



SUBMISSION 14

Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters	
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Secretary	<i>[Signature]</i>

Office of the Speaker

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

Dear Ms Palmieri

I am pleased to present the ACT Legislative Assembly's submission in response to your inquiry into Civics and Electoral Education. (See Attachment A)

I would be happy to host a visit by the Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters or to appear before the committee.

If you have any queries please contact my advisor, Ms Sue Robinson on (02) 6205 0051.

Yours sincerely,

Wayne Berry MLA
Speaker

25 May 2006



**LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY FOR THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY****JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE ON ELECTORAL
MATTERS:-
INQUIRY INTO CIVICS AND ELECTORAL EDUCATION**

In 1995, shortly after relocating to a permanent building, the A.C.T. Legislative Assembly established an education office, staffed with one full-time officer (1.0 FTE), with a mandate to develop a range of materials and programs to promote a greater understanding of the electoral and parliamentary process to students, public servants and the wider A.C.T. community. In 2003, a part-time administrative assistant (0.6 FTE) was employed. In 2005, the office was amalgamated with another office and renamed – the Strategy and Parliamentary Education Office.

Due to the small size of the Assembly, the Strategy and Parliamentary Education Office has additional responsibilities including:

- producing and updating Assembly publications,*
- managing the Members' official gifts program,*
- organising hospitality supplies;*
- organising official portraits of members and the Assembly; and*
- providing secretariat support to the Legislative Assembly Art Advisory Committee (LAAAC) as well as managing the placement and management of artworks in the building.*

The office works closely with staff from Elections ACT to develop a range of programs and publications that educate participants about electoral and civics education in the A.C.T.

Visitation numbers average between 1600-2000 per year. The major clients are A.C.T. government and non-government school students in years 4 – 12. Groups participating in programs at the Assembly range from individuals to groups of 80 students. Fees are only charged for the Public Service Seminars. All other programs and materials are provided free.

Programs are developed to suit the individual needs of the client groups and are dependent on room availability as there is no designated educational room, only access to the Reception Room, Committee rooms, Exhibition and Media Conference rooms. Programs may also be presented in the Chamber, on a non-sitting day. The Assembly and Elections ACT education officers deliver programs off-site if clients cannot visit the Assembly.

Evaluation forms are distributed to clients for all programs. Feedback received is highly supportive of the programs offered. Any suggestions for improvements are discussed and if relevant are used to improve program delivery.

COMMENTS ON STATUS OF PROGRAMS FOR TARGET GROUPS**1. YOUNG PEOPLE**

Students in the primary, high school and college years can access a range of general and specialised programs on different aspects of electoral and civics education. (See Attachment A – *OVERVIEW OF A.C.T. LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY EDUCATION PROGRAMS*)

A.C.T. students can also access a variety of programs run by the Federal Parliament, Old Parliament House and the Electoral Education Centre, if there are spaces available.

Adequacy of current programs:-

While the Assembly offers a range of programs to educate students from their primary to college years, participation seems dependent on school interest and/or course participation, and the ability to provide teacher release to enable the appropriate number of staff to accompany students on an excursion.

Issues the committee may consider or make recommendations on:-

- The cost of transport and teacher release may prevent some schools accessing the electoral and civics programs provided in the A.C.T.

2. MIGRANTS

The Speaker of the A.C.T. Legislative Assembly, Mr Wayne Berry MLA, conducts citizenship ceremonies for approximately 100 people per month at the Assembly. In response to a staff member's observation that new citizens received their Australian citizenship certificate without any education about their new country's system of democracy, the Speaker developed a *Speaker's Citizenship Evening*. New citizens are now invited to attend an evening at the Assembly where they meet with current members and learn about the democratic process. The Speaker's Citizenship Evenings are held every two months.

The evening runs from 5.30pm until 7.00pm and on arrival guests mingle with available members over refreshments before viewing a captioned film which gives an overview of the history and function of the Assembly. Participants then take a tour of the building guided by either the Clerk, Deputy Clerk, Manager of Committees, Manager of Corporate Services or the Manager of Strategy and Parliamentary Education. The evening concludes with a visit to the Chamber where participants can ask questions of the Speaker.

Students undertaking an Adult Migrant English Program (AMEP) at the Canberra Institute of Technology (CIT) often visit the Assembly to learn about the electoral and parliamentary process and to meet current members. These programs are initiated by the CIT teacher.

A generic pamphlet on the A.C.T. Electoral System and the workings of the Assembly has recently been translated into 3 languages:- Vietnamese, Cantonese and Arabic. This pamphlet is also scheduled to be translated into six other languages over the next two financial years. All translations will be placed on the Assembly website (www.parliament.act.gov.au) to enhance understanding for people with a language other than English.

Adequacy of current programs:-

Approximately 30-50 new citizens attend each Speaker's evening citizenship program.

Visits from new immigrants undertaking an AMEP program, while a regular occurrence, occur because of the initiative of CIT teachers.

Issues the committee may consider or make recommendations on:-

- The need for all Australian electoral centres and parliamentary education units to develop formal links with their local migrant education groups in order to create and deliver appropriate programs for all immigrants.

3. INDIGENOUS AUSTRALIANS

The Assembly does not have a program that specifically targets indigenous Australians, although indigenous students have participated in programs through school visits.

Adequacy of current programs:-

There is a distinct lack of programming to specifically target this group.

Issues the committee may consider or make recommendations on:-

- To encourage indigenous Australians to participate in electoral and civics education all Australian electoral centres and parliamentary education units need to develop programs that target their particular needs.
- Consideration should be given to engaging indigenous Australians in the development and delivery of programs for indigenous Australians.

ADDRESSING THE TERMS OF REFERENCE

❖ *The nature of civics education and its links with electoral education*

The Assembly education office regularly works closely with staff from Elections ACT, and at other times with the Australian Electoral Commission (AEC) and Old Parliament House (OPH), to develop a range of programs which promote a comprehensive understanding of the interdependencies and significance of both the electoral and parliamentary system. Electoral and civics education are interlinked and must not be taught in isolation.

Issues the committee may consider or make recommendations on:-

- The need for the development and delivery of a range of integrated programs on electoral and civics education to ensure students acquire a comprehensive understanding of our system of democracy.

❖ *The school age at which civics education should begin*

Students from year 4 onwards, and in particular years 5-6, regularly visit the Assembly and actively engage in interactive discussion and role-plays on the electoral and parliamentary process.

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 programs run by the Assembly for students in years 8 -11 such as the Interschool Debates Program and the A.C.T. Schools Constitutional Convention.

Students attending the 2006 A.C.T. Youth Interact Conference discussed the issue of lowering the voting age to 16. Approximately half of the students were in favour and half against. From experience, students aged 16-18 years, who participate in programs at the Assembly, express a similar level of interest/disinterest in electoral and civics education.

Students close to voting age need to have the opportunity to develop a greater understanding and awareness of representative democracy and how to be active citizens. To achieve this it is essential that students in their secondary years access information and participate in electoral and parliamentary processes across all levels of government - local, state and federal.

Issues the committee may consider or make recommendations on:-

- Most upper primary students (Years 4 –6) are currently studying aspects of electoral and civics education. This may include a visit to their Local/State/Territory parliament.
- Not every high school and college student (Years 7 –12) completes a unit in electoral and civics education.
- Teachers may benefit from the establishment of a national website to assist them to access information and lesson plans on the electoral and parliamentary processes used in every Australian parliament. Contact details would also be useful.
- The need to expand and develop specialised programs to target the needs of students in the different years of high school and college.

❖ *The potential to increase electoral knowledge through outside school programs*

All programs at the Assembly promote an understanding of both electoral and parliamentary processes, as they are viewed as an interrelated package.

Educational pedagogy reinforces the theory that students of all ages learn best by doing and being actively engaged in the process of learning. So, by visiting an electoral education centre or a parliament students gain 'real' experiences by participating in a range of activities such as a mock election, an impromptu debate in the chamber, watching a parliament debate issues of importance to the community and discussing issues or concerns with 'real' parliamentarians. Programs delivered by experienced presenters can also assist teachers and students to gain a greater insight into the practices and processes they see in action.

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 programs is to promote knowledge of the electoral and parliamentary process but also to provide teachers with additional resources and to increase their awareness of the range of programs offered by the Assembly or Elections ACT.

When the event is scheduled on a school day, attendance is often limited due to the need for schools to pay for a replacement teacher. Most of the Assembly's professional development days for teachers are held on a sitting day, to enable teachers to experience local parliament in action and debating issues that may affect their daily life.

In 2004, an A.C.T. teacher's in-service day to celebrate democracy, funded courtesy of the *Discovering Democracy* program, was better attended. From this program the Assembly received some new school bookings.

Restrictions on visits to the Assembly only occur because of lack of room availability, as there is no designated educational room. If visitations were to increase significantly, there would need to be a proportional increase in resourcing.

Issues the committee may consider or make recommendations on:-

- The added value students in their primary and secondary years would gain by visiting an electoral education centre and a parliament and actively participating in a range of interactive programs.
- Electoral education centres and parliaments may require an increased level of funding to support any increased visitation if visits were made compulsory.
- The lack of funding available to enable a school to release staff to attend professional development days held at local electoral education centres and parliamentary education units.

❖ *The role of the Australian Electoral Commission (AEC) and the State and Territory Electoral Commissions in promoting electoral education*

The AEC and State and Territory Electoral Commissions have a major role in promoting electoral education. However, it is imperative that they work closely with the parliamentary education units to ensure students gain a comprehensive understanding of the connection between the electoral process and Australia's system of parliamentary democracy.

The education office of the Assembly works closely with the A.C.T. Electoral Commission's education officer to ensure students receive a comprehensive understanding of elections and the parliament.

Issues the committee may consider or make recommendations on:-

- Electoral education is only part of the equation and must not be taught in isolation.
- The value to be gained if electoral education centres develop formal links with their local parliamentary education units.

❖ *The role of the Federal, State and Local Governments in promoting electoral education*

The Federal, State and Local Governments represent and make laws on behalf of all Australians. Their role is paramount in promoting electoral and civics education. Every Australian needs to have a sound understanding of the electoral process as well as the role of parliamentarians after they are elected.

Issues the committee may consider or make recommendations on:-

- Federal, State and Local Parliaments currently fund and promote programs on electoral and civics education. Support from Federal, State and Local governments may provide greater impetus for schools to focus on educating all students, especially those in the upper primary and secondary years, about electoral and civics education.

❖ *The access to, and adequacy of funding for, school visits to the Federal parliament*

The Federal parliament needs to take a more expansive view on this issue. 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.

Issues the committee may consider or make recommendations on:-

- It is more cost-efficient and requires less permissions if students visit their local State/Territory electoral centre or parliament.
- Funding for visits to the Federal Parliament may be more appropriate targeting secondary students as they are more independent and are also closer to the voting age.
- Support should be provided to enable more secondary students to participate in a wider range of programs offered by their State/Territory electoral education centres and parliamentary education offices such as constitutional conventions, debates programs etc.

OVERVIEW OF A.C.T. LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY EDUCATION PROGRAMS

SCHOOL PROGRAMS - GENERAL

Programs offered to schools are designed to suit the needs of students and their educational level. Clients construct their program by selecting from a number of activities they would like students to undertake. They may select from the following:-

1. A Mock Hare-Clark Election – which is a role-play – conducted by staff from Elections ACT. (45-60minutes)
2. 'One of a Kind' Film on the Assembly. (12 minutes, captioned version available)
3. PowerPoint presentation –covering current members and the passage of legislation. (15 -30 minutes depending on what level students are in)
4. Meet the members – students can discuss issues with members or ask them questions about their role. (30 minutes. This can be panel style or individual. Questions are sometimes sent in ahead of the visit to ensure members are prepared.)
5. Papers and procedures - Daily Program, Minutes of Proceedings, Notice Paper. This session is often presented by the Clerk or Deputy Clerk. (30 minutes)
6. The committee process – often presented by a Committee Secretary. (30 minutes)
7. A short role-play in the Chamber which looks at the opening of a sitting day or an impromptu debate on an issue students may be discussing at school. (15 - 30 minutes)
8. A formal class role-play – based on legislation that has been passed in the Assembly. This is currently being finalised. (1 hour)

Most school visits last for two and a half to three hours and are arranged to suit room availability, school timetables and school transport limitations. Schools may also invite a member to visit their school.

An information folder with a series of fact sheets on the electoral process and the workings of the Assembly, as well as a set of black-line masters, are sent to the school when they book a visit. Every student receives a workbook on the day of their visit. Some additional material is also provided to assist the teacher in following up the visit.

The education officers from the Assembly and Elections ACT will take the program to the school, if schools cannot visit the Assembly.

SCHOOL PROGRAMS - SPECIFIC

Specific programs are also organised for students in high school and college to further develop their understanding of parliamentary process and democratic conventions for e.g. the A.C.T. Schools Constitutional Convention and the Interschool Parliamentary Debates program.

▪ *Schools' Constitutional Convention*

In recent years every state and territory has held a Schools' Constitutional Convention to promote understanding and informed discussion amongst young Australians about the Australian Constitution and system of government. During this event a group of students are selected to participate in the National Schools Constitutional Convention held at Parliament House the following year.

The A.C.T. Schools Constitutional Convention has been jointly developed with staff from the Assembly Strategy Parliamentary Education Unit, the Australian Electoral Commission (AEC), Old Parliament House (OPH), the Electoral Education Centre (EEC) and the A.C.T. Department of Education and Training (DET). The target group is Year 11 students in A.C.T. Government and non-Government Colleges.

Staff from the Parliamentary Education Office (PEO) of the Federal Parliament participated in the planning and hosting of one day of this program from 2001-2003, but withdrew in 2004.

The Australian National University (ANU) Law school – including professors and ANU law students – also assist with the planning and delivery of this program.

Some recent topics explored include:-

- *Should Australia become a Republic?*
- *An Australian Bill of Rights*
- *“Let the Rivers Run.”* – which focused on Section 100 of the Constitution - *–Nor abridge right to use water* – which states that the Commonwealth cannot restrict the States’ right to reasonable use of their waters or rivers for conservation or irrigation.

On day one, students learn about the Constitution and participate in a role-play as Senators. On day two, students represent the Australian States and Territories and question members on their perspective; engage in group work; express their views at a Soapbox session and finally, they vote in the referendum and watch the count run by staff of the AEC. Members of the Assembly present the “Yes” and “No” case.

Five students are selected every year to represent the A.C.T. at the national constitutional convention held in the following year.

▪ *Interschool Parliamentary Debates*

The Interschool Parliamentary Debates program was re-introduced in 2001. The program initially targeted high school students in Years 8 and 9, but was expanded in 2006, to include students in Year 10. The overall aim of the program is to provide an opportunity for students to practise their public speaking skills in a formal arena - the A.C.T. Legislative Assembly Chamber, the setting for parliamentary debates.

Students sit in the Chamber and debate a range of topics related to an overarching theme. Previous themes have included:- Ecotourism, International Issues, Scientific Dilemmas, Australia Fair, Sport Matters, Canberra Issues and Youth Affairs. The Speaker, Deputy Speaker and Temporary Deputy Speakers preside over the day and give the students ‘tips’ and feedback on their performance.

The program begins with students from one school presenting a case ‘for’ or ‘against’ a topic. The students are then questioned about their view by another school that sent a set of questions on notice to the presenting school, a week or two before the day of the debates. The Speaker then opens up the floor for a ‘questions without notice’ segment.

At the end of every topic debated, the Speaker puts the question on the topic to the vote. A division is held, if called for. The Speaker provides feedback on each school’s performance throughout the program. Available members attend morning tea with the students and participate in an open question/answer session in the afternoon.

- *Youth Week Activities*

The Assembly participates in the A.C.T.'s annual Youth Week activity. This can range from a street stall to a workshop presentation.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT FOR A.C.T. TEACHERS

Professional development days are held annually to assist teachers to gain a comprehensive understanding of the A.C.T. electoral system and the workings of parliament.

These events have been scheduled on a sitting day to enable teachers to see the Assembly in action. There is also a session with a panel of members – representing the Government, Opposition and the Crossbench – who discuss their roles and take questions from the teachers.

At the end of the day teachers are provided with a range of materials and contacts to assist them in the delivery of their programs.

WORK EXPERIENCE

The education unit arranges work experience placements in members' offices for students in Years 10-12 and for CIT Business Administration Certificate II students.

The Assembly also has a formal agreement with the ANU to place undergraduate students, undertaking an internship, in a member's office. Students are formally assessed on the report they present. The topic for the report is selected through discussion with students, the ANU and the member.

MIGRANT EDUCATION

- *Speaker's Citizenship Evenings*

The Assembly hosts Speaker's Citizenship Evenings every two months for new Australians, who receive their certificate at a citizenship ceremony held at the Assembly. The focus of this program is to welcome new citizens, to introduce them to their local members and to inform them of the process of governance followed in the A.C.T. Participants meet members over refreshments before viewing a captioned film, taking a tour of the Assembly and finally, visiting the Chamber where the Speaker takes questions.

- *Adult Migrant English Program (AMEP)*

Students undertaking Adult Migrant English Program (AMEP) classes at the Canberra Institute of Technology (CIT) regularly visit the Assembly to meet members and to learn more about the process of voting and governance. These programs are arranged by class teachers and vary according to need, language level and interest.

- *Pamphlets written in Languages Other than English*

The Assembly has recently translated a pamphlet, which gives a brief overview of the electoral process and the history and workings of the Assembly into three languages – Cantonese, Vietnamese and Arabic. These pamphlets will soon be available at the Public Entrance and for download from the Assembly website.

This pamphlet is scheduled for translation into a number of other languages over the next two financial years.

COMMUNITY PROGRAMS

Programs are developed for community groups on request. Some recent visits have been undertaken by scout associations, the A.C.T. Deafness Resource Centre, the Christian Lobby Group and the Alzheimer's Association (A.C.T.).

A one-day program on the electoral system and workings of parliament is also offered bi-annually for members of the University of the Third Age (U3A).

PUBLIC SERVICE SEMINARS

A program of Public Service Seminars was re-introduced for A.C.T. Public Servants in 2005. This is the only program the Assembly charges for. The current price is \$100 plus GST per seminar.

Four, half-day seminars are held. Sessions include:-

- An introduction to the A.C.T. Legislative Assembly;*
- Role and Operation of Assembly Committees;*
- The Budget Process; and*
- The Legislative Process.*

Assembly staff from other sections – the Secretariat, Committee Office and Hansard and Communications - participate in the delivery of these seminars, as do, staff from the A.C.T. Treasury, the A.C.T. Auditor-General's Office, the A.C.T. Office of Parliamentary Counsel and the Assembly Cabinet Office.

Half-day programs are also developed for individual public service departments on request. There is no charge for these programs.

PARLIAMENTARY DELEGATIONS

The Education Office also presents programs to delegates from interstate and international parliaments.

OPEN DAY

An Open Day at the A.C.T. Legislative Assembly is held once every sitting of each Assembly and is actively promoted through the media. Visitors participate in a range of interactive activities developed by the Secretariat, Committee Office, Hansard and Communications and Parliamentary Counsel's Office. The Speaker runs a session in the Chamber.

Members volunteer to take small groups of visitors on a tour of the building and through all the interactive activities. Each visit lasts between one and one and a half hours. Despite media promotion and advertising attendance to the last two open days have been between 90 and 105.

WEBSITE

The Assembly website has an education section which provides copies of fact sheets about the workings of the parliament; information on Past Members; a Glossary of Parliamentary Terms; a Virtual Tour; Games and a Committee Role Play. The Strategy and Parliamentary Office has responsibility for developing new programs for the website.