

Young people's civic knowledge

- 3.1 Links between civic education and civic knowledge have been made repeatedly in the education literature. Saha, for example, recently reported that 'having taken a civics subject in school is positively and significantly related to... political knowledge'.¹
- 3.2 The level of Australian students' civic knowledge, as revealed in a number of recent studies, however, appears to indicate that many have not had the benefit of comprehensive civics education.
- 3.3 The Australian national report of the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA) Civic Education Study, comparing Australian students' knowledge with those of students in 28 countries, revealed that:
- ...only half of the Australian students have a grasp of the essential pre-conditions for a properly working democracy. It seems that Australian students are not strong in their understandings of what constitute their civil rights. The Civic Knowledge items with which Australian students had the most difficulty were those which deal with the forms and purposes of Democracy.²
- 3.4 A more recent assessment of Australian students' understanding of civics was that conducted under the auspices of the Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA) in

1 Saha, L., 2000, 'Political activism and civic education among Australian secondary school students', *Australian Journal of Education*, 44(2), pp.155-74.

2 Mellor, S., K. Kennedy, and L. Greenwood, 2001, *Citizenship and Democracy: Students Knowledge and Beliefs, Australian Fourteen Year Olds and the IEA Civic Education Study*, p. 4.

October 2004 of Year 6 and 10 students across the country.³ Data were gathered from 10 712 Year 6 students from 318 schools and 9 536 Year 10 students from 249 schools.⁴

- 3.5 The report analyses students' responses to the survey questions according to a framework of 'proficiency levels': students attaining the lowest proficiency level demonstrated a basic understanding of civics and citizenship issues and concepts using vague terminology, whilst those attaining the highest level demonstrated a more sophisticated understanding using precise and appropriate terminology. Table 3.1 shows the percentages of students at each year level attaining these proficiency levels.

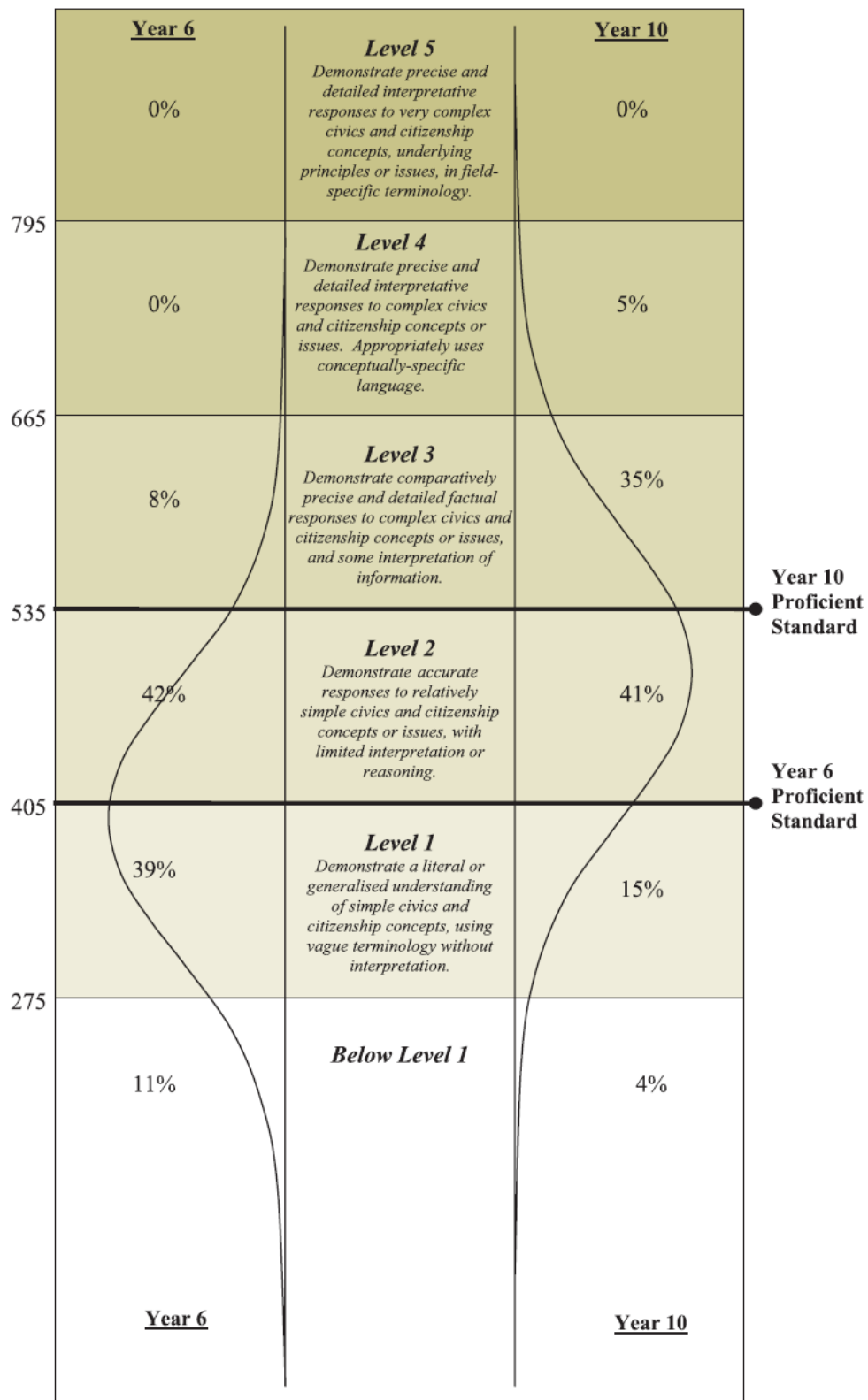
Table 3.1 Percentages of Year 6 and Year 10 students attaining each proficiency level, by sex

Proficiency level	Year 6 (%)			Year 10 (%)		
	Male	Female	All	Male	Female	All
Five Demonstrates precise and detailed interpretive responses to very complex civics and citizenship concepts underlying principles or issues, in field-specific terminology.	--	--	--	0	0	0
Four or above Demonstrates precise and detailed interpretive responses to complex civics and citizenship concepts or issues. Appropriately uses conceptually-specific language.	0	0	0	4	6	5
Three or above Demonstrates comparatively precise and detailed factual responses to complex civics and citizenship concepts or issues, and some interpretation of information.	7	10	8	35	44	39
Two or above Demonstrates accurate responses to relatively simply civics and citizenship concepts or issues, with limited interpretation or reasoning.	47	53	50	76	85	80
One or above Demonstrates a literal or generalised understanding of simple civics and citizenship concepts, using vague terminology without interpretation.	87	91	89	94	97	96

Source: Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs, 2006, *National Assessment Program: Civics and Citizenship Years 6 and 10 Report 2004*, p. xiv and 24.

- 3 More information about the National Assessment, including the full report, is available online at: <<http://www.mceetya.edu.au/mceetya/default.asp?id=17149>>. Accessed 30 January 2007.
- 4 Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs, 2006, *National Assessment Program: Civics and Citizenship Years 6 and 10 Report 2004*, p. 21.

Figure 3.1 Distribution of Year 6 and 10 students on the Civics and Citizenship Scale



Note: The percentages for this figure have been rounded.

Source: Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs, 2006, National Assessment Program: Civics and Citizenship Years 6 and 10 Report 2004, p. xiii.

- 3.6 As can be seen in Figure 3.1 (p. 29), very few students, in either Years 6 or 10, were able to demonstrate a sophisticated understanding of Australian democracy and related civics and citizenship issues or concepts. In fact, 11 per cent of Year 6 students and 4 per cent of Year 10 students were not even able to display a literal or generalised understanding of simple civics and citizenship concepts.
- 3.7 The report describes the concepts and understandings with which students appeared to have the greatest difficulty as being of two types:
- concepts such as ‘the common good’ or strategies that refer to how individuals can influence systems for the benefit of society. It is unclear whether students do not have such a concept at all, don’t believe in the common good or do not see how individuals can act for the common good; and
 - so-called ‘iconic knowledge’: the widespread ignorance of key information about national events and nationally representative symbols, which, it had generally been assumed, had been ‘taught to death’ in Australian schools, was a surprise.⁵
- 3.8 Irrespective of this apparent low level of civic knowledge amongst young Australians, some surveys indicate students’ significant level of interest in learning more about civics and citizenship at school. The Australian Clearinghouse of Youth Studies 2002-03 report, for example, found that, ‘Of 800 young people aged 12–15 who were surveyed in 2003:
- 50% were taught about citizenship at school; [and]
 - 85% thought that they should have been taught about it.’⁶

5 Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs, 2006, *National Assessment Program: Civics and Citizenship Years 6 and 10 Report 2004*, pp. 90-91. The lack of ‘iconic knowledge’ was raised in several submissions, including that of the Democratic Audit of Australia which noted, ‘A grasp of basic political history is sadly lacking. For example, very little is known about the issues involved in Federation. Most students are hard pressed to name more than three or four of Australia’s 25 prime ministers’, *Submission no. 21*, p. 2. See also Senate Legal and Constitutional Affairs References Committee, 2004, *The road to a republic*, for a discussion of young people’s limited knowledge of constitutional processes in Australia.

6 Cited in Western Australian Electoral Commission, *Submission no. 12*, p. 6. The Democratic Audit of Australia reports the findings of an informal survey of 150 first year political science students at the ANU in which ‘nearly everyone said there should be more politics/civics in schools. A common theme was ‘if it is compulsory to vote there should be proper education about the political system’, *Submission no. 21*, p. 1.

Civics and citizenship education in Australian schools

- 3.9 Both the IEA and MCEETYA reports note that at the time of their respective surveys, civics and citizenship was not an area of study well established in the curricula of the Australian states and territories.⁷
- 3.10 In 1994, the then Labor Government asked a Civics Expert Group to recommend a series of strategies to improve the dire state of civic literacy even then apparent amongst young people. Following Labor's electoral defeat in 1996, the newly-elected Liberal-National Coalition Government embraced the central tenets of the Civic Expert Group's work by introducing its *Discovering Democracy* programme. Between 1997 and 2004, the Australian Government allocated \$31.5 million to this programme which included:
- development of curriculum materials and professional learning resources, which were distributed to all Australian schools between 1997 and 2004. The *Discovering Democracy* resources included a primary and a secondary kit of teaching and learning materials, readers, posters, a number of CD-ROMs and the development of a website to support professional learning and provide extra teaching and learning materials (the *Discovering Democracy* units are presented in Tables 3.2 and 3.3, pp. 32-33);
 - funding for professional development programmes in all states and territories; and
 - a programme of national activities that included funding for principal, parent, academic and key learning area groups, as well as the initiation of Celebrating Democracy Week and the National Schools Constitutional Convention.
- 3.11 The programme was intended to lay the foundations for ongoing civics and citizenship education across a range of education sectors: schools, higher education, adult and community education, and vocational education and training institutions.
- 3.12 A further \$4.9 million over four years was allocated to civics and citizenship education in 2004.⁸ While new resources are no longer

7 Mellor, S., K. Kennedy, and L. Greenwood, 2001, *Citizenship and Democracy: Students Knowledge and Beliefs, Australian Fourteen Year Olds and the IEA Civic Education Study*, p. 7; Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs, 2006, *National Assessment Program: Civics and Citizenship Years 6 and 10 Report 2004*, pp. 3-4.

8 Department of Education, Science and Training, *Submission no. 100*, p. 26.

produced,⁹ the initiative continues, through Celebrating Democracy Week, the school grants programme and the National Forum for Civics and Citizenship Education held in Canberra in early June.¹⁰

Table 3.2 Discovering Democracy—primary school units

	Middle Primary	Upper Primary
<i>Themes</i>		
Who rules?	Stories of the People and Rulers Who rules? Should one person rule? Should the people rule? Who rules in Australia? ⁱ How should a nation be ruled?	Parliament versus Monarch What does it mean to have absolute power? What is a parliament? ⁱⁱ What is the difference between 'divine right' and 'citizen's right'? How has the power moved from the monarch to the people? How does Australian parliamentary democracy reflect its British inheritance? ⁱⁱⁱ
Law and rights	Rules and Laws Why do we need rules and laws? What is a rule and what is a law? Why should laws apply equally and be public? What are Aboriginal laws? How are laws made in Australia? What makes a good law?	The Law Rules How do you get a fair trial? Who makes the law? ^{iv} Should the courts be independent? Should people be equal before the law? How does the law rule in Australia today?
The Australian Nation	We remember Which symbols do Australians use to show who they are and what they value? Which symbols represent our democratic nation? ^v How do we commemorate significant events and lives in Australia? How and why have the symbols and events changed over the years? Which symbols and events are relevant to the Australian nation today?	The People Make a Nation Was Australia always organised in states and territories? What were the arguments for and against Federation? How did the people make the nation? How does the Australian federal system of government work? ^{vi}

Source: *Discovering Democracy Units*, <<http://www.curriculum.edu.au/ddunits/units/units.htm>>.

- i Representative democracy; Australian government
- ii Introducing parliament; Westminster system
- iii Australia's system of government
- iv Law making in a parliamentary democracy
- v Parliamentary symbols
- vi Levels of government; structure of federal system; people in parliament

9 When Erebus Consulting evaluated the *Discovering Democracy* roll out for a second time in 2003, it found that there was 'no demand for new curriculum resources'. See Department of Education, Science and Training, *Submission no. 100*, p. 21.

10 Department of Education, Science and Training, *Submission no. 100*, p. 26.

Table 3.3 Discovering Democracy—secondary school units

	Lower Secondary	Middle Secondary
<i>Themes</i>		
Who rules?	Should the People Rule? Who rules us? ⁱ What are the main types of government? What was it like to live in a democracy in ancient Athens? How do the people rule in Australia? ⁱⁱ	Parties Control Parliament What role do political parties have in parliament and government? ⁱⁱⁱ Who do Australia's political parties represent? ^{iv} How do parties select policies and campaign for government? ^v
Law and rights	Law Why do we need laws? What are the sources of Australian law? How do we make laws today? ^{ix} Who has the final say about laws in Australia? ^x How does Australia's legal system attempt to ensure fairness and to protect people?	A Democracy Destroyed What are the features of a healthy democracy? How and why was democracy lost in Germany in 1933? Which people resisted the Nazis? What are the key features of a democracy and how did the Nazis take them away? How is democracy in Australia protected? ^{vi} Human Rights What are human rights? Where did human rights come from? Where have Australians' human rights come from and how are they protected? ^{vii} What is Australia's record on Indigenous people's rights? ^{viii}
The Australian Nation	Democratic Struggles What is democracy and what was Australia like before we had it? ^{xi} How did democracy develop in Britain? What influence did the Chartists have on the goldfields and did the struggle at Eureka contribute to the establishment of democracy in Australia? To what extent and when were the Chartists' six points achieved in Australia? Why didn't all adults get the vote at Federation and how did those excluded work to achieve it? ^{xii}	Making a Nation Why do people decide that governments should federate? ^{xiii} How do you make a federation work? ^{xiv} Why do federations break apart? ^{xv} Should Australia become a republic? What Sort of Nation? What sort of nation has Australia been? What sort of nation is it today? How has immigration shaped the kind of nation we are? How do economic factors shape and reflect the kind of nation we are? What responsibilities do individuals, communities and governments have for the welfare of Australian citizens? ^{xvi} What kind of country do we want Australia to be?

Citizens and public life	Men and Women in Political Life	Getting Things Done
	What is 'political activity'?	How can Australian citizens influence government action?
	What can we learn from people who have worked in parliament? ^{xvii}	How do governments and political parties respond to new issues? ^{xviii}
	What can we learn from people who have worked outside parliament?	How can Australian citizens influence the media and how does the media influence governments and political parties? ^{xix}
		How are disputes between State and Federal governments resolved? ^{xx}

Source: *Discovering Democracy Units*, <<http://www.curriculum.edu.au/ddunits/units/units.htm>>.

- i Influencing government decisions in a democracy
- ii Representative democracy; Senate and House of Representatives; Preferential voting; Direct democracy in Australia
- iii Public opinion of political parties; Political parties; Functions of political parties; Forming governments; Reasons for having political parties; Party discipline
- iv Australia's political parties 'Left' and 'right'; the 1949 election campaign; The middle ground
- v The 1972 election campaign: media; polls; issues
- vi Democratic principles in Australia and elsewhere today; Reflection on democracy in Australia and its destruction in Germany
- vii Rights established in Australian Constitution; Acts of Parliament (including role of Ombudsman and Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission) and court rulings
- viii Changes to laws and establishment of new laws to protect human rights of Indigenous people
- ix The law-making process
- x Introduction of constitutional rule-making powers; Our Constitution
- xi Introduction to key elements of democracy
- xii Why women didn't have the vote; Methods used by women to gain the vote; Why some Aboriginal people lost the vote following Federation; Aboriginal people's struggles for full citizenship status; The 1967 Referendum; A timeline of Aboriginal people's achievement of the right to vote
- xiii Federation: arguments for and against
- xiv Australian and United States constitutions; Reasons why the Australian Constitution does not include a Bill of Rights; The balance of power between Commonwealth and State and Territory governments
- xv WA votes to secede
- xvi Individual and government responsibilities
- xvii The lives of Chifley and Menzies; A day in the life of a contemporary Australian prime minister; Qualities and attributes required for the position of Prime Minister; The lives of Goldstein and Cowan; Milestones in the achievement of women's political rights in Australia; Comparison of the current leaders of the Liberal Party of Australia and the Australian Labor Party with Chifley and Menzies; Representation of women in current Australian parliaments
- xviii *Definitions:* political parties and public policy; Definition and comparison: party policy, public policy, political values and power; Description: the political values of the Labor and Liberal parties; Comparison of Labor and Liberal; States' rights and central power; Making public policy: parliament, interest groups, the public service, and the media; Timeline: development of the Franklin dam issue; National versus Tasmanian opinion.
- xix Interest groups, political parties and the media
- xx Tasmania and the Commonwealth lock horns: Australia: a Federation of States

3.13 In April 1999, MCEETYA met in Adelaide to endorse a new set of National Goals for Schooling in the 21st century.

3.14 The National Goals include an emphasis on educating students to understand their role in Australia's democracy and made explicit the expectation that students, when they leave school:

- be active and informed citizens with an understanding and appreciation of Australia's system of government and civic life (Goal 1.4); and

- have the capacity to exercise judgement and responsibility in matters of morality, ethics and social justice, and the capacity to make sense of their world, to think about how things got to be the way they are, to make rational and informed decisions about their own lives, and to accept responsibility for their own actions (Goal 1.3).
- 3.15 Since the *Discovering Democracy* initiative and the publication of the National Goals, all states and territories have recognised that civics and citizenship education is central to effective schooling and have incorporated civics and citizenship education into their curriculum documents and school practices.

Lessons learned from the implementation of civics and citizenship programmes

- 3.16 Evidence to the Committee elicited the following major 'lessons learned' from the implementation of civics and citizenship education in Australian schools to date:
- given the significant discrepancy in the subjects in which civics and citizenship is taught across the states and territories, a more concerted, coordinated approach is required;
 - civics and electoral education can (and should) be taught from primary school up;
 - more needs to be done to explicitly link the goals of civic knowledge and civic engagement and that this is especially required at senior secondary level;
 - continuing professional development for teachers is essential;
 - there should be variety in the source material used to teach civics and electoral education;
 - while links exist between civics, Australian history and values education curricula, often these are not clearly defined for teachers;
 - parents provide an important reinforcement of civics lessons; and
 - outside school activities stimulate greater civic awareness, knowledge and engagement.
- 3.17 Each of these 'lessons' is elaborated in the following sections.

Requiring a more coordinated approach across states and territories

- 3.18 At present, state and territory governments are responsible for the development and implementation of primary and secondary school curricula. Civics and citizenship is therefore taught through different subjects in the various states and territories. For example:
- in the Australian Capital Territory, civics and citizenship education can be integrated through the ACT Studies of Society and Environment (SOSE) framework, all the Key Learning Areas and the ACT Essential Learnings which have been developed for the ACT High Schools Development Project;¹¹
 - in New South Wales, civics and citizenship is part of the Human Society and Its Environment (HSIE) K-6 primary school syllabus and the secondary History and Geography Years 7-10 syllabuses, with a mandatory test of Australian Geography, History, Civics and Citizenship being part of the NSW School Certificate for all Year 10 students;¹²
 - in the Northern Territory, Civics, Governance and Social Justice is incorporated into the learning area of SOSE, which also incorporates the disciplines of History, Geography, Politics, Economics, Business and Careers;¹³
 - in Queensland, *Discovering Democracy* is implemented across the curriculum in subjects including SOSE, history, business studies, English and Technology;
 - in South Australia, Civics and Citizenship education is incorporated into Society and Environment Studies and Legal and Political Studies in the South Australian Curriculum Framework;
 - in Tasmania, Civics and Citizenship is incorporated into the Essential Learnings Curriculum of Society and Environment Studies, which itself is inter-disciplinary;
 - in Victoria, Civics and Citizenship was a cross-curriculum priority in the Victorian Curriculum and Standards Framework. Cross-curriculum emphases are seen in key learning areas including Health and Physical

11 Civics and Citizenship in the ACT, available online at: <http://activated.det.act.gov.au/learning/civics/index.htm>. Accessed 30 February 2007.

12 NSW Cabinet Office, *Submission no. 10*, p. 2.

13 Studies of Society and Environment Learning Area. Available online: available online at: http://www.deet.nt.gov.au/education/ntcf/docs/learning_areas_soc_env.pdf. Accessed 6 February 2006.

Education (outdoor education), Science (acting responsibly) and English (discussion of contemporary social and political issues). Under the new Victorian Essential Learning Standards (implemented from 2007), schools will be required to report against defined standards for civics and citizenship;¹⁴ and

- Civics and Citizenship is a cross-curriculum priority in the Western Australian Curriculum and Standards Framework, with particular focus on civic responsibility and social competence in the Society and Learning area.

3.19 Dr Bede Harris submitted that while 'all states and territories include at least some civics-related subject matter as part of the syllabus... the depth of coverage of civics varies from jurisdiction to jurisdiction, and even from school to school.'¹⁵ In many respects, this is why the MCEETYA Report uncovered that:

The delivery of instruction in civics and citizenship was fragmented and marked by a lack of formality. The definitions associated with certain key concepts were not generally agreed across the jurisdictions, nor was their appearance in formal curriculum documents universal. The year levels at which some treatment of these concepts and knowledge was to be undertaken, how much time was to be spent on the teaching of civics and citizenship and within which key learning areas have been matters for debate during recent developments. These issues had a significant influence on what students were taught and could learn at school.¹⁶

3.20 For a number of submitters, the decline in interested students has led to calls for a more comprehensive approach to the implementation of civics and citizenship in Australia. Dr Harris, for example, noted that:

The ability of the Commonwealth to fund projects in the States by means of tied grants provides an opportunity for the Commonwealth to be proactive in this regard, by granting supplementary funds to the States, on condition that such funds

14 Department of Education and Training Victoria, *Transcript of Evidence*, 21 August 2006, p. 2.

15 Dr Bede Harris, *Submission no. 4*, p. 2.

16 Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs, 2006, *National Assessment Program: Civics and Citizenship Years 6 and 10 Report 2004*, pp. 3-4.

are used to include at least a core element of the *Discovering Democracy* programme in school curricula.¹⁷

3.21 Dr Phillips suggested a voluntary Civics (Citizenship) Certificate, that:

...would be available to all, but particularly youth, who could satisfy an examination which includes the rudiments of government, the operation of the voting system and the judicial structure. This course would be in the context of Australian values and include avenues for 'reflective' engagement. This Civics course outline should be brief. It would be necessary to appoint a well qualified advisory committee to undertake the task.¹⁸

3.22 Other submitters were more comfortable in asserting the need for a mandatory civics curriculum.¹⁹ On the understanding that with the exception of NSW, civics remains a discretionary unit of school curricula, the Northern Territory Electoral Commission submitted that:

The delivery of electoral education through schools will never be really consistent and effective unless it is made mandatory in the school curriculum. At the moment, schools are under a great deal of pressure to include non-core education items in school time and electoral education, whilst undoubtedly deemed important, simply does not currently rate with other competing priorities with many decision makers in the education fraternity.²⁰

3.23 The Committee did hear certain reservations, however, on making civics compulsory. Education coordinator Ms Lorraine Caldwell, for example, stated:

In principle, yes, because I think it is really important, but in practice... who is actually going to deliver it, is it going to be delivered by the teachers in the schools or are groups, such as parliaments and the electoral commissions, going to get together and create and deliver the programme? It is all very well to say, 'Let's make it compulsory.' In principle I would agree with that – I think it is important that the students have that sort of background – but it comes down to delivery: who is actually going to deliver it?... If we made it compulsory without having all those

17 Dr Bede Harris, *Submission no. 4*, pp. 2-3. See also, Human Rights and Equal Opportunities Commission, *Submission no. 34*, pp. 6-7.

18 Dr Harry Phillips, *Submission no. 22*, p. 4.

19 See, for example, Western Australian Electoral Commission, *Submission no. 12*, p. 8; Dr Aborjsen *et al.*, *Submission no. 21*, p. 3; Ms Jane Gray, *Submission no. 68*, p. 1.

20 Northern Territory Electoral Commission, *Submission no. 98*, p. 6.

basics organised – what is the content of the programme, what are the outcomes – and having all those established first, you would probably have the negative effect. If teachers have to teach it and do not really want to teach it... or they do not understand it, then you could actually end up with a worse problem on your hands as far as cynicism is concerned.²¹

- 3.24 Even where civics is currently considered a 'compulsory component' of the Year 10 school certificate curriculum (as is the case in New South Wales), challenges in teaching the subject persist. As Ms Julie Parker explained:

...[students] are given only 400 hours in which to do it from [Years] 7 to 10. It is up to the school how it approaches those 400 hours, as long as it is done from 7 to 10. There is a certain amount in what we call stage 4, which is 7 and 8, and a required 100 hours in history and a required 100 hours in geography in stage 5, which is 9 and 10. Within those times, they have to cover the mandatory syllabus. It is very overcrowded as far as history and geography are concerned, because they are joined as one. There is only 100 hours given to history and 100 hours given to geography, whereas science would have the 200 hours together. So it is a very crowded curriculum and it is very hard to get through it.²²

- 3.25 It was therefore suggested that the Commonwealth had a major role to play in facilitating a more comprehensive approach to civics and citizenship. Dr Harris, for example, submitted that, given the great variance in the teaching of civics across the states and territories:

...as a first step towards achieving uniformity, it would be useful if the Commonwealth funded research on civics education as it is currently delivered and on how it could be made uniform both in breadth and in content.²³

- 3.26 In August 2006, MCEETYA released its National Statements of Learning for Civics and Citizenship to be implemented by all states and territories by 2008. The National Statements of Learning are a clear attempt to systematise the curricula used to teach students in all states and territories across five main areas, namely English, Science, Mathematics, Civics and

21 Ms Loraine Caldwell and Mrs Julie Hearnden, *Transcript of Evidence*, 20 November 2006, p. 23.

22 Ms Julie Parker, Deputy Principal, Sir Joseph Banks High School, *Transcript of Evidence*, 29 September 2006, p. 18.

23 Dr Bede Harris, *Submission no. 4*, pp. 2-3.

Citizenship and Information and Communication Technologies. Statements of Learning have been developed for Years 3, 5, 7 and 9.

- 3.27 While the Statements do not represent the totality of the curriculum, states and territories are expected to use these as core curriculum opportunities for all students. States and territories may add to the statements, but not 'delete'.²⁴
- 3.28 Mr Simpson, from the Department of Education, Science and Training, noted that the Australian Government was beginning to exert a little more influence, in the form of 'conditions of funding', on state and territory education curricula. He noted:

In the current quadrennium funding that the Australian government gives to education authorities for schools, for the first time with this quadrennium, 2005-08, a number of conditions have been applied to that funding, such as the use of plain English report cards and so on. You are probably aware that at the Australian history summit, which the Minister held in August, there was a call from the summitters in the communiqué to make Australian history a compulsory stand-alone subject in years 9 and 10. That in effect is a recommendation to government. Government will need to consider the normal mechanism for something to be done about that, if something is to be done about it, in the quadrennium beginning in January 2009.²⁵

Committee comment

- 3.29 The Committee supports the National Statements of Learning for Civics and Citizenship produced by MCEETYA. MCEETYA's work in this area has revealed that the 'delivery of instruction in civics and citizenship was fragmented and marked by a lack of formality.' It is essential that there be progress in ameliorating the deficits identified by MCEETYA. The States and Territories are encouraged to deliver learning objectives identified by MCEETYA as quickly as possible.

24 Mr Noel Simpson (Department of Education, Science and Training), *Transcript of Evidence*, 7 August 2006, p. 8. The National Statements of Learning for Civics and Citizenship are available online at: <http://www.mceetya.edu.au/verve/_resources/Civics_SOL06.pdf>. Accessed 30 January 2007.

25 Mr Noel Simpson (Department of Education, Science and Training), *Transcript of Evidence*, 4 December 2006, p. 22.

Civics and electoral education can begin at primary school

- 3.30 Submissions were generally in favour of beginning civics education 'earlier rather than later':²⁶ As the WA Government noted:

It is the belief of the Constitutional Centre and its Advisory Board that civics education cannot start too early. The Constitutional Centre has developed a programme for Years 1 to 3 called Larfalot's Letter. This is a big book story about an imaginary Australian town and how it uses democratic processes to elect representatives to develop a constitution for the town. With the aid of puppets, students become the characters in the story, hold an election, identify the problems that need to be solved and develop a constitution or set of rules for the town.²⁷

- 3.31 There are several advantages, as expressed in these submissions, to starting civics and electoral education at primary school level. In the first instance, given the different approaches to class timetables in primary and secondary schools, there are considerably more opportunities for primary teachers to 'weave' civics and electoral education into their daily lessons.²⁸

- 3.32 For example, in their presentation to the Committee, the students of Rosetta Primary School, in Hobart, explained that they had participated in mock UN Assemblies, World Vision global leadership conferences and had been involved in local government programmes such as precinct meetings.²⁹ The students of Hambleton State School, in Cairns, were very well versed in parliamentary practices, using weekly class parliaments to decide on any arising classroom issues.³⁰

- 3.33 Second, the Australian Centre for Educational Studies submitted that:

26 See, for example, Mr Ian Martin, *Submission no. 8*, p. 1, Mr David Westaway, *Submission no. 9*, p. 1; Western Australian Electoral Commission, *Submission no. 12*, p. 9, the Australian Centre for Education Studies, *Submission no. 19*; and Ms Yvonne Goudie, *Submission no. 27*. A notable exception was that of the Civil Liberties Australia (ACT Branch) which argued that 'Electoral education should begin at 17 years 9 months in most circumstances, but only... where an election is in the offing. Electoral education is a waste of time and effort if there is no immediate practical focus on electoral involvement', *Submission no. 53*, p. 4.

27 Government of Western Australia, *Submission no. 13*, p. 2.

28 Senior secondary school students have the option to elect subjects. It was submitted that one of the difficulties arising from the secondary school class timetable is that the number of students electing to take politics or legal studies classes has continued to decline over a period of 20 years, see Mr Glenn Marchant, *Submission no. 2*, p. 1.

29 See *Transcript of Evidence*, 31 August 2006, pp. 26-28.

30 See *Transcript of Evidence*, 24 October 2006, pp. 5-9.

Research evidence indicates that children form values at an early age and prior to commencing formal education. They are influenced by family and community attitudes and experiences. Therefore it is considered appropriate that civics and electoral education begin in the early years of primary schooling. In recognition of this formative process students should engage in teaching and learning activities in developing a critical awareness of issues related to citizenship and participation in civic life and an understanding of democratic processes.³¹

3.34 The students of Monbulk Primary, in Melbourne's outskirts, demonstrated their ability to learn and grasp such civic values when they recited key events in Australia's democratic history, including the Eureka Stockade, the date and meaning of Federation, the significance of the First and Second World Wars and distinctions in Australia's three tiers of government.³²

3.35 Third, educators have found that teaching younger students can be easier because of their higher levels of enthusiasm and participation. Educators at the ACT Legislative Assembly, for example, found that:

The level of enthusiasm and interest in exploring aspects of the democratic process seems to vary more widely amongst students in high school and college. Students with an interest in politics or debating tend to be the ones who participate in the specialised programmes run by the Assembly for students in years 8 -11 such as the Interschool Debates Programme and the A.C.T. Schools Constitutional Convention.³³

3.36 The students of Al Zahra College in Sydney demonstrated high levels of enthusiasm and were keen to demonstrate to the Committee their knowledge of Australia's political system, including the political parties and tiers of government, and the values underpinning our society.³⁴

3.37 Once primary school students' imaginations are caught, however, educators emphasised the need for continuing education. In a survey conducted by the WA Electoral Commission (WAEC), one primary school teacher noted that students 'know what is taught when it is taught, but do

31 Australian Centre for Educational Studies, *Submission no. 19*, p. 1.

32 See *Transcript of Evidence*, 22 August 2006, pp. 12-14.

33 ACT Legislative Assembly, *Submission no. 14*, p. 3.

34 See *Transcript of Evidence*, 29 September 2006.

not retain it unless a continuous programme is developed and worked on.³⁵

Civic knowledge and civic engagement

3.38 A number of submissions pointed to a lack of civic skills amongst young people or a capacity to translate civic knowledge into action.³⁶ In this respect, two elements appear to be missing from the civics curriculum, particularly at the senior secondary level:

- first, the basic tenets of electoral education; and
- second, mechanisms by which to contribute to the political process, namely through political parties.

3.39 In relation to electoral education, the WAEC reported on the findings of its survey of teachers using the Commission as a resource for the learning outcome Society and Environment. The Commission noted that:

Of those surveyed, the adequacy of electoral education in the schools was seen to be dependent on such initiatives as that of the Commission in providing a resource in this arena.³⁷

3.40 As indicated above, secondary schools attribute this to what is known as the 'crowded curriculum', particularly pertinent during the final years of school (11 and 12).³⁸

3.41 However, Goudie and others submitted that electoral education is best conducted in the context of a civics and citizenship programme.³⁹ Moreover, Year 11 and 12 students require a specific electoral focus given that they are closest to the voting age.

3.42 Both the Australian Electoral Commission (AEC) and the Victorian Electoral Commission (VEC) submitted that a course unit on electoral education should therefore be developed for implementation at senior secondary school level:

35 Western Australian Electoral Commission, *Submission no. 12*, p. 9. See also Ms Yvonne Goudie, *Submission no. 27*.

36 See for example Ms Sandra Kenman (Australian Federation of Societies for Studies of Society and Environment), *Transcript of Evidence*, 4 December 2006, pp. 34-35.

37 Western Australian Electoral Commission, *Submission no. 12*, p. 9. See also Parliamentary Education and Community Relations Section, Parliament of NSW, *Submission no. 16*, p. 2.

38 Western Australian Electoral Commission, *Submission no. 12*, p. 9.

39 Ms Yvonne Goudie, *Submission no. 27*, p. 2.

It is a matter of concern to the AEC that there appears in most States and Territories to be a significant time lag between the point at which students encounter CCE, and the point at which they become eligible to enrol and later vote. This time lag cannot but decrease the salience for the students of messages encouraging their participation in elections; particularly given that the “electoral” component of the CCE curriculum is but one element of a substantial body of learning. One way of addressing this problem, in the AEC’s view, would be the development of an “electoral education” course unit - not necessarily requiring more than two one-hour classes - which could be delivered to year 11 students (most of whom would be turning 17 close to the time at which they took part in the classes). The content of such a unit would need to reflect the distinctive electoral arrangements in each State and Territory... the AEC could seek to pursue it in consultation with its State and Territory counterparts, and with the relevant educational authorities.⁴⁰

3.43 A second concern raised during the inquiry related to young people’s limited understanding of how they could translate concern with issues into action. Most notably, it was submitted that while the curriculum describes the formal structures – the parliament, the chambers of the parliament, the role of the cabinet and so forth – the curriculum does not sufficiently describe the way in which Australian democracy actually works, in particular through the political parties. The *Discovering Democracy* National Sample Survey conducted in 1999 found that students were not ‘well informed of the political parties’.⁴¹

3.44 Students did not disagree with this statement:

I think in schools, in my experience, what we have really been learning is about the system: yes, there is the lower house and then the upper house, and how a bill gets passed. But there is only a limited time in schools, and so a limit on what you can learn about, and I think it is more important that we understand our part in democracy more than the whole overall system. We really need to know about the parties and what they stand for and how we can take our place, rather than how the system works, because

40 Australian Electoral Commission, *Submission no. 72*, p. 11. The Victorian Electoral Commission also submitted that students could have a ‘Passport to Democracy’ to be stamped each time a student progresses from one stage to another. See *Submission no. 36*, p. 17.

41 See Department of Education, Science and Training, *Submission no. 100*, Attachment E, p. 3.

if we do not know about that it is still going to work, but if we do not know about our role it is not going to work.⁴²

- 3.45 Teachers who spoke with the Committee were also not averse to teaching the philosophies of the political parties, although, in the Northern Territory, it was noted that on occasions, it can be the parents who find this subject matter confronting:

We were at a parents group meeting last week and we were briefing parents on what we are teaching students about statehood. There was a comment by a parent who was quite cynical about what we were doing. The parent said, 'Next thing you'll want us to do is have the Labor Party in here telling students what Labor Party policy is.' My thought was: 'Yes, why not? And then we could have the Coalition and so on.' But there was resistance. There was a lot of reluctance from parents thinking that we were propagandising to their children to some extent.⁴³

- 3.46 While political parties are currently included in the *Discovering Democracy* curriculum, it was evident that certain teachers may find this area more challenging to teach.

Continuing professional development for teachers

- 3.47 Teacher enthusiasm is one of the most important factors in implementing civics and citizenship in schools. Where passion for the subject matter is evident in the teacher, that passion is often replicated in the students.
- 3.48 It is clear from evidence to the Committee, however, that teaching civics and electoral education can be quite difficult, especially for young and/or new teachers.⁴⁴ It was submitted that the difficulty stems from teachers' generally low levels of knowledge about the subject matter itself, and therefore, a lack of confidence in teaching it. As one passionate teacher from Western Australia noted:

...most teachers do not even know about the Australian Constitution. They do not know what it is. They would not even know where to begin teaching it. In my experience, I have actually

42 Ms Alice Hudson (Canberra Forum), *Transcript of Evidence*, 19 October 2006, p. 21.

43 Mr Michael Tatham, *Transcript of Evidence*, 20 November 2006, p. 27.

44 In informal discussions with Australian Electoral Commission staff from Western Australia, for example, the Committee was advised that it is often young teachers, with generally no teaching experience, who are sent to remote communities. It was submitted that these teachers are generally 'ill-equipped' to teach civics and electoral education, especially when little of this subject matter is covered in pre-service university courses.

sat and delivered a kind of theory to teachers just to give them the confidence to feel that they can walk into a classroom and talk very confidently about the subject matter...⁴⁵

3.49 The Australian Education Union's submission cited research pointing to teachers' low understanding and interest in both electoral and civics education.⁴⁶ The Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission's *Rights of Passage* report similarly found that the degree of civic knowledge in young people varies greatly because, among other things, 'it is largely up to the discretion of the individual teachers whether or not to teach civics.'⁴⁷

3.50 Inevitably, in a 'crowded curriculum' environment, this lack of confidence and interest means that teachers tend to teach what they know:

...teachers certainly do not have the confidence that they would have in subjects in which they obviously did their studies. When you are confronted with some of the students that we have, it is much better to be dealing with something that you feel confident in so that you feel you have some control over that, if you are struggling with control of the kids.

...People take refuge in what they are familiar with. The NT framework is very broad and you cannot hope to do everything that is in it; it is just overwhelming. You have to make decisions and, of course, people tend to make decisions that support their understanding and strengths rather than decisions that perhaps do not.⁴⁸

3.51 The VEC submitted that teachers' level of confidence in teaching civics and electoral education was also related to the 'changing resourcing levels in schools'. Ms Lang, the VEC's Manager of Communication, Education and Research, explained that:

Teachers come in to teach a course that they perhaps have not taught before, so their level of confidence is quite low. They are not quite sure what the students have learnt to that point and, therefore, the temptation, if they have the opportunity, is to go with something that they know. That tends to be something that is not civics and citizenship; it might be something like SOSE – social

45 Mrs Melissa Rasmussen, *Transcript of Evidence*, 23 October 2006, p. 37.

46 The Australian Education Union's Submission (no. 48, p. 12) cites research by Prior (2005) and the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement study.

47 Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, *Submission no. 34*, pp. 4-5.

48 Ms Anne Channing, *Transcript of Evidence*, 28 July 2006, p. 3.

education – et cetera. Civics and citizenship tend to suffer somewhat from this effect.⁴⁹

- 3.52 Unlike the teaching of mathematics or science, for example, teachers of civics and citizenship often have no formal training. In fact, the 1999 evaluation of *Discovering Democracy* found that 70 per cent of teachers did no professional development in this subject area.⁵⁰ This being the case, it was suggested that professional development is essential and should include opportunities to network with other civics and citizenship teachers to facilitate the sharing of teaching experiences/practices.
- 3.53 It was further submitted that the absence of formal training cannot (and, indeed, should not) be compensated by the production of manuals and 'resource kits'. As Ms Goudie stated:
- There is evidence from Australia and overseas that confirms that the training of staff who are implementing CCE [civics and citizenship] and EE [electoral education] programmes is vital. Whilst it is tempting for CCE/EE providers to produce 'glossy' materials (in an attempt to satisfy the desired 'outcomes' of funders & policy-makers), it is not an effective strategy (and ultimately a waste of money). The intrinsic value of training (and professional development programmes) cannot be over-stated.⁵¹
- 3.54 Electoral education is considered especially challenging to teach because teachers are often not familiar with electoral systems and processes.⁵² To this end, the VEC submitted that 'teachers are not confident in teaching something they don't fully understand'.⁵³ Electoral education officers often remarked on the benefit teachers derived from school visits to their education centres and their programmes.⁵⁴
- 3.55 In many respects, federal and state/territory electoral commissions and parliamentary education offices are the specialist agencies in this field of education. The Australian Federation of Societies for Studies of Society and Environment submitted that teachers would welcome the involvement of these agencies in the delivery of civics and electoral education, although it also submitted that 'train the trainer' type courses

49 Victorian Electoral Commission, *Transcript of Evidence*, 21 August 2006, p. 4.

50 Department of Education, Science and Training, *Submission no. 100*, p. 20.

51 Ms Yvonne Goudie, *Submission no. 27*, p. 3.

52 See Dr Murray Print and Dr Lawrence Saha, *Transcript of Evidence*, 7 August 2006, p. 56.

53 Victorian Electoral Commission, *Transcript of Evidence*, 21 August 2006, p. 2.

54 See *Transcripts of Evidence: Elections ACT* (11 August 2006), Victorian Electoral Commission (21 August 2006), Western Australian Electoral Commission (21 September 2006).

would be very effective, 'along with suggestions for practical activities and case studies to inspire discussion and individual student learning'.⁵⁵

- 3.56 Recently, the Parliamentary Education Office (PEO) has targeted pre-service teachers studying in university towards a teaching qualification. In its submission to this inquiry, the PEO stated that it:

...establishes parliamentary programs in local schools for these pre-service teachers, in their internship, to learn how to use the Parliament as a teaching methodology. The following year the interns take this practical teaching strategy with them into their first classroom.⁵⁶

- 3.57 The WA PEO similarly reported on a series of workshops it has been running for second and third year education students. The WA PEO stated:

These workshops introduce pre-service teachers to Civics and Citizenship Education exploring the ways in which citizenship education can be translated into effective classroom practice. Positive attitudes, ideas and strategies for future curriculum development are fostered in the area of Civics and Citizenship Education and pre-service teachers are encouraged to become informed, interested and actively involved in getting Civics and Citizenship Education into the classroom curriculum.⁵⁷

- 3.58 A number of these specialist agencies submitted that there should be greater collaboration between these bodies and education authorities, not only in the development of curriculum resources, but also in the provision of formal training for all civics teachers.⁵⁸ The ACT Legislative Assembly, for example, submitted that:

Learning by doing and seeing parliament in action is also extremely important for teachers, as it improves the quality of their teaching of the subject. The Assembly schedules two professional development days for teachers in A.C.T. government and non-government schools every year. The aim of these programmes is to promote knowledge of the electoral and

55 Australian Federation of Societies for Studies of Society and Environment, *Submission no. 25*, p. 5; see also Australian Catholic University, Faculty of Education, *Submission no. 90*.

56 Department of the Senate, *Submission no. 28*, p. 13.

57 Ms Jane Gray, *Submission no. 68*, p. 3.

58 See, for example, South Australian Electoral Office, *Submission no. 84*, Western Australian Electoral Commission, *Submission no. 12*, Victorian Electoral Commission, *Submission no. 36*. See also Australian Federation of Societies for Studies of Society and Environment, *Submission no. 25*, p. 5.

parliamentary process but also to provide teachers with additional resources and to increase their awareness of the range of programmes offered by the Assembly or Elections ACT.⁵⁹

- 3.59 A necessary part of professional development is teacher release. Teachers require time off in order to participate in their development courses and, for schools, this involves the organisation of a substitute teacher during school hours. Ms Goudie was concerned that the AEC's *Your Vote Counts* professional development programme no longer provides for teacher relief. In fact, the AEC's Annual Report indicates that in 2005-06, teachers only participated in an abridged version of the AEC course, rather than the two-day workshop it had previously provided.⁶⁰

Civics education requires a variety of source materials

- 3.60 While *Discovering Democracy* kits were distributed to all schools, the materials and resources have not always been considered an effective means by which to capture students' interest and engagement. As Mr Marchant submitted:

The *Discovering Democracy* kits that have been distributed to schools are, to be frank, both 'a hit and a miss'. I say this because, although the material itself is important, the presentation: a constant stream of handouts and folders in green packs, lacked the capacity to have an impact with many (most?) teachers and students and, I suspect, most are simply gathering dust in a storeroom somewhere.⁶¹

- 3.61 The second evaluation of the programme found that the *Discovering Democracy* kits were more often used as a 'set of resources to be "dipped into" on an as required basis' and very rarely taught in totality.⁶² As Ms Caldwell noted:

Kids who are visual learners need to see things in a visual context; others need to have stories that they can relate to... The key to it is that you do not just have one kitbag that you take out; you have several kitbags that you are delving into, depending on your audience, because one size does not fit all. It just depends on the learning styles of the kids and the age group. You really have to cater to that. You cannot just have text based materials, you cannot

59 Speaker of the ACT Legislative Assembly, *Submission no. 14*, p. 4

60 Australian Electoral Commission, *Annual Report 2005-06*, p. 92.

61 Mr Glenn Marchant, *Submission no. 2*, p. 3.

62 Department of Education, Science and Training, *Submission no. 100*, p. 21.

just have picture based materials and you cannot just have factuials: sometimes you have to use a bit of fiction and weave it in. It is how you engage. That is why it is important to have educators involved in the teaching of civics and electoral education, because that is what we are trained to do – we are trained to engage kids.⁶³

- 3.62 For this reason, teachers often submitted that a variety of source materials should be used to engage students on civics issues. Most commonly, teachers cited Australian narratives and inspiring stories in engaging their students:

I firmly believe that students should be familiar with a range of inspirational political speakers; incorporating the words of historical and contemporary figures. This should include Australian speeches. A text such as *Well May We Say... The Speeches That Made Australia*, edited by Sally Warhaft, is an excellent resource that I use regularly in Politics and Australian History classes. Students should have an understanding of our cultural and political values including the evolution of our country through the views of our leaders.⁶⁴

We do not have revolutions. We have not had wars; we have not had civil wars. Dean Jaensch says that we have had two civil wars, one was called the Eureka Stockade and the other one was two Afghan camel drivers shooting at a train in the Northern Territory. You are fighting a historical event. It is up to the teachers in the classroom to make these events relevant to these young people coming through. If you go back over the last 20 years, with the number of committees such as yours that have come through, an enormous amount of money has been spent on resources which we as teachers cannibalise, plagiarise and use for our own programs.⁶⁵

- 3.63 In addition to these ‘inspiring narratives’, a number civics teachers surveyed in the IEA Civic Education Study also nominated “media: newspapers, magazines, television” as the “most important” resources available in teaching civics.⁶⁶

63 Ms Loraine Caldwell (Education Coordinator, NT Legislative Assembly), *Transcript of Evidence*, 20 November 2006, p. 22.

64 Mr Glenn Marchant, *Submission no. 2*, p. 4.

65 Mr Igor Plisko, *Transcript of Evidence*, 22 September 2006, p. 10. See also Mrs Melissa Rasmussen, *Transcript of Evidence*, 23 October 2006, p. 37.

66 Mellor, S., K. Kennedy, and L. Greenwood, 2001, *Citizenship and Democracy: Students Knowledge and Beliefs, Australian Fourteen Year Olds and the IEA Civic Education Study*, p. xxii.

- 3.64 Current events are seen as a 'way into' civics and citizenship education and a means by which to examine what is happening in the international context:

The Australian community is perhaps more interested now in civic values, national identity and our place in the world, than in the recent past... Events in both our national context and the international context, such as the Bali bombings, international terrorism, war in Afghanistan and Iraq, press home this point and highlight the importance of links to studies of Asia, learning about regional and global citizenship.⁶⁷

- 3.65 It was often remarked that teaching students about civil and electoral rights, for example, is best done in the context of examining the civil rights of citizens in less democratic, or developing, countries.⁶⁸

- 3.66 The role of television was also not to be underestimated in teaching civics.⁶⁹ Mr Tony Poynter, for example, referred to the ABC's production, *Behind the News (BTN)*, which he noted, examined issues according to a range of views.⁷⁰

- 3.67 It was argued, however, that with the exception of *BTN*, Australian television networks do not regularly produce programmes with educational content for children, specifically relevant to civics and electoral education.⁷¹ On this basis, the Australian Children's Television Foundation submitted that a dedicated, free-to-air, children's channel, as recently proposed by the Foundation to the Australian Government, would fill this gap.

- 3.68 Developing this variety of content material also requires cooperation and consultation between a variety of stakeholders. Specifically, it was suggested that greater consultation is required between education authorities and electoral commissions.⁷²

- 3.69 Teaching materials are also coming from relatively new sources. The Department of the House of Representatives, for example, recently began

67 Department of Education, Science and Training, *Submission no. 100*, p. 21.

68 See, for example, *Transcripts of Evidence*, Western Australian Electoral Commission, 21 September 2006 and Dr Bede Harris, 11 August 2006.

69 See Australian Children's Television Foundation, *Submission no. 82*, and Australian Catholic University, *Submission no. 90*, p. 1.

70 Mr Tony Poynter, *Transcript of Evidence*, 31 August 2006, p. 38. With respect to *Behind The News*, a student at the Adelaide forum stated that a version of the program that catered to 'teenagers' would also be welcome, see *Transcript of Evidence*, 22 September 2006, p. 4.

71 See Australian Children's Television Foundation, *Transcript of Evidence*, 21 August 2006, p. 51.

72 South Australian Electoral Office, *Submission no. 84*, p. 5.

producing an *About the House* segment for television, showcasing recent House and committee activities. This segment, aired at 3.15pm on Sky Television on Fridays of parliamentary sitting weeks, recently showed this Committee's visit to Melbourne High School, including interviews with the Chair, the students and their teachers. The Department's *About the House* magazine is also distributed to 501 school libraries in an effort to keep students up to date with the goings on of the House.⁷³ Teachers have indicated that the articles in this magazine are very useful as teaching aids. Parliaments, as a whole, have become more accessible institutions for both teachers and students through their websites, with webcasts and live RSS feeds, and education sections with content developed especially for schools.

Civics, values education and Australian History

3.70 Stemming from its initiatives in civics and citizenship education, the Australian Government has been concerned to ensure both values and Australian History hold a significant place in school curricula around the country. Some submitters saw an opportunity to teach these subject areas in a more coherent approach:

The *Discovering Democracy* initiative which grew from earlier concerns about civics and citizenship education was well funded by the Federal Government for a time but it ran out of steam, being taken over by [the] push for values education. The support for teachers and schools which came from *Discovering Democracy* should be renewed if our young people are to receive the civics education required to turn them into informed voters.⁷⁴

We believe that there has been a plethora of often disconnected education policy initiatives such as drug education, values education, boys' education and civics and citizenship. However, a more coherent approach to these initiatives is needed because we believe that many of these initiatives actually overlap. We need an overall coherent approach so that schools can gain maximum benefit of those initiatives.⁷⁵

73 Department of the House of Representatives, *Submission no. 108*, p. 2. The Department's original submission indicated that a number of teachers used the magazine in their classes. In response, the Department 'sent a copy of the magazine to all high schools in Australia, inviting them to join the magazine's mailing list.' *Submission no. 91*, p. 1.

74 Australian College of Educators, *Submission no. 10*, p. 3.

75 Association of Independent Schools South Australia, *Transcript of Evidence*, 22 September 2006, p. 2.

- 3.71 There are strong links between civics and citizenship education, and both values education and Australian History. The SA Electoral Office submitted that civics should be understood as part of Australian history, and as being entrenched in particular values.⁷⁶
- 3.72 Mr Marchant was strongly in favour of making the links between civics and values education much clearer. In his view, civics is not value-neutral:
- There has been a lot of debate about Australian values. I would like to strongly endorse the idea that we must, as a nation, have a clear set of core values... I would point out that the Australian Constitution, political institutions, culture and history, as well as political conventions have contributed to core values. These include: a secular society, democracy (with rights and responsibilities), the rule of law, freedom and human rights...⁷⁷
- 3.73 Accepting that Australian democracy is not value-neutral, a number of teachers were supportive of the use of critical analysis as a basic pedagogy for civics and citizenship education. Teachers acknowledged that students required a level of critical literacy in determining their own thoughts and opinions about the subject matter they learned in class.⁷⁸

School governance

- 3.74 Research presented to the Committee revealed that students' experience of school governance can shape their views on elections and democracy outside school and can also have a strong impact on their levels of civic knowledge.
- 3.75 The Youth Electoral Study project, for instance, found that student government (either voting or standing for office) is positively related to the intention to vote in federal elections.⁷⁹ The authors noted:
- Insofar as schools do have student governments of one form or another, and they have elections to determine which students hold office in those governments, then the failure to hold proper democratic elections, and the failure to treat the student governments seriously, represents a serious missed opportunity.

76 South Australian Electoral Office, *Submission no. 84* and see also, Australian Catholic University, Faculty of Education, *Submission no. 90*.

77 Mr Glenn Marchant, *Submission no. 2*, p. 4.

78 See Melbourne High School, *Transcript of Evidence*, 22 August 2006 and Ms Leslie McFarlane (Queensland Teachers' Union), *Transcript of Evidence*, 23 October 2006, pp. 9-10.

79 Print, M., L. Saha and K. Edwards, 2005, *Youth Electoral Study 2: Youth, Political Engagement and Voting*, Australian Electoral Commission, p. 22.

That the experience of democracy can be a more important agent of political learning than the academic knowledge about democracy suggests that some practices in some schools at least, may be undermining efforts to effectively produce active and participatory adult citizens.⁸⁰

- 3.76 The 2006 MCEETYA Report found that there is an 'association between being in a school that provides opportunities for participation in governance and civics achievement scores amongst Year 10 students.'⁸¹ Opportunities described in the report include those reported in Table 3.4.

Table 3.4 Opportunities for participation in civics-related activities at school, by year level

At my school ...	Year 6 'Yes'	Year 10 'Yes'
	%	%
Students vote for class representatives	77	63
Students are represented on student councils	81	93
Student representatives contribute to decision making	85	92
Students can help prepare a school paper or magazine	56	75
Students can participate in peer support programs	90	80
Students can participate in activities in the community	84	93
Students can participate in activities outside the classroom	97	97

Source: Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs, 2006, *National Assessment Program: Civics and Citizenship Years 6 and 10 Report 2004*, p. 74

- 3.77 Many submissions were therefore supportive of integrating civics lessons with other areas of school activity, or as Ms Yvonne Goudie phrased it, integrating 'civic knowledge' with 'civic dispositions' and 'civic skills'. She considered the most effective civics programmes to be those containing each of these three elements and which are used in both:

- formal instruction in schools and other community programmes; and
- the informal school setting or 'hidden curriculum' (the informal curriculum refers to the governance of the school community and relationships among those within it). These relationships should embody the fundamental values and principles of constitutional democracy – 'schools should be managed by adults who govern in accordance with constitutional values and

80 Print, M., L. Saha and K. Edwards, 2005, *Youth Electoral Study 2: Youth, Political Engagement and Voting*, Australian Electoral Commission, p.26.

81 Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs, 2006, *National Assessment Program: Civics and Citizenship Years 6 and 10 Report 2004*, p. 82.

principles and who display traits of character worth emulating'.⁸²

3.78 Some submissions saw this 'whole school approach' as a means by which to implement civics and citizenship within the crowded curriculum:

Follow up work with teachers after the IEA study revealed that 91% of teachers recognized the importance of civics education in preparing young people for citizenship. And young people agreed that good citizenship included the obligation to vote. It is very important, therefore, that schools find space and time in their overcrowded curricula to give civics education the attention it deserves. Schools that model democratic practice through their ethos and structures are most effective in promoting civic knowledge and engagement.⁸³

3.79 Other submissions explained that using parliamentary and electoral models to structure school representative councils captures students' imagination and also adds an element of fun to what can be a 'dry' subject area.

3.80 Two different initiatives presented to the Committee are illustrative. The first was the Parliamentary Club, an initiative developed by Mr Don Perna of St Joseph's High School in Albion Park, NSW. Mr Perna described the Club as 'a microscopic political system within the school. It allowed students to form political parties, to present candidates for elections and to form a student parliament that reflected the federal system.'⁸⁴

3.81 The Parliamentary Club has two major roles:

- first, to educate its members and the wider school community about democracy; and
- second, to form a student government.⁸⁵

3.82 The parliament is formed according to a written constitution and has, to date, passed a number of bills. The club also includes political journalists and cartoonists, a security and intelligence organisation and an independent commission against corruption.⁸⁶

82 Ms Yvonne Goudie, *Submission no. 27*, p. 2.

83 Australian College of Educators, *Submission no. 10*, p. 2; see also Mr Patrick Tacey, *Submission no. 1*, p. 1.

84 Mr Don Perna, *Transcript of Evidence*, 13 October 2006, p. 52.

85 Mr Don Perna, *Transcript of Evidence*, 13 October 2006, p. 53.

86 Mr Don Perna, *Transcript of Evidence*, 13 October 2006, p. 54.

- 3.83 The second school to illustrate its use of parliamentary and electoral models was Hambleton State School in Cairns. At this school, the AEC's Divisional Returning Officer (DRO) for Leichhardt, Mr Tony Anderson, conducts student leadership elections using polling materials (such as screens, ballot boxes, and pencils) saved from federal elections.
- 3.84 The school encourages all potential candidates for election to submit an 'application', addressing specific leadership selection criteria, to teachers. Successful applicants may then create a campaign poster, make an electoral speech and begin seeking the support of the student body. In evidence to the Committee, Mr Anderson stressed the importance of running the election 'according to democratic principles that apply to the electoral process of local, state and federal elections'.⁸⁷
- 3.85 The 'learning as doing' approach was also said to provide students with the skills to become active citizens. In the Northern Territory, the Committee heard of a case where a teacher encouraged her students to participate in a committee inquiry on sport in the Territory. In this process, the students not only learned about parliamentary committees, but also how they can participate and have 'a real voice'.⁸⁸
- 3.86 To successfully implement a whole school approach, however, it was submitted that school communities not only have to be supportive of the initiative, but they, in turn, may require additional support. As the Australian College of Educators stated:
- It may be that schools will need support to create the ethos and structures required to develop the 'active and informed citizens with an understanding and appreciation of Australia's system of government and civic life', referred to in the Adelaide Declaration.⁸⁹
- 3.87 The case of conducting school elections is an important example of where schools may require additional support. Electoral commissions, for example, understand school council elections as 'as a means of enabling students to take part in the decision-making process at a level that is both immediately relevant and empowering'.⁹⁰
- 3.88 In 2005-06, the WAEC coordinated 48 school elections involving 9 816 students. Elections ACT similarly reported that conducting student

87 Mr Tony Anderson, *Transcript of Evidence*, 24 October 2006, p. 11.

88 Mrs Jane Hearnden, *Transcript of Evidence*, 20 November 2006, pp. 20-21.

89 Australian College of Educators, *Submission no. 10*, p. 2.

90 Western Australian Electoral Commission, *Submission no. 12*, p. 11.

representative council elections was one of its 'most successful electoral education tools', because:

When we are in a school running an election, we do it usually from go to whoa. We take the nominations, we get the ballot papers ready, we attend the school to help with the voting, we get the young people involved as polling officials and those sorts of things and then we stay with the students and count the election. They actually see the whole process from beginning to end. I suspect, in that case, the cynicism is less.⁹¹

3.89 Evidence was therefore in favour of electoral commissions contributing more resources (in terms of materials and staff) to the conduct of school elections.⁹²

3.90 Currently, however, there are several challenges to implementing this proposition:

- there is limited coordination between the AEC and its state and territory counterparts in terms of access to schools and programmes delivered;⁹³
- given the current staffing structure of AEC divisional offices, DROs are not able to cover the majority of schools within their electorates, and would find it particularly difficult to do so if all schools requested school election assistance at the same time;⁹⁴
- the AEC has had some difficulty in gaining access to schools to make presentations or conduct elections, although this could also be due to a range of factors including the timing of presentations offered, AEC letters of invitation being misdirected, and competing offers from other organisations wishing to make presentations to students;⁹⁵ and
- AEC DROs are often not equipped with the presentation skills to be able to provide schools with this education service. The AEC Commissioner advised that DROs are currently selected on their ability

91 Ms Alison Purvis, Elections ACT, *Transcript of Evidence*, 11 August 2006, p. 31. See also, Elections ACT, *Submission no. 83*, p. 2.

92 See, for example, Parliamentary Education and Community Relations Section, NSW Parliament, *Submission no. 16*; Dr Murray Print and Dr Lawrence Saha, *Transcript of Evidence*, 7 August 2006, p. 56.

93 Australian College of Educators, *Submission no. 10*, p. 3.

94 See Mr Patrick Tacey, *Submission no. 1*, p. 1; Australian College of Educators, *Submission no. 10*, p. 3.

95 Mr Ian Campbell (Australian Electoral Commission), *Transcript of Evidence*, 7 August 2006, p. 40 and follow up correspondence to the Committee on 18 August 2006.

to conduct elections, maintain the electoral roll, and run a small staff rather than on education qualifications and skills.⁹⁶

- 3.91 The Parliamentary Education and Community Relations Section of the NSW Parliament submitted that DROs should be supported through professional development, and that ultimately, they could become responsible for running professional development seminars for teachers. They also submitted that given election periods were particularly busy periods for DROs:

...consideration should be given to the employment of temporary education staff (e.g. casual teachers) to continue and accelerate electoral education programmes for both adults and students at such times.⁹⁷

- 3.92 Mr Glenn Marchant also recommended that every school have a Student Leadership Coordinator with the specific responsibility of developing programmes to stimulate students' interest in civics and citizenship activities.⁹⁸

Parents and civics education

- 3.93 The MCEETYA Report found a strong association between civics achievement and 'talking about politics and social issues with family' among Year 10 students.⁹⁹ Moreover:

Parental occupation had large effects on civics and citizenship literacy. The difference in civics and citizenship achievement between children of unskilled labourers, office, sales and service staff and senior managers and professionals is just less than 80 score points for both Year 6 and Year 10.¹⁰⁰

- 3.94 If whole school approaches are to be implemented, it was submitted that parents need to play a role in the development of activities as well as in fostering political awareness at home through family discussions.¹⁰¹

96 Mr Ian Campbell (Australian Electoral Commission), *Transcript of Evidence*, 7 August 2006, p. 39.

97 Parliamentary Education and Community Relations Section, NSW Parliament, *Submission no. 16*, p. 4.

98 Mr Glenn Marchant, *Submission no. 2*, p. 2.

99 Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs, 2006, *National Assessment Program: Civics and Citizenship Years 6 and 10 Report 2004*, p. 84.

100 Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs, 2006, *National Assessment Program: Civics and Citizenship Years 6 and 10 Report 2004*, p. 71.

101 See, for example, Australian Education Union, *Submission no. 48*, p. 5.

Outside school activities and civic knowledge

3.95 The MCEETYA Report also indicated that 'there is an association between participation in civics-related activities outside of school and civics achievement.'¹⁰² The Constitution Education Fund–Australia submitted that it was:

...especially committed to the concept of civics education in schools being supplemented by education outside of schools. Considering school constraints on time and budget, and the demand of the school syllabus, it is a stark reality that civics and electoral education are not given enough of a focus within ordinary school activities. Organisations like CEF-A exist solely for the purpose of addressing this disparity.¹⁰³

3.96 The Committee received submissions from a wide range of organisations running civics programmes outside school. For those aware of such programmes, there are numerous opportunities for young people to become involved with their communities, such as:

- Rotary clubs have a range of initiatives dedicated to young people, including the Rotary Youth Leadership Awards, Rotary Youth Exchange Programme, INTERACT, Model United Nations Assembly, ROTARACT, Rotary Adventure in Citizenship, and the Rotary Youth Programme of Enrichment;
- Lions clubs have similar programmes, including Youth Exchange, Youth of the Year Quest, Youth Camps, Lions Quest, Leos, Youth In Search,
- United Nations Youth Associations;
- YMCA Youth Parliament;
- OXFAM Australia and its Oxfam International Youth Parliament; and
- World Vision's Global Leadership Convention.

3.97 The Parliamentary Education and Community Relations section of the NSW Parliament emphasised that electoral education did not always have to form a separate unit in outside school programmes:

Rather than creating new programs, electoral education could be very effectively included in many such existing programs,

102 Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs, 2006, *National Assessment Program: Civics and Citizenship Years 6 and 10 Report 2004*, p. 83.

103 Constitution Education Fund – Australia, *Submission no. 72*, p. 9.

strengthening them but also gaining impact from its inclusion in already established valid programs, fostering knowledge about the system, encouraging young people to enrol to vote and empowering them to make decisions and participate in society and their community.¹⁰⁴

- 3.98 While certain schools would encourage students' participation in these activities, others may not be as forthcoming. Year 10 students at Melbourne High School for example have been expected to engage with their local community in a number of ways for some time. The students were supportive of this initiative:

We have compulsory community involvement in year 10. That is where we have Red Cross Day, where all year 10 students jog into the city and do a bit of fund-raising. There is also I think 20 hours of community involvement. That is compulsory in order to receive your report in year 10. But it is definitely something that is not implemented in all schools; I think that is quite specific to our school and only a few others.¹⁰⁵

- 3.99 The Hon. Teresa Gambaro, MP presented the Committee with her proposal for an Active Civics Programme which aims to increase students' connectivity with their local communities. The Programme has found success in her electorate, with students of home economics and catering, for example, receiving credit for their studies for work in volunteer community organisations such as Meals on Wheels.¹⁰⁶

Committee Comment

- 3.100 The recent MCEETYA report concluded that students cannot be expected to achieve high proficiency standards in civics and citizenship education in the absence of formal, consistent instruction.¹⁰⁷
- 3.101 Submissions to this inquiry expressed the view that civics and electoral education, at the school level, requires a more coordinated and coherent approach, not only across states and territories, but between education authorities and parliamentary and electoral education agencies such as electoral commissions and parliamentary education offices.

104 Parliamentary Education and Community Relations Section, Parliament of NSW, *Submission no. 16*, p. 4.

105 Melbourne High School, *Transcript of Evidence*, 22 August 2006, p. 11.

106 The Hon. Teresa Gambaro, MP, *Transcript of Evidence*, 4 December 2006, pp. 46-50.

107 Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs, 2006, *National Assessment Program: Civics and Citizenship Years 6 and 10 Report 2004*, p. 93.

- 3.102 The role of teachers was also found to be fundamental in inspiring young students to engage with their democracy. Submissions stressed that teachers need to be supported, not only through professional development, but with a range of source materials to make civics and electoral education interesting and fun.

The tertiary sector

- 3.103 If civics and electoral education form a fragmented component of the primary and secondary school curricula, then they fare less well at the tertiary level. While very few submissions touched on the adequacy of civics and electoral education in the tertiary sector, those that did were clearly of the view that there is an almost complete absence of such units of study in universities or Technical and Further Education (TAFE) colleges.¹⁰⁸

Technical and Further Education (TAFE) Colleges

- 3.104 At the TAFE level, adult English classes, targeted at recently arrived migrants, tend to include a component of civics and electoral education.¹⁰⁹ The Parliamentary Education Office in Canberra submitted that it delivers programmes for students in TAFE colleges, and students in the community education and welfare sectors,¹¹⁰ as does the WAEC.¹¹¹
- 3.105 Doctors Print and Saha note in their submission that while their research into TAFE students is limited, they found 'no evidence of electoral education taking place in TAFE institutions'.¹¹²

Universities

- 3.106 Civics and electoral education at university level is predominantly taught through political science or government courses. Doctors Print and Saha,

108 Parliamentary and Community Relations Section, Parliament of NSW, *Submission no. 16*, p. 3; Dr Murray Print and Dr Lawrence Saha, *Submission no. 54*, p. 12; Australian Education Union, *Submission no. 48*, p. 9; Australian Federation of Societies for Studies of Society and Environment, *Submission no. 25*, p. 4.

109 Parliamentary and Community Relations Section, Parliament of NSW, *Submission no. 16*, p. 3.

110 Department of the Senate, *Submission no. 28*, p. 14.

111 Western Australian Electoral Commission, *Submission no. 12*, p. 11.

112 Dr Murray Print and Dr Lawrence Saha, *Submission no. 54*, p. 12.

however, submitted that 'these units are studied by only a small proportion of the total student body'.¹¹³

- 3.107 The National Union of Students alerted the Committee to a six-credit point mandatory course on civics, politics and government for all students at the University of New South Wales.¹¹⁴ Ms Jackson stated that:

The pass rates, from what I understand, are particularly good. But I think that students do enjoy it because it is something different. They are learning something that is not necessarily a core part of their degree in aeronautical engineering, but it is a core part, I think, of their lives as citizens of this country.¹¹⁵

- 3.108 Parliamentary education offices and departments also offer university lectures. For example, the Department of the House of Representatives submitted that it has conducted a university lecture programme known as *House Calls* for the past few years:

Under the program, the Speaker and Clerk of the House deliver guest lectures on the realities of working in today's House of Representatives to tertiary students. Each lecture is accompanied by a question and answer session that allows students to explore issues of interest to them regarding the House and the way it operates. The lectures are provided at no cost to the universities. The universities that have participated in the program in recent years include: Australian National University; Bond; Murdoch; New England; New South Wales; Newcastle; and Southern Queensland.¹¹⁶

- 3.109 The (WA) Parliamentary Education Office also offers educational programmes for tertiary groups, including students from the schools of Politics, International Studies, Law, Business Law, Journalism, and Information Studies.¹¹⁷
- 3.110 University students also have the opportunity to participate in student council elections, although only a very small percentage are actively

113 Dr Murray Print and Dr Lawrence Saha, *Submission no. 54*, p. 12.

114 Ms Rose Jackson, National Union of Students, *Transcript of Evidence*, 21 August 2006, p. 38.

115 Ms Rose Jackson, National Union of Students, *Transcript of Evidence*, 21 August 2006, p. 38.

116 Department of the House of Representatives, *Submission no. 91*, pp. 3-4. The Department's magazine, *About the House*, is also distributed to 34 university libraries; see *Submission no. 108*, p. 2.

117 Ms Jane Gray, *Submission no. 68*, p. 3.

engaged in student politics.¹¹⁸ Various electoral bodies noted that they were involved in the conduct of these elections.¹¹⁹

Committee's conclusions and recommendations

- 3.111 The Committee accepts that education is the key to greater civic engagement and acknowledges the challenges faced in inspiring students with its importance given current curriculum restrictions discussed in this chapter. However, the Committee encourages further debate among federal, state and territory governments on the implementation of a national curriculum, particularly as it relates to civics and electoral education.
- 3.112 It is evident that electoral education, particularly for those closest to voting age in Years 11 and 12, suffers the most. The Committee therefore endorses recommendations put to it that a short but focused electoral education unit be developed by electoral commissions to be delivered once in Year 11 and again in Year 12. Given that a number of students leave school at the end of Year 10, this course should also be delivered to students in either Year 9 or 10.

Recommendation 4

- 3.113 **The Committee recommends that the Australian Electoral Commission, in collaboration with the State Electoral Commissions, develop a short, focused electoral education unit to be delivered to either Year 9 or 10 students, and Year 11 and 12 students, in all secondary schools.**

The Australian Government – through the Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs – should ensure that the delivery of this unit is incorporated into all secondary schools.

118 Dr Murray Print and Dr Lawrence Saha, *Submission no. 54*, p. 12.

119 See for example, Elections ACT which runs the ANU student union elections.

Recommendation 5

- 3.114 **The Committee recommends that the Australian Electoral Commission be granted sufficient funds to create several electoral education officer positions in each state and territory with responsibility for the development and presentation of electoral education teaching resources.**

Recommendation 6

- 3.115 **The Committee recommends that the Australian Electoral Commission provide an assessment of statistics regarding the delivery of civics education, which includes both students and teacher training, for inclusion in its submission to the Committee's regular inquiries into the conduct of federal elections.**
- 3.116 State and territory education authorities, may also consider funding of teacher secondments to electoral education centres, so that teachers may learn how to use electoral education strategies in their own classrooms.
- 3.117 The Committee is cognisant of the many lessons to be learned from overseas which are detailed in Appendix C. The United States of America has successfully established centres for civics education which have produced useful 'best practice' manuals. The Committee heeds the recommendations made during this inquiry for the establishment of a national centre for research into teaching civics and electoral education. Such a centre would be well placed to conduct an audit of civics and electoral education programmes currently implemented in Australia.