

SUBMISSION 51

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

Chair: Peter Lindsay MP
Deputy Chair: Michael Danby MP

Submission by the National Capital Educational Tourism Project 1 June 2006

The National Capital Educational Tourism Project (NCETP) commenced operation in 2000 and is a partnership project of the ACT Government, the National Capital Authority and the National Capital Attractions Association to increase school visitation to the National Capital. The NCETP is a unique marketing campaign that supports collaborative initiatives among Local Government and Federal Government Departments and cultural institutions.

The NCETP aims to increase the number of Australian school children visiting the National Capital as part of their school education, through visits to and participating in the educational programs offered by the National Cultural Attractions that encourage an understanding of Australian history, culture, democracy, citizenship, and values.

The National Capital symbolises the Australian identity, past, present and future and was created as a city for this to be experienced and appreciated by all Australians. The NCETP's marketing initiatives are targeted at promoting the National Capital as the destination where the nation's history, values and treasures are easily accessible through the resources of the National Institutions.

The National Capital, with its many national cultural institutions, is in a unique position to offer experiential learning for students in civics and citizenship. The cultural institutions have developed sophisticated education programs which specifically fit into the school curriculum and assist in the teaching of issues relevant to our democratic society. The key institutions delivering civics and citizenship education are Parliament House, the Parliamentary Education Office, Old Parliament House (OPH), the Electoral Education Centre (EEC), the National Archives of Australia and the National Capital Exhibition.

To further assist in providing experiential learning and the engagement of our school students in understanding our democracy the two Federal Government rebate schemes that operated until 30 June 2006 - the Citizenship Visits Program and the Education Travel Rebate, have now been combined into one programme, funded by the Department of Education, Science and Training (DEST), known as the Parliament and Civics Education Rebate (PACER) Programme. PACER is to commence operation on 1 July 2006 and has been provided with additional funding by the Federal Government to assist schools visiting the National Capital to participate in parliament and civics education out of the class room.

The PACER Programme is an integral part of DEST's Civics and Citizenship Education Programme. To qualify for funding under PACER, schools must visit Parliament House, Old Parliament House (incorporating the EEC) and the Australian War Memorial, as well as demonstrate that their visit to the National Capital integrates into their class room activities.

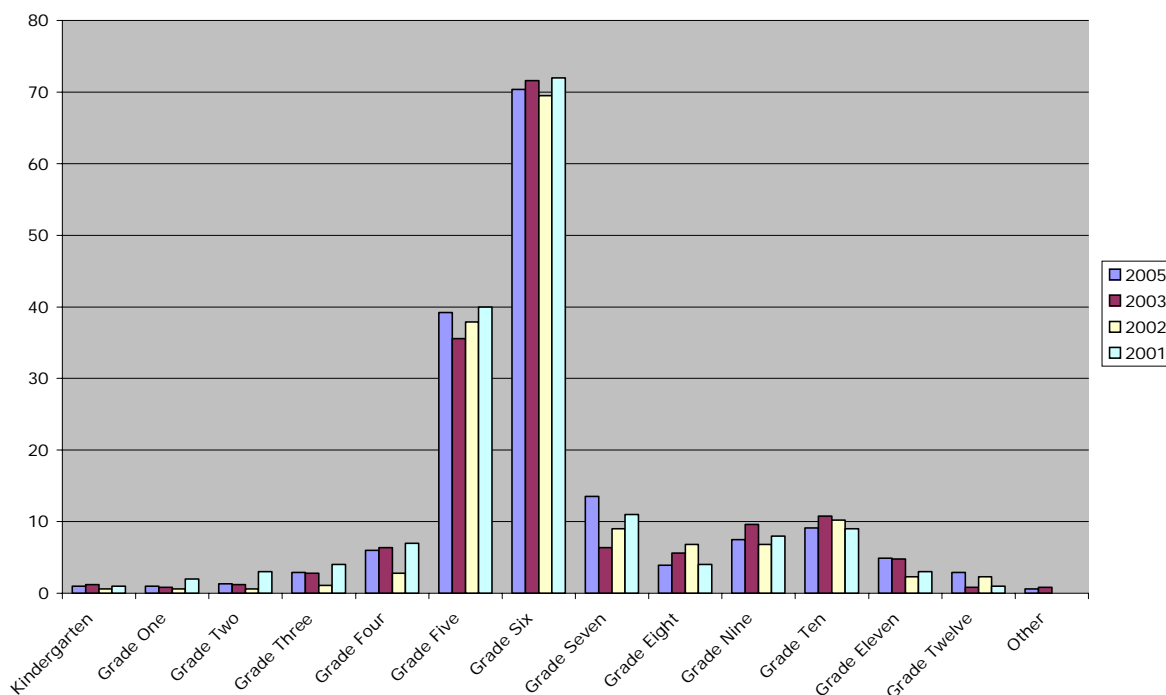
Currently approximately 122,000 students visit the National Capital annually on a school excursion and the average length of stay is 2.8 nights. Research undertaken by the University of Canberra¹, Centre for Tourism Research, on behalf of the NCETP, shows that the majority of the students that visit the National Capital are in Years 5/ 6/7 and

Years 9/10, and the main reason (83.4% of teachers surveyed) for an excursion to the National Capital is to assist in the delivery of the curriculum in the Civics and Citizenship. 96.1% of teachers surveyed agreed that a visit to the National Capital contributed positively to the curriculum, with 89.3% advising that the visit increased the student's understanding of civics and democracy.

The Research reports the following outcomes:

The majority of school students visiting the National Capital on a school excursion are in grade five and six.

Grade levels of visiting schools 2001, 2002, 2003 and 2005 (%)



The main reason for a visit to the National Capital was Civics and Government, as shown in the table below:

	2005 n=385	
	Frequency	%
Civics and Citizenship	321	83.4
Australian History	275	71.4
Science and Technology	251	65.2
Sightseeing	160	41.6
Art and Culture	147	38.2
Health and Sport	144	37.4
Personal Development	129	33.5
Indigenous Culture and Society	71	18.4
Other	31	8.1
The Environment	25	6.5
Stopover	17	4.4

Please note that some of these categories have changed due to changes in government curriculum policy.

For instance, Civics and Citizenship was previously called Civics and Government.

This reinforces the importance of the institutions providing civics and citizenship education.

Canberra as a Destination for School Excursions

The 2005 Research Report states that schools visit the National Capital from all Australian states and territories and that:

Generally, teachers agreed that a visit to the National Capital:

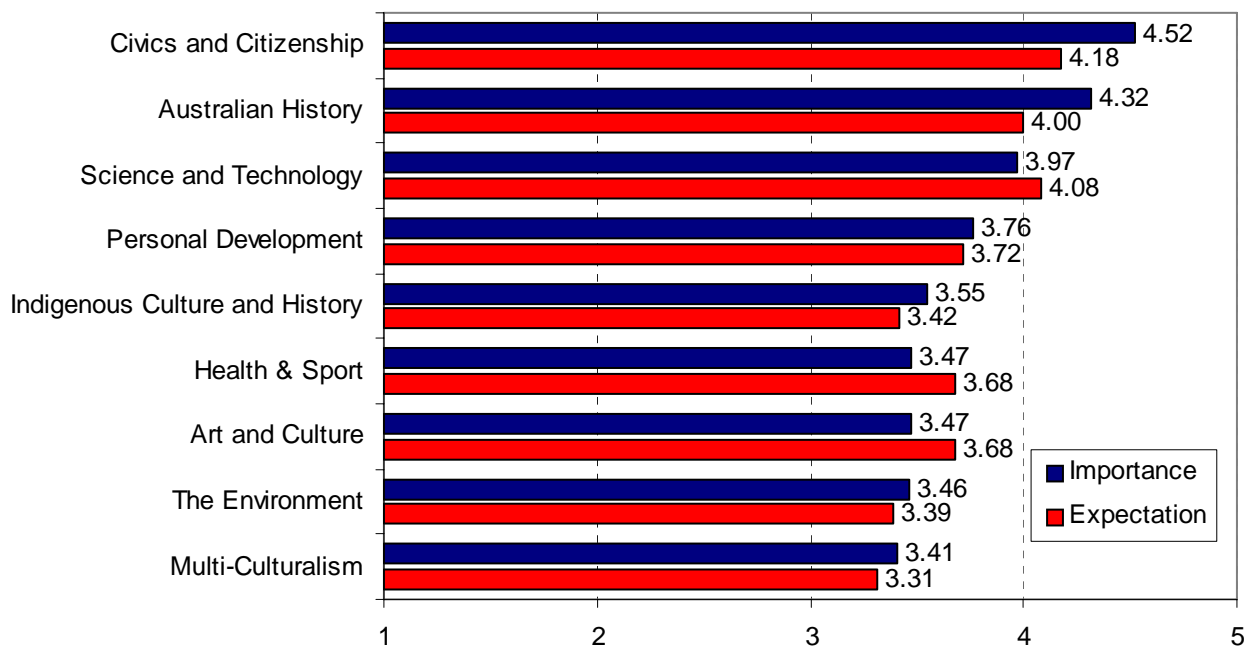
- contributed positively to the curriculum (96.1%);
- enhanced students appreciation of the National Capital (94.0%);
- increased students understanding of civics and citizenship (89.3%);
- increased students understanding of Australia's history (91.6%); and,
- gave students a better understanding of how leadership contributes to Australian Society (82.2%).

They also agreed that:

- understanding Australian politics is an important part of the school curriculum (94.3%);
- Canberra's attractions represent Australian Culture (87.1%);
- visiting the National Capital increases students national pride (62.0%); and,
- Undertaking a visit or programs at National Cultural institutions assist your students in understanding our diverse society (75.9%).

Curriculum Needs and Expectations

The 2005 Research Report rates the importance of curriculum areas in planning a visit and the itinerary for the visit to the National Capital. This is shown in the graph below.



The research demonstrates the importance of a visit to the National Capital in supporting a range of curriculum areas in schools, particularly civics and citizenship.

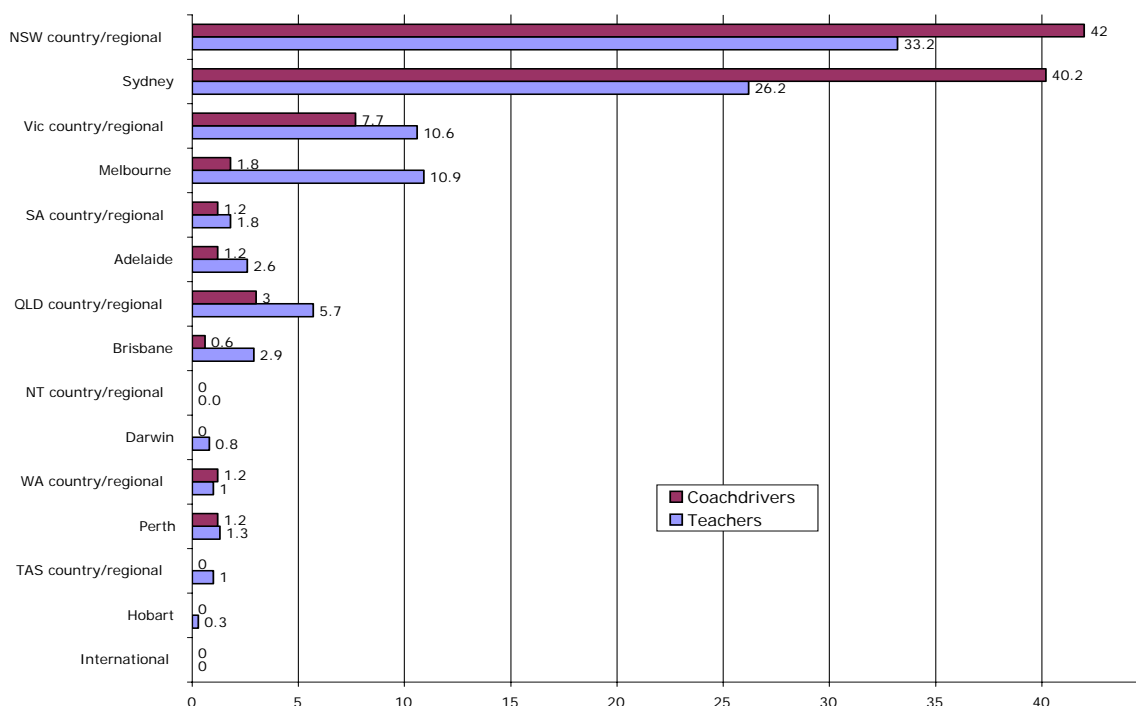
Civics and citizenship is now a national priority for schooling. The Australian Government, State and Territory Ministers of Education have all agreed to develop nationally consistent curriculum outcomes in civics and citizenship education, along with English, mathematics and science, through the MCEETYA (Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs). This involves the development and agreement of proficiency standards and the reporting of outcomes against these standards. In 2004, MCEETYA conducted the first national assessment of civics and citizenship education for a representative sample of Year 6 primary and Year 10 secondary school students as the basis for this national reporting.

National Assessment in Civics and Citizenship commenced in 2004 using two key performance measures (KPMs). *KPM 1: Civics: Knowledge and Understanding of Civic Institutions and Processes* includes 'Knowledge of key concepts and understandings relating to civic institutions and processes in Australian democracy, government, law, national identity, diversity, cohesion and social justice.' *KPM 2: Citizenship: Dispositions and Skills for Participation* include 'Understandings related to the attitudes, values, dispositions, beliefs and actions that underpin active democratic citizenship.'

The incorporation of Civics and Citizenship as a national schooling priority and the proactive marketing activities of the benefits of a visit to the National Capital and the new PACER programme will more than likely increase the desire of schools to benefit from the education programs in the National Capital that enhance an understanding of Civics and Citizenship.

It is also important to note from the Research that over half (53.3%) of schools visiting the National Capital in 2005 were from country or regional areas highlighting the importance of an educational visit to the National Capital for students from these regions.

The Origin of Schools by Region visiting the National Capital is shown in the table below.



Currently, the Institutions delivering these programs, particularly in the second half of the year, are operating at a maximum capacity. The NCETP is actively marketing on behalf of both the Federal and ACT Governments to not only increase the visitation, but to also the length of stay in the National Capital and encourage school visitation in the first half of the school year. This marketing, along with the significant focus now introduced into the school curriculum in relation to Civics and Citizenship and the introduction of the PACER Programme, will lead to increased demand on the cultural institutions to deliver their education programs.

The school years, particularly primary school, is an important developmental period in young people when their minds are open to learn about our unique Australian electoral system, and every opportunity should be grasped to provide this education.

One of the most important venues for delivering civics and citizenship education in the National Capital is the Electoral Education Centre (EEC). It is currently referred to by the Australian Electoral Commission (AEC) as the Canberra EEC. Its significance and audience reach is understated by its current name. The Centre might be more appropriately renamed as the National Electoral Education Centre as it delivers an outstanding programme on electoral education on the Federal Electoral System. [The ACT Electoral Commission and the ACT Legislative Assembly provide education programs on the ACT electoral system.]

The 2005 Research clearly demonstrates the outstanding programmes delivered at the EEC. The Research reports that the mean satisfaction of the EEC by teachers in 2005 was 4.76 out of 5, and 80.5% of teachers were very satisfied and 16.8% satisfied with the EEC. The Research quotes:

Electoral Education Centre:

- *“EEC was excellent”*
- *“EEC activities were designed at student's needs”*
- *“Fabulous set-up great professional transfer of knowledge”*
- *“Great educational value/ hands on for children”*
- *“EEC involvement of students in the voting process...”*
- *“EEC fantastic, children really enjoyed it”*

Electoral education is fundamental to a healthy and robust democracy. All citizens need to understand their rights and responsibilities with regard to voting to ensure a successful democracy.

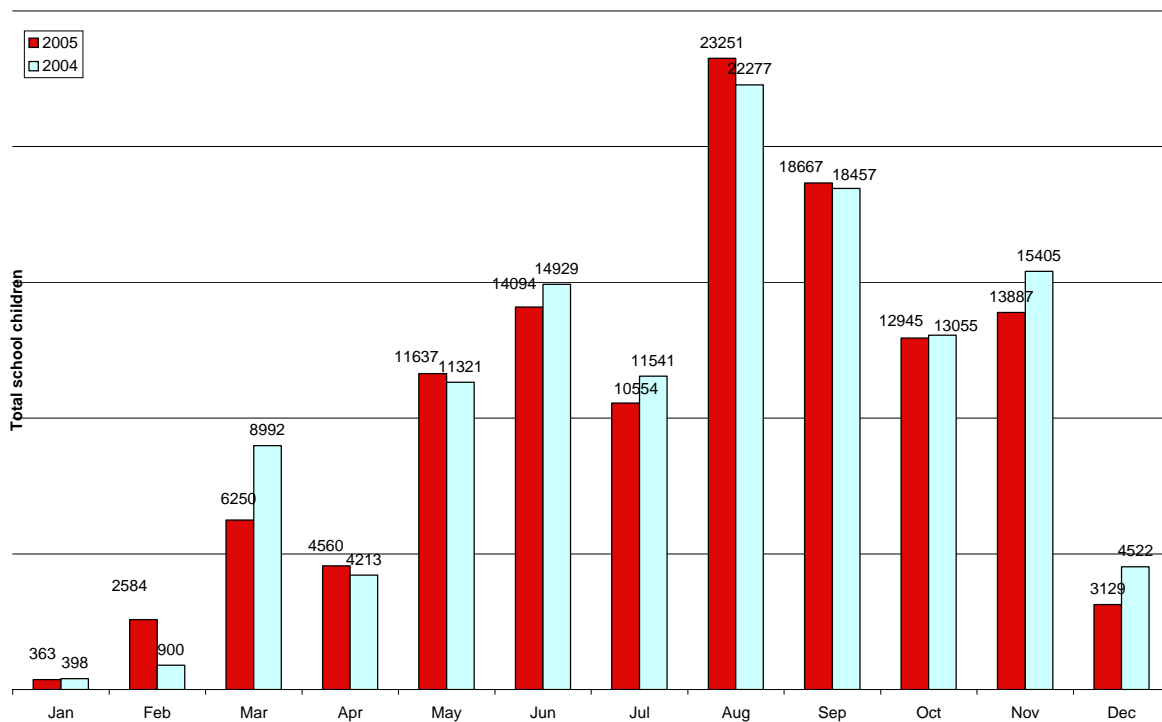
There is a compelling case for expanding the EEC in Canberra to ensure that all students who visit the National Capital can participate in its electoral education programme.

The EEC in Canberra currently operates over 2000 sessions, educating over 70,000 students on the Australian electoral system, annually. These students are from primary age, through to tertiary students, the bulk of the students being upper primary.

The core hours for sessions at the EEC are from 8.30am to 5.30pm. Each session is 1.5 hours duration and new sessions commence every ½ hour.

During the peak periods of school visitation to Canberra the Centre runs at capacity.

The table below shows the visitation by schools to Canberra by month. It can be seen that, the peak period to visit is during June to November. Monthly Visitation Figures to the National Capital, 2004 and 2005



For 8 weeks of term two the EEC operates at over 70% capacity, with some weeks over 90%. In term three the EEC operates at 100% capacity and at times operates additional sessions outside core business hours. In term four, three weeks operates at over 90% capacity, and four weeks at over 70% capacity. Schools tend request sessions on Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursdays, as they travel to and from Canberra on Mondays and Fridays. This means that getting into sessions on Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays is not possible for all schools during peak periods, yet explains why the EEC appears to operate at below 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.

The new Gallery of Australian Democracy to be opened at Old Parliament House will complement the programme at the EEC. It highly likely that this Gallery, the curriculum focus on Civics and Citizenship, the PACER Programme combined with NCETP's marketing activities will substantially increase the requests for EEC programmes in the future.

To assist to meet the current and future demand the EEC would greatly benefit from additional funding and resources for the following:

- To extend the current operating hours at the EEC
- To allow for the duplication of the current facility at Old Parliament House in Canberra

- To provide outreach programmes for rural and regional areas in Australia
- To allow for employment and training of staff who can deliver this vital education to our young Australians in an effective manner.

As part of the review on electoral matters we strongly urge that consideration be given to provide additional funding to allow the continued growth and development of facilities, staffing and education programs of the Electoral Education Centres, especially in the National Centre in Canberra.

The Electoral Education Centre is a key resource in the delivery of the school curriculum in the civics and citizenship area. It is essential that the Electoral Education Centre be able to offer their education programs to all schools that visit the National Capital and wish to educate students in our electoral processes.

It is also essential that the Electoral Education Centre have the resources to cater for both primary and secondary school students. The Research shows that the majority of students that visit the National Capital, particularly in relation to civics and citizenship education, are from grades 5 and 6. As civics and citizenship education has now become a national priority for schooling in Australia it is essential that all possible resources are provided to assist in this education across all sectors of our young Australians.

¹ 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.