

Inspiring future civic participation

- 4.1 Evidence to the committee was highly supportive of initiatives to send students to Canberra as a means by which to impress upon students the importance of civic engagement. Indeed, planning a visit to Canberra has, for a number of teachers, provided the rationale for studying aspects of Australian democracy. As one teacher indicated:

In my experience, prior to the introduction of a unit of work on Federation and Government prior to us visiting Canberra, the children have very limited knowledge of government.

... if we were not to visit Canberra as part of our normal Grade 6 Curriculum, there would have been no prescribed need to study the electoral system.¹

- 4.2 The Australian Government recently recognised the important role Canberra plays in promoting Australia's cultural heritage in its 2006-07 Budget. The Government allocated over \$30 million over four years to the establishment of a Gallery of Australian Democracy to be located at Old Parliament House (OPH). The Gallery will feature an Australian Prime Ministers Centre, and will include a combination of permanent, long-term and temporary exhibitions celebrating the role of Australian prime ministers and their governments.²

1 Mr Ian Martin, *Submission no. 8*, p. 1.

2 2006-07 Budget Paper No. 2, Expense measures, Communications, Information Technology and the Arts, available at: <http://www.budget.gov.au/2006-07/bp2/html/bp2_expense-03.htm>. Accessed 15 May 2007.

- 4.3 While Canberra uniquely offers a number of positive educational experiences, many schools face serious difficulties in raising sufficient funds for student excursions. This part of the chapter explores the accessibility of the National Capital for many students, and explores some of the alternatives to such visits.

The national capital: a civic attraction—for how many?

- 4.4 The National Capital Educational Tourism Project (NCETP) estimates that 130 000 students visit Canberra each year.³ Roughly 110 000 students visit Parliament House and of those, approximately 20 per cent travelled with the assistance of a subsidy in 2005-06.⁴
- 4.5 Until July 2006, two rebate schemes operated to facilitate school children's travel to the National Capital:
- the Citizenship Visits Programme (CVP), administered by the parliamentary departments for those students travelling more than 1 000kms from Canberra; and
 - the Education Travel Rebate (ETR), administered by the Department of Education, Science and Training (DEST) for those students travelling less than 1 000kms from Canberra.
- 4.6 In the 2006-07 Budget, the Australian Government announced that these two programmes would be amalgamated to form the Parliament and Civics Education Rebate (PACER).

Citizenship Visits Programme and the Education Travel Rebate

- 4.7 The CVP was established to provide a per capita subsidy to final year(s) primary and secondary school students travelling long distances to visit the Parliament and other national institutions in Canberra. The Programme was jointly funded by the Department of the Senate and the Department of the House of Representatives and was administered by the Serjeant-at-Arms' Office.
- 4.8 The primary objective of this programme was to facilitate visits to Canberra for those students in regional and remote areas. For this reason,

3 National Capital Educational Tourism Project, available at: <<http://www.ncetp.org.au/>>. Accessed 30 January 2007.

4 Department of the House of Representatives, *Annual Report 2005-06*, pp. 30-31.

no subsidy was provided to those travelling less than 1 000km from Canberra.

Table 4.1 Rebates under the Citizenship Visits Programme, per zone.

Distance	Rebate
More than 1,000km from Canberra	\$ 40 per student
More than 2,000km from Canberra	\$110 per student
More than 3,000km from Canberra	\$230 per student
All students from Tasmania	\$110 per student

Source Parliamentary Education Office, 'Citizenship Visits Programme Guidelines', <<http://www.peo.gov.au/programs/cvp.htm>>. Accessed 26 April 2006.

4.9 This rebate was not to be used if the school's principal purpose for visiting Canberra was to engage in sporting or other cultural activities. Other qualifications were placed on schools wishing to apply, namely that the visit:

- not be undertaken during school holidays, public holidays or weekends;
- include taking part in organised activities at Parliament House, be that either through an education programme of the Parliamentary Education Office (PEO) or a guided tour of the building; and
- also include an additional approved activity in Canberra such as a meeting with their local Member or Senator, or a visit to the Electoral Education Centre at Old Parliament House.⁵

4.10 While it operated, this programme attracted predominantly primary school students (see table 4.2 p. 68) and an overwhelming majority of students from Queensland.

4.11 For those students within the 1 000km radius from Canberra, the ETR, administered by the National Capital Authority and funded through DEST, allowed a \$15 rebate per student for visits to the National Capital.⁶

5 Parliamentary Education Office, 'Citizenship Visits Program Guidelines', available at: <<http://www.peo.gov.au/programs/cvp.htm>>. Accessed 26 April 2006.

6 Department of Education Science and Training, *Submission no. 100*, p. 28.

Table 4.2 Student visits subsidised under the Citizenship Visits Programme, 2001-02 to 2005-06

Financial year	State							Total students	Percent primary school	Total cost of subsidies
	NSW	NT	Qld	SA	Tas	Vic	WA			
2001-02	1 948*	165	8 917	1 671	954	320	1 490	15 422	--	\$1 010 000
2002-03	2 020*	330	9 133	2 005	838	343	1 373	16 047	85	\$1 020 000
2003-04	2 578	229	9 442	2 695	859	471	1 916	18 190	72	\$1 220 000
2004-05	2 141	232	10 933	2 225	787	51	2 045	18 741	74	\$1 294 000
2005-06	1 765	350	11 586	3 099	1 033	328	2 319	20 400	73	\$1 474 000

Source: Department of the House of Representatives, Annual Reports for 2000-01 (p. 39), 2001-02 (p.45), 2002-03 (p. 25), 2003-04 (p.37), 2004-05 (p.34) and 2005-06 (p.31).

Note: * In addition, 5 students visited the Parliament from the ACT.

Parliament and Civics Education Rebate

4.12 In the 2006-07 Budget, a total of \$16.3 million over four years was allocated to the PACER programme, to be administered by DEST (see Table 4.3 below). The Government asserted that the new programme would provide increased travel rebates to school groups visiting Parliament House and other national institutions in Canberra and would also provide educational resources to help students better understand and appreciate Australia's democratic values and processes.⁷

Table 4.3 Funding for the Parliament and Civics Education Rebate

Expense (\$m)				
	2006-07	2007-08	2008-09	2009-10
Department of Education, Science and Training	3.7	4.0	4.2	4.4
Department of the House of Representatives	-0.7	-0.7	-0.7	-0.7
Department of the Senate	-0.7	-0.7	-0.8	-0.8
Total	2.4	2.6	2.8	2.9

Source: Budget Paper No. 2: Budget measures 2006-07, Part 2: Expense measures, Department of Education, Science and Training, available at: <http://www.budget.gov.au/2006-07/bp2/html/bp2_expense-05.htm>.

7 Budget Paper No. 2: Budget measures 2006-07, Part 2: Expense measures, Department of Education, Science and Training. Available online: <http://www.budget.gov.au/2006-07/bp2/html/bp2_expense-05.htm>. Accessed 15 May 2007.

4.13 The rebate now applies on a per student basis (see Table 4.4 below).

Table 4.4 Parliament and Civics Education Rebate rates

Distance	Rebate
Zone 1: 150 to 499km from Canberra (Sydney 286km, Newcastle 430km, Albury 339km)	\$20 per student
Zone 2: 500 to 999km from Canberra (Melbourne 667km, Bendigo 649km, Hay 510km, Goondiwindi 909)	\$30 per student
Zone 3: 1000 to 1499km from Canberra (Adelaide 1193km, Mount Gambier 1100km, Brisbane 1207km, Maryborough 1468km, Lismore 1037km)	\$60 per student
Zone 4: 1500 to 1999km from Canberra (Rockhampton 1575km, Roxby Downs 1690km)	\$80 per student
Zone 5: 2000 to 2499km from Canberra (Coober Pedy 2003km, Townsville 2187km)	\$120 per student
Zone 6: 2500 to 2999km from Canberra (Cairns 2533km, Alice Springs 2690km, Eucla 2684km)	\$150 per student
Zone 7: 3000 to 3999km from Canberra (Perth 3854km, Darwin 3969km)	\$240 per student
Zone 8: over 4000km from Canberra (Meekatharra 4436km)	\$260 per student

Source: National Capital Educational Tourism Project, PACER Zones, <http://www.ncefp.org.au/downloads/PACER_Zones.pdf>. Accessed August 2006.

4.14 The Australian Government noted in its 2006-07 *Budget Paper No. 2* that the new rebate represented a 15 per cent increase on the previous subsidies.⁸

4.15 As part of the PACER programme, students are required to visit:

- Parliament House (including, wherever possible, taking a guided educational tour, participating in a Parliamentary Education Office Program and meeting their local Member/Senator);
- OPH (including, wherever possible, undertaking an educational programme and visiting the Electoral Education Centre located in OPH);
- the Australian War Memorial; and
- other national civic institutions where possible.⁹

8 Budget Paper No. 2: Budget measures 2006-07, Part 2: Expense measures, Department of Education, Science and Training. Available online: <http://www.budget.gov.au/2006-07/bp2/html/bp2_expense-05.htm>. Accessed 15 May 2007.

Concerns with PACER

- 4.16 A representative from DEST stated in evidence before the Committee that 'schools will say that the rebate is never high enough. They would always appreciate more.'¹⁰
- 4.17 This notwithstanding, in a country the size of Australia, the logistical challenges associated with organising a school trip to Canberra can be significant. Mr Poynter, of Rosetta Primary School in Hobart explained:
- As I understand it, [PACER] is quite a new program and there is still a considerable financial burden on parents to be able to afford the travel to get to Canberra. I am not sure about the exact details. The logistics of physically getting there – the flights and all that – take a considerable amount of time. Teachers are very busy people, and organising camps and things like that is something that is maybe not as popular as it was 15 or 20 years ago. We were very keen to go, but it is one of those situations where you need lots of time and energy from a core group of people who are really keen to go. All of the incentives that have been offered are fantastic and it is something that I looked at this year, but, because of timing and the sheer logistics of it, it was very difficult to get there. It is something that we would like to look at in the next couple of years.¹¹
- 4.18 The PACER programme's requirements of visiting at least three national institutions may also mean that students cannot visit Canberra without an overnight stay. For those travelling between 150 and 499 km, \$20 per student may not be enough to cover accommodation expenses.

Attracting the remotest students

- 4.19 In its supplementary submission to the inquiry, the Department of the House of Representatives reminded the Committee that the original intent of the CVP was to support those school students who had to travel long distances to visit the Parliament in Canberra.¹² That is, the CVP was effectively created as a specific measure to counter the tyranny of distance.

9 Parliament and Civics Education Rebate 'Program Guidelines'. Available online: <http://www.ncetp.org.au/downloads/PACER_programme_guidelines_231106.pdf>. Accessed 30 January 2007.

10 Mr Noel Simpson (Department of Education, Science and Training), *Transcript of Evidence*, 7 August 2006, p. 5.

11 Mr Tony Poynter, *Transcript of Evidence*, 31 August 2006, pp. 37-38.

12 Department of the House of Representatives, *Submission no. 108*, p. 2.

- 4.20 In this respect, the CVP was successful in attracting school students from Western Australia, however, very few schools from the Northern Territory and regional or remote schools from Queensland participated in the programme (see Table 4.5 below).
- 4.21 Table 4.6 (p. 70) illustrates the number of schools visiting Canberra during the first six months of the PACER programme, and the regions from which they travelled. It is evident that, to date, there has not been a significant increase in the number of schools from remote and regional areas. Eight schools from the Northern Territory visited the capital under the PACER programme, being roughly the equivalent number of students visiting Canberra from the Northern Territory under the previous programme in a similar time frame. PACER has been successful in attracting schools from New South Wales and Victoria.

Table 4.5 Students receiving highest rate of subsidy (travelling over 3000kms) 2001-02 to 2005-06

Financial year		Western Australia	Northern Territory	Queensland	Total receiving highest rate of subsidy
2001-02	<i>Schools</i>	63	11	4	78
(rate \$200/student)	<i>Students</i>	1598	217	80	1895
% of total students receiving subsidy		10	1		11
2002-03	<i>Schools</i>	65	15	2	82
(rate \$200/student)	<i>Students</i>	1447	344	36	1827
% of total students receiving subsidy		9	2		11
2003-04	<i>Schools</i>	76	13	--	89
(rate \$230/student)	<i>Students</i>	1937	279	--	2216
% of total students receiving subsidy		11	2	--	13
2004-05	<i>Schools</i>	86	13	2	101
(rate \$230/student)	<i>Students</i>	2046	259	28	2333
% of total students receiving subsidy		11	1		12
2005-06	<i>School</i>	100	14	1	115

(rate \$230/student)	Students	2341	321	20	2682
% of total students receiving subsidy		12	2		14

Source: Department of the House of Representatives, Submission no. 108, p. 3.

Notes: All Western Australian schools are located more than 3000kms from Canberra and therefore receive the highest subsidy rate.

All Northern Territory schools are located more than 3000kms from Canberra and therefore receive the highest subsidy rate.

Most Queensland schools are located less than 3000kms from Canberra and therefore only a small number of schools receive the highest subsidy rate.

Table 4.6 Schools visiting Canberra under the PACER programme, July-December 2006 (subsidy per student)

	Zone 1 (\$20)	Zone 2 (\$30)	Zone 3 (\$60)	Zone 4 (\$80)	Zone 5 (\$120)	Zone 6 (\$150)	Zone 7 (\$240)	Zone 8 (\$260)	Total
<i>State</i>									
NSW	371	93	47						511
Vic	17	126	4						147
Qld		4	161	10	18	6	1		200
SA		5	71	2					78
WA							47	18	65
Tas						14			14
NT						2	4	2	8
Total	388	228	283	12	18	22	52	20	1023

Source: National Capital Educational Tourism Project, January 2007

Accessing civics and electoral education programmes in Canberra

4.22 The teachers surveyed by the NCETP considered planning a visit to the National Capital particularly important in underlining curriculum taught in civics and citizenship units and in Australian history. Canberra's cultural attractions generally exceeded expectations for teachers of these subjects. Table 4.7 (p. 73) lists the attractions frequented the most by schools between 2001-03 and 2005.

4.23 Moreover, the survey found that 'Generally, teachers agreed that a visit to the National Capital':

- contributed positively to the curriculum (96.1 per cent compared with 96.4 per cent in 2003);
- enhanced students appreciation of the National Capital (94.0 per cent compared with 94.8 per cent);
- increased students understanding of civics and democracy (89.3 per cent compared with 93.2 per cent);
- increased students understanding of Australia's history (91.6 per cent compared with 96.0 per cent); and,
- gave students a better understanding of how leadership contributes to Australian Society (82.2 per cent compared with 86.4 per cent).

They also agreed that:

- Canberra's attractions represent Australian Culture (87.1 per cent compared with 84.3 per cent in 2003); and
- understanding Australian politics is an important part of the school curriculum (94.3 per cent compared with 95.2 per cent).¹³

Table 4.7 Attractions most visited by schools while in the National Capital, 2001-03 and 2005

Attraction	Teacher Survey			
	2005	2003	2002	2001
	(n=385) %	(n=250) %	(n=179) %	(n=465) %
Questacon	95.1	94.0	84.4	91.2
Australian War Memorial	91.7	90.0	81.6	89.2
Parliament House (Tour)	91.4	89.2	84.9	94.0
Australian Institute of Sport	79.7	82.0	64.2	73.5
Telstra Tower	66.4	63.2	55.3	64.1
Parliamentary Education Office	65.6	68.0	53.6	49.2
National Museum of Australia	62.2	60.0	56.4	40.6
Embassies	61.2	61.2	55.9	38.7
ANZAC Parade and Memorials	59.4	57.6	53.6	31.6
AEC Electoral Education Centre	57.0	61.2	57.5	49.9
National Capital Exhibition/Regatta Point	54.7	66.8	53.1	50.5
Mount Ainslie	49.7	54.4	53.1	31.6
Old Parliament House	40.4	40.8	40.8	51.2
National Gallery of Australia	39.8	38.0	41.3	44.3
High Court of Australia	32.8	27.2	32.4	33.1

Source: Brent Ritchie and Sue Uzabeaga, 2006, Discover what it means to be Australian in your National Capital: Size and effect of school excursions to the National Capital, 2005, Centre for Tourism Research, University of Canberra.

13 Source: Discover what it means to be Australian in your National Capital: Size and effect of school excursions to the National Capital, 2005, Brent Ritchie and Sue Uzabeaga, Centre for Tourism Research, University of Canberra, March 2006.

- 4.24 However, it is also clear from this survey and from submissions received by the Committee that there are some difficulties in accessing some of the programmes offered by key institutions, including those of the PEO and the AEC's Electoral Education Centre (EEC).
- 4.25 In the case of the PEO and the EEC, the popularity of these programmes prevents more students from accessing them. These programmes are regularly booked to capacity, often twelve months in advance.¹⁴
- 4.26 The EEC offers educational sessions on the House of Representatives, the Senate, federal referendums and the election process. It also runs simulated elections for visitors. The EEC currently operates over 2 000 sessions annually, educating around 70 000 students (see Table 4.8 below). These include students from primary age through to tertiary students, the majority of the students being upper primary.

Table 4.8 Session participants at the Canberra Electoral Education Centre

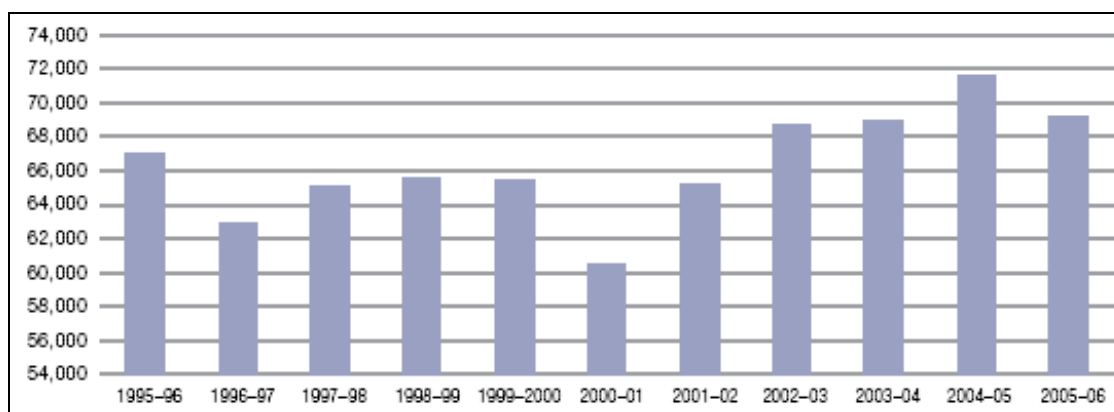
Participant group	Number of participants	Number of sessions
Primary students	57,214	1,786
Junior secondary students	2,511	89
Senior secondary students	3,691	134
Other participants	35	2
Total participants	63,451	
Accompanying adults	5,657	
Total	69,108	2,011

Source: AEC, *Annual Report 2005-06*, p. 84.

- 4.27 In 2005-06, there was a decline of 3.4 per cent in the number of participants visiting the EEC since the previous financial year (see Figure 4.1 on p. 75).

14 See, for example, Australian Electoral Commission, *Submission no. 116*, p. 2, National Capital Educational Tourism Project, *Submission no. 51*, pp. 5-6, Department of the Senate, *Submission no. 28*, p. 11, *Transcript of Evidence*, 11 August 2006, pp. 5-6.

Figure 4.1 Canberra Electoral Education Centre visitors, 1995-96 to 2005-06



Source: AEC, *Annual Report 2005-06*, p. 85.

4.28 In its submission, the NCETP commented on capacity issues affecting student visitation to the EEC:

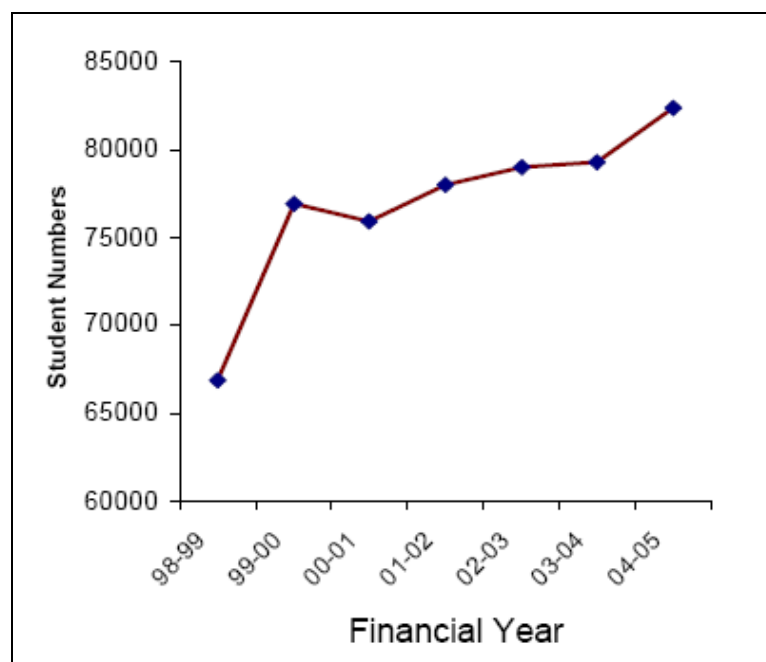
There is a compelling case for expanding the EEC in Canberra to ensure that all students who visit the National Capital can participate in its electoral education programme... During the peak periods of school visitation to Canberra the Centre runs at capacity... Unfortunately at these peak periods many schools cannot be accommodated. Currently there are 50 schools (approximately 2,800 students) on the wait list, but many schools do not go on the wait list as they have to set their itinerary and cannot wait on the chance that a space might become available. It is estimated that approximately another 30,000 students would visit the Centre if space was available.¹⁵

4.29 The PEO's role play programme for students visiting Parliament House has also reached its capacity. The Department of the Senate reported that the programme has operated at almost maximum capacity during the school year for the last three years. In 2004-05 over 82 000 students from across Australia participated in the programme (see Figure 4.2, p. 76). The PEO has educated over 600 000 students since 1998-99 and expects to meet its one millionth student by 2010.¹⁶

15 National Capital Educational Tourism Project, *Submission no. 51*, pp. 5-6.

16 Department of the Senate, *Submission no. 28*, pp. 11-12.

Figure 4.2 Student participation in PEO role play programme 1998-2005



Source: Department of the Senate, Submission no. 28, p. 11.

- 4.30 PEO Director, Mr Chris Reid pointed out that despite the graph above indicating increasing student numbers, the programme is now at capacity due to the lack of availability of classrooms within Parliament House. Mr Reid stated:

Space at Parliament House is a big deal for us. Only 50 per cent of our space is guaranteed. If we teach 2 400 classes a year, only 1 200 of those are guaranteed in one room. During sitting weeks we can be bumped off three or four times and we have to find a room that is adequately spaced and resourced for students who have come from as far away as somewhere like Bamaga in the north of Queensland or the Kimberley.¹⁷

Attracting students in off-peak periods

- 4.31 Figure 4.3 (p. 77) presents the distribution, over the course of a year, of school visits to the National Capital. Demand peaks during August, but is much lower in the early months of the school year, and much lower again in the summer holiday period. It was submitted that schools tend to prefer visiting the National Capital following the winter recess for two reasons:

17 Mr C. Reid (Parliamentary Education Office), *Transcript of Evidence*, 7 August 2006, p. 20.

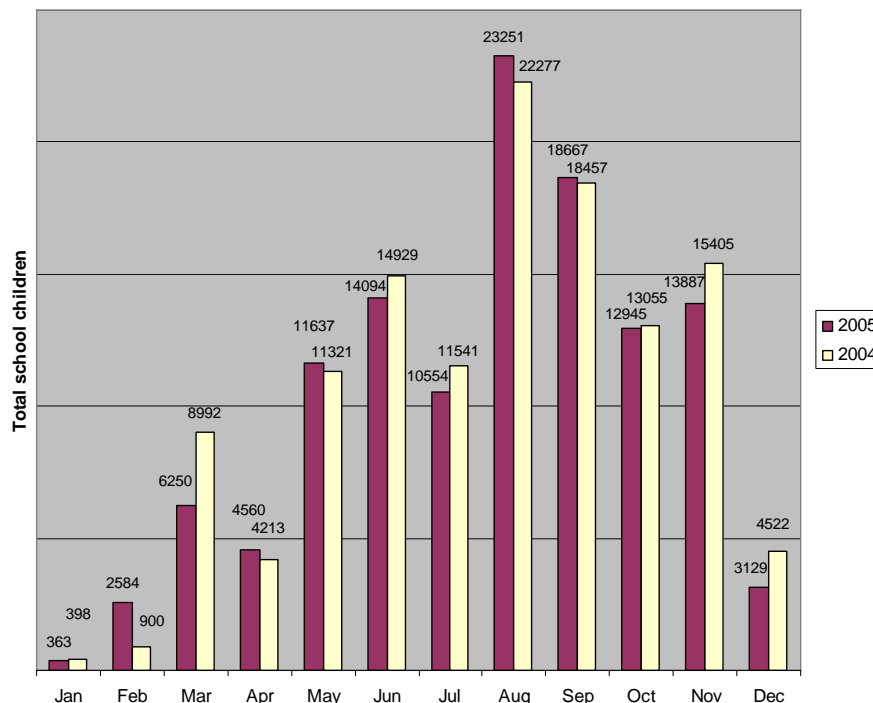
- first, the ski season provides an additional reason the visit the region; and
- second, students benefit more from a visit to the Capital's iconic institutions once they have studied a unit of civics or Australian history in the first half of the year.

4.32 The AEC responded positively to the idea of a scheme which would attract more students to Canberra during the summer holidays, and acknowledged that this would provide a better workflow.¹⁸

4.33 DEST also expressed interest at the suggestion of the possible introduction of increasing the subsidy to schools outside of the peak visiting period. Mr Noel Simpson, Manager of the Curriculum Branch, stated:

That sounds like a reasonable incentive to me to try to flatten out the demand. There are obvious reasons. We know why the demand is higher at that time. There are a number of factors, of course. You probably need to introduce either some incentives or disincentives to flatten out that demand structure.¹⁹

Figure 4.3 Monthly visitation figures to the National Capital, 2004 and 2005



Source: *National Capital Educational Tourism Project, Submission no. 51, p. 6.*

18 See *Transcript of Evidence*, 4 December 2006, pp.13-14.

19 Mr Noel Simpson (Department of Education, Science and Training), *Transcript of Evidence*, 4 December 2006, p. 20.

Accessing state/territory legislatures and local governments

4.34 There was evidence to suggest that all three levels of government had an important role to fulfil in facilitating civics and electoral education. While a visit to Canberra was highly desirable for accessing civics and electoral education programmes, it was also asserted that there was much value to be gained from state and territory legislatures and local governments. In its submission, the ACT Legislative Assembly stated:

Education about electoral education and civics and citizenship in students' home State/Territory is equally important as understanding the Federal process. In fact laws created by State/Territory parliaments may impact more significantly on their daily lives than those passed by the Federal Parliament.

All Australian school students need to visit their State/Territory parliament. Some schools restrict excursions to one visit per term and sometimes a visit to the parliament will be overlooked for other activities.

Travelling to the Federal Parliament, from an interstate destination, is a costly and timely exercise that requires a number of detailed permissions and a greater level of teacher supervision. Visiting a local or State/Territory parliament can be accomplished with greater ease (local transport, fewer permissions required) and would also cost less per student.²⁰

4.35 The Education and Community Relations section of the NSW Parliament argued that local governments could be playing a greater role in disseminating civics and electoral education amongst their communities. Its submission noted that local governments:

- are uniquely placed to provide information directly to local communities;
- should offer electoral education for their constituents to explain local council election procedures, as well as supporting electoral education for state and federal elections in conjunction with the AEC and state and territory electoral authorities; [and]
- could require enrolment forms to be available in all council offices, local government community and information centres and particularly in public libraries.²¹

20 ACT Legislative Assembly, *Submission no. 14*, pp. 5-6.

21 Parliamentary Education and Community Relations, Parliament of New South Wales, *Submission no. 16*, p. 7.

- 4.36 The NSW Parliament offers organised tours for students which last around an hour and a half, and involve a role play and a visit to both Houses. Manager of Education and Community Relations, Mr Graham Spindler, explained that the programme was restricted due to capacity issues:

...we are almost fully booked. Unfortunately, unlike the national parliament, which was wisely designed with facilities to assist student visits, educational programs, role-plays and things like that, we are totally dependent on the availability of the two chambers. On sitting days they are not available and on non-sitting days you can only put through a limited number of groups. Given that schools really only want to come during school terms, that cuts out another 10 or 12 weeks in the year. So, to be honest, very soon into the school year we are fully booked. It would be ideal to have more, and we certainly encourage it – it is there in the curriculum. Some of the curriculum statements specifically say ‘visits to the New South Wales parliament or the federal parliament’. We would obviously like to encourage more, but I am not sure that we could fit them.²²

Electoral education centres

- 4.37 In addition to the EEC in Canberra, the AEC operates EECs in Melbourne and Adelaide. The Western Australian Electoral Commission also runs an EEC in Perth (the AEC provides support to this centre, with \$15,000 going towards the cost of running the centre during 2005–06). Each centre conducts free electoral education sessions for groups using a variety of interactive programmes. Table 4.9 (p. 80) shows participant numbers for the three state-based EECs for 2005–06.
- 4.38 In 2005–06, those EECs run by the AEC (Canberra, Adelaide and Melbourne) provided services to 112,292 people, which was 3 799 more than in 2004–05. However, the AEC reported that the EECs did not meet their 2005–06 performance target of 115 000 visitors – although ‘changes made to school terms to accommodate the Commonwealth Games appear to have impacted on participant numbers’.²³

22 Mr Graham Spindler (Parliament of New South Wales), *Transcript of Evidence*, 13 October 2006, p. 4.

23 Australian Electoral Commission, *Annual Report 2005–06*, p. 83.

Table 4.9 Participant nos. for Adelaide, Melbourne and Perth electoral education centres, 2005-06

Participant group	Adelaide		Melbourne		Perth
	students	sessions	students	sessions	students
Primary students	2841	94	5307	184	4692
Junior secondary students	1787	73	4365	195	1505
Senior secondary students	1078	52	2019	96	268
Tertiary students	395	17	560	35	418
Other participants	461	31	246	16	--
Total participants	6562		12497		6883
Accompanying adults	524		1140		581
Total	7086	267	13637	526	7464

Source: AEC, *Annual Report 2005-06*, pp.85, 87, 88.

Note: In addition, the Melbourne EEC provided services to 2,962 participants off site during 2005-06; the Adelaide EEC provided services to 901 customers off site during 2005-06; and the Perth EEC provided services to 11,134 customers off site during 2005-06.

4.39 A number of submissions supported the establishment of electoral education centres in each state and territory. The Education and Community Relations section of the NSW Parliament stated:

Ideally, however, there should be electoral centres in at least each capital city and major regional centres. The option of joint centres in conjunction with the AEC and state and territory commissions should be explored. Joint programs with parliamentary and other civics educators should be explored and encouraged.²⁴

4.40 The Queensland Parliament's Legal, Constitutional and Administrative Review Committee recently recommended that the Premier coordinate the creation and ongoing resourcing of a 'Democracy Centre' in Brisbane. It was recommended that the Centre, which would support a civics programme in schools to be known as the *Active Democracy* programme, is:

- to be established by way of a joint arrangement with the Minister for Education, the Attorney-General, the Speaker of the Queensland Parliament, Electoral Commission Queensland and the Australian Electoral Commission and located at Parliament House and/or incorporated into the redevelopment of Old Government House on the QUT campus; and

- to provide a major outreach program delivered via a 'democracy bus' to continually tour communities in rural, regional and remote Queensland.²⁵

'Virtual' alternatives

4.41 The PEO indicated that there are approximately 230 000 teachers in this country and there are about 3.3 million students.²⁶ The PEO advised that it was investigating alternative directions through its outreach programme and an increased focus on web-based resources.²⁷

4.42 Mr Patrick Tacey, an acting primary school principal, suggested replicating the resources offered by the EEC in Canberra in electronic format so that they can be utilised by those schools not 'lucky enough to visit or live in Canberra'.²⁸

Electoral Office Education Centre in Canberra is a wonderful resource for those lucky enough to visit or live in Canberra; maybe a similar resource could be made available in larger regional centres or provided electronically to schools.

4.43 The Australian Federation of Societies for Studies of Society and Environment (AFSSSE) supported the introduction of a 'virtual tour' of parliament to afford those students in remote areas with an alternative to travelling to Canberra. In its submission, AFSSSE stated:

[School visits to parliament are] a very expensive exercise and its cost benefits are questionable unless a set program accompanies the visit. Many excursions are not successful because of poor planning and a lack of clear goals. A less expensive option is to prepare a virtual tour of parliament and to provide extracts of debates with exercises and discussion points accompanying it. The costs of a school visit are quite prohibitive for the general population and funding would be appreciated.²⁹

4.44 Dr. Harry Phillips also commented on the merits of virtual tours, drawing attention to the success of this feature within the WA Parliament's website. Dr Phillips stated:

25 Legal, Constitutional and Administrative Review Committee (Qld), *Voices and Votes: A parliamentary committee inquiry into young people engaging in democracy*, report no. 55, August 2006, p. 111.

26 Mr Chris Reid, (Parliamentary Education Office), *Transcript of Evidence*, 7 August 2006, p.18.

27 Department of the Senate, *Submission no. 28*, p. 12.

28 Mr Patrick Tacey, *Submission no. 1*, p. 1.

29 Australian Federation of Societies for Studies of Society and Environment, *Submission no. 25*, p. 6.

The objective that each citizen visit the Parliament (Commonwealth and State) should be pursued. If this is not possible, mainly due to distance and cost, 'virtual' tours should be available.³⁰

... the [Western Australian] parliament itself, the education section, has a virtual tour. We get a lot of hits on that website. I think the Electoral Commission has to have the same system, and [federal] parliament does too.³¹

... a 'virtual tour' of a visit to a voting booth should [also] be produced by the respective Australian, State and Territory Electoral offices.³²

Committee's conclusions and recommendations

- 4.45 The Committee is of the view that the benefits derived for school students from a visit to Canberra cannot be underestimated. The Committee was heartened to hear students visiting Canberra for Celebrate Democracy Week 2006 note that there is much more to what happens in the Parliament than that expressed in nightly news reports. In this sense, the Parliament is, uniquely, a working museum, and students should always be encouraged to visit.
- 4.46 The Committee is concerned that Canberra is less accessible to students from schools from the remotest parts of Australia.

Recommendation 7

- 4.47 **The Committee recommends that the Australian Government re-assess the Parliament and Civics Education Rebate as it affects students from the remotest parts of Australia.**
- 4.48 The Committee is equally concerned that once students arrive in the National Capital, they may not have access to programmes such as those

30 Dr Harry Phillips, *Submission no. 22*, p. 3.

31 Dr Harry Phillips, *Transcript of Evidence*, 21 September 2006, p. 46.

32 Dr Harry Phillips, *Submission no. 22*, p. 3.

offered by the PEO and the EEC. That the PEO can only accommodate approximately 50 per cent of its requests is unfortunate.

- 4.49 The Committee is aware that both the PEO and the AEC are investigating alternative locations which could potentially increase their capacity load. Should the House of Representatives' Main Committee be relocated from its current place in Committee Room 2R3 of Parliament House, the PEO would also have access to this room for its role play programme. Should certain agencies be relocated from the AEC's headquarters in West Block, the Canberra EEC would have a greater space with which to accommodate more visiting students.
- 4.50 The Committee encourages both of these agencies to continue efforts which would see more space allocated to their education programmes.
- 4.51 The Committee further recognises the difficulty associated with increased demand for such programmes during the peak period of August to October. The Committee believes that more effort should be made to accommodate students earlier in the year, and also during school holidays and therefore recommends that a new rebate be offered to encourage students to visit the National Capital in off-peak periods.
- 4.52 The Committee recognises that only a small proportion of the total Australian student population will travel to Canberra and therefore encourages state, territory and local governments to improve their education services for school students. Local councils, in particular, should offer guided tours and encourage students to attend council meetings.
- 4.53 The Committee further encourages efforts to create virtual tours of federal, state and local legislatures.

Recommendation 8

- 4.54 **The Committee recommends that the Australian Government provide additional support to both the Parliamentary Education Office and the Australian Electoral Commission in their efforts to access additional space so that a greater number of students and schools who want to participate in relevant programmes can do so.**

