

**Information on Civics and Citizenship Education of Australian School Students
For the
Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters
29 July 2005**

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. 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.

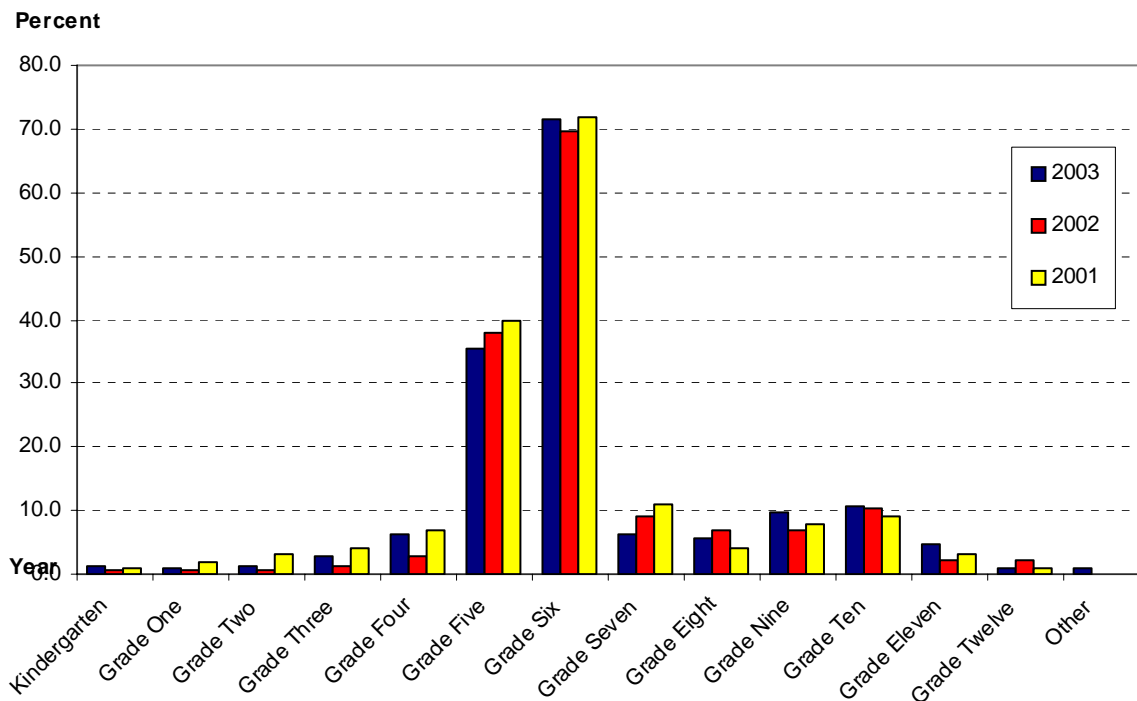
The National Capital, with its many national cultural institutions, is in a unique position to offer experiential learning for students in civics and citizenship. The cultural institutions have developed sophisticated education programs which specifically fit into the school curriculum and assist in 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, the Electoral Education Centre and the National Capital Exhibition.

To assist in providing experiential learning and the engagement of our school students in understanding our democracy two Commonwealth Government rebate schemes operate. The Citizenship Visits Program, administered by the Sergeant-at-Arms Office at Parliament House, for schools travelling to the National Capital beyond 1000 kms, and the Education Travel Rebate, funded by the Department of Education, Science and Training (DEST), for schools travelling to the National Capital within 1000 kms.

The Education Travel Rebate (ETR) is administered by the NCETP, and is an integral part of DEST's Civics and Citizenship Education Program. Schools that qualify for the ETR must visit at least two democracy related institutions and demonstrate that their visit to the National Capital integrates into their class room activities.

Currently approximately 126,000 students visit the National Capital annually on a school excursion. 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 and Year 10, and the main reason (90.3% of teachers surveyed) for an excursion to the National Capital is to assist in the delivery of the curriculum in the Civics and Citizenship. 96.4% of teachers surveyed agreed that a visit to the National Capital contributed positively to the curriculum, with 93.2% 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.



Main Reason for Visiting the National Capital

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

Main reasons for visiting the National Capital

	2003 n=248 Frequency	%
Civics and Government	224	90.3
Science and Technology	147	59.3
Australian History	92	37.1
Art and Culture	87	35.1
Sightseeing	84	33.9
Indigenous Art and Culture	44	17.7
Health and Sport	35	14.1
Personal Development	20	8.1
Stopover	8	3.2
Environment	3	1.2
Other	4	1.6

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

Canberra as a Destination for School Excursions

The 2003 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 (96.4% compared with 93.2% in 2002);
- enhanced students appreciation of the National Capital (94.8% compared with 92.4%);
- increased students understanding of civics and democracy (93.2% compared with 91.9%);
- increased students understanding of Australia's history (96.0% compared with 89.1%); and,
- gave students a better understanding of how leadership contributes to Australian Society (86.4% compared with 71.9%).

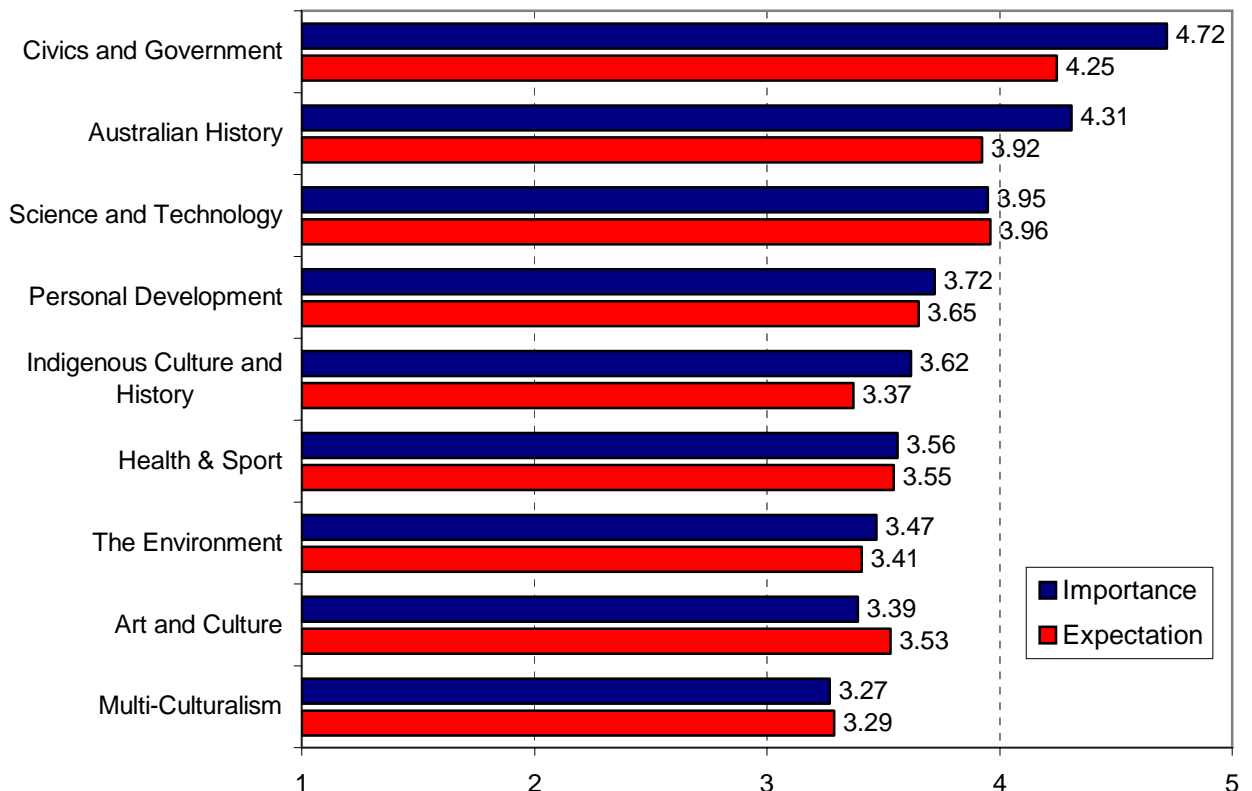
They also agreed that:

- Canberra's attractions represent Australian Culture (84.3% compared with 79.9% in 2002); and
- understanding Australian politics is an important part of the school curriculum (95.2% compared with 93.5%).”

Curriculum Needs and Expectations

The 2003 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 Importance of Curriculum Areas in Planning a Visit to the National Capital



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

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 will more than likely increase the desire of schools to benefit from the education programs operated by the cultural institutions.

Currently, the Institutions delivering these programs, particularly in the second half of the year, are operating at a maximum capacity. With the visitation level of 126,000 students increasing, and the length of time that schools are staying in the National Capital increasing (from 2.4 nights in 2002 to 3.0 nights in 2003) and the significant focus now introduced into the school curriculum in relation to Civics and Citizenship, the demand on the cultural institutions to deliver their education programs is increasing. This 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.

The Electoral Education Centre in Canberra operated over 2000 sessions, educating over 70,000 students on the Australian electoral system, over the past year. During this period the Electoral Education Centre in Canberra had a waiting list of 90 groups (over 4,500 students) that it could not accommodate. Many more groups did not go onto the waiting list as it was too extensive.

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 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.

¹ Discover what it means to be Australian in your National Capital: size and effect of school excursions to the National Capital, 2003, Angela Smith, Brent Ritchie and Michelle Filo, Centre for Tourism Research, University of Canberra, August 2004.