

Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters
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THE CABINET OFFICE
NEW SOUTH WALES

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Mr Peter Lindsay MP
Chair
Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600


Dear Mr Lindsay

Thank you for your letter inviting submissions to the Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters in relation to its inquiry into the adequacy of civics and electoral education.

I enclose the submission of the NSW Government.

Should you have any questions about this matter, please contact Sarah Kelly, Principal Legal Officer, Legal Branch, on 9228 5687.

Yours sincerely


Roger B Wilkins
Director-General

**NEW SOUTH WALES GOVERNMENT SUBMISSION TO THE JOINT STANDING
COMMITTEE ON ELECTORAL MATTERS *INQUIRY INTO CIVICS AND
ELECTORAL EDUCATION***

Civics and Electoral Education in NSW

As a result of the Report of the Civics Expert Group, *Whereas the people ...*, commissioned by the Commonwealth Government in 1994, New South Wales strengthened the place of civics and citizenship education within the New South Wales curriculum.

The Human Society and Its Environment K-6 Syllabus 1999 contains strong references to civics and citizenship content including electoral education. The NSW Department of Education and Training has recently published units of work to support connected outcomes groups that provide teachers with a framework for implementing the primary curriculum. In the unit *Working together*, students in Stage 2 (Years 3 and 4) study local councils, how councillors are elected, the decision making processes and the election mechanism. In Stage 3 (Years 5 and 6) students study the unit *Making informed choices*, learn about State and Federal Governments, voting systems and who is eligible to vote and use the Australian Electoral Commission video, *Every vote counts*.

In NSW secondary schools, students study Australian history as a mandatory course in Stage 5 (Years 9 and 10). In this course students study Federation and the Constitution, the voting rights of different groups in Australia at Federation, compulsory and preferential voting, referenda and people power. Additional studies are available through the option, *Political involvement* in the Years 7-10 Commerce Syllabus.

At the end of Year 10, NSW students have a School Certificate test in *Australian history, Australian geography and civics and citizenship*.

During the period 1998–2004, NSW schools were supported in civics and electoral education by the Australian Government Discovering Democracy Program. This program provided over \$2m for teacher professional development to support the implementation of the Discovering Democracy materials sent to all schools. During this period, close to 4,000 primary and 3,000 secondary teachers in NSW participated in this professional development program.

The combination of embedding explicitly civics and electoral education into the curriculum and the provision of high quality teacher professional development around national resources has ensured that NSW students have performed well in the 2004 National Civics and Citizenship test.

Throughout this period, the Education and Community Relations Section of the New South Wales State Parliament has provided and continues to provide support for civics and electoral education with support from the NSW Department of Education and Training. Courses for primary and secondary teachers are offered, and students and classes visit the New South Wales State Parliament for electoral education.

The Australian and State Electoral Commissions

During this period, New South Wales has benefited from the work of the Australian and State Electoral Commissions and their programs. The task of supporting students across schools is significant and these Commissions have provided high quality services to those who have been able to participate in their programs.

The program to enrol students during their senior years of schooling is particularly important to increase the participation rate of young people in elections. In this regard, schools and career advisors might also carry electoral enrolment forms and make them available to students on request and through appropriate classes.

School age at which electoral education should begin

Students should have the opportunity to explore democratic processes from an early age. Schools provide a safe and supportive environment that can provide opportunities for students to exercise and practise voting using a variety of methods. They can discuss the advantages and disadvantages of each method and begin to understand how different methods can produce different results.

In both primary and secondary schools, democratic practices including voting ought to provide a framework for school decision making in many areas of school life. With such mechanisms in place, students can explore the wider political processes involving lobbying, political parties, campaigning and policy development.

Most secondary schools and many primary schools have student representative councils that operate on democratic principles involving elections and election campaigns. There are a number of primary schools that operate school parliaments. These initiatives should be encouraged.

Outside school programs

Schools and the school curriculum provide a major channel for the delivery of electoral education outcomes. Highlighting the opportunities provided through the curriculum for electoral education and supporting these with materials and teacher professional development should be the focus of any future program.

While other organisations can deliver some electoral education outcomes to small and specialist groups within the school aged population, schools remain the key deliverers of learning and should be the focus of resources to support civics and electoral education. In the senior years of schooling, where there may be no universally appropriate curriculum context, sessions conducted by outside groups might be able to provide basic electoral education, at least around the need to register and participate in voting.

Other organisations will need to focus on the post school age groups to ensure that they have access to the information and skills of electoral education.

TAFE colleges

The TAFE NSW Certificate II in General and Vocational Education (CGVE) develops work-related and general education skills and knowledge to a level equivalent to Year 10.

The NSW Board of Studies (BoS) recognises the equivalence of CGVE to Year 10 due to the inclusion of mandatory studies in English, Maths, Science, Civics and Citizenship and Information Communication Technology.

Enrolments in the CGVE have been above 4,000 per year for the past 3 years. Over 70% of students enrolled in the CGVE during this time were aged between 15 and 19 years.

The CGVE is currently being revised and will be re-accredited as a unit based qualification for implementation in 2007. TAFE NSW is currently negotiating with the NSW Board of Studies regarding components of the qualification.

The Terms of Reference for the Inquiry into Civics and Electoral Education includes a focus on:

- the nature of civics education and its links with electoral education
- the content and adequacy of electoral education in government and non-government school programs of study, as well as in TAFE colleges and universities.

In order to meet the BoS requirement for the equivalence to Year 10, the CGVE focuses on civics education rather than electoral education through the delivery of two core modules:

- Australian Studies – covering Australian issues, history and geography
- Community Identity – covering an individual's identity as part of a community plus participation within a community.

All students enrolled in the CGVE are required to complete these two modules. The module purposes and content for the two modules are attached. Neither of the modules specifically addresses electoral education.

An elective unit is being proposed for inclusion in the new CGVE qualification relating to the Australian system of government and political processes. The content of this unit is yet to be finalised but it will include a focus on electoral education.