, “[it is] illogical for society to expect a person who turns eighteen to suddenly become an informed, rational voter without any other prior education” (1991:111).
- C- Krinks notes ‘young people’ are generally defined in these surveys as between 15 and 35 years old (1999:online).Of the 1987 surveys, “only about 30 per cent of 18-24 year olds knew of the Constitution's existence” (Newspoll), “only 34 per cent could name the Federal electorate in which they lived” and “only 50 per cent could name the House of Parliament in which the Prime Minister sat” (Year 11 students in one NSW High School, both cited in Krinks 1999:online).
- D- The Committee inquiry was into ‘education for active citizenship in Australian Schools and youth organisations’. Submissions were invited on the current state of students’ civic knowledge, the current state of civics and citizenship education, the adequacy of teacher education programs and the availability and suitability of teacher resources (Senate Standing Committee on Employment, Education and Training 1989:4).The Committee’s final recommendations included “that the Commonwealth initiate a national program in education for active citizenship” (Senate Standing Committee on Employment, Education and Training 1989:11).
- E- Of the 2500 people surveyed for the project, only:
- 10 per cent felt they knew what the Constitution covers
 - 13 per cent knew what the Governor-General does

- 14 per cent were aware of the voting procedure for the Senate
- 15 per cent knew what was meant by 'the division of powers'
- 21 per cent felt they knew what were the rights and responsibilities of citizens (CEG 1994:3; cited in Krinks 1999:online).

The CEG's final recommendations included that all governments make a civics education program a national priority in 1995-2001 (1994:24).

F-The package included finance for teacher education and teacher resources such as booklets, websites and advice on learning units. Primary and high school kits contained more interactive material such as videos, CD-ROMS and posters (Curriculum Corporation 1997: 4-5). Four key themes to be studied from middle primary school to the end of compulsory schooling are "Who Rules?" (looking at rights of citizens, principles of Australian democracy), "Law and rights" (constitutions, parliaments and courts), "The Australian nation" (civic identity and the role of the nation state) and "Citizens and public life" (civil community participation) (Curriculum Corporation 1997: 8-9).

G- The sample structure of the surveys ensured "representation amongst government, catholic and independent schools [and] provides a good estimate for Australia overall, but it does not enable between-state comparisons" (Mellor, Kennedy and Greenwood 2002:xvi).

Whilst Phase Two of this research was funded through the *DD* program, it was completed in 1999 before the *DD* program had been fully implemented (Mellor, Kennedy and Greenwood 2002:xiii).

H- Mr. Harry Phillips of the Western Australian College of Advanced Education noted "one of the problems is that I cannot show to my students at a primary level or at a teacher education level, videos prepared in New South Wales about New South

Wales government [...] If it is for Western Australian government, it has got to be for Western Australia” (Senate Standing Committee on Employment, Education and Training 1989:58).

I- The recommendation was

that as a matter of priority, the Curriculum Development Centre assume responsibility for fostering the development of adequate teaching resources for education for active citizenship, monitoring progress and achieving this goal, and coordinating projects where required. Particular emphasis should be placed in developments relating to the State and local level (Senate Standing Committee on Employment, Education and Training 1989:62).

J- For instance, the jointly run ABC Education Online and the NSW DET *NSW Discovering Democracy* professional development website successfully links *DD* resources to the current Yr 7-10 History and Geography syllabuses (ABC and NSW DET 2000a:online). However, no mention is made in the website of how *other* resources may be useful in civics teaching (ABC and NSW DET 2000b:online). Compulsory and elective civics content for NSW secondary students in Years 7-10 is found in the current NSW History and Geography curriculums, available to download from the Board of Studies Website (no date:online) and are specifically found at

http://www.boardofstudies.nsw.edu.au/syllabus_sc/pdf_doc/history_710_syl.doc

(History) and at

http://www.boardofstudies.nsw.edu.au/syllabus_sc/pdf_doc/geography_710_syl.doc

(Geography).

7.Resources

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