The Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia

Civics and Electoral Education

Parliament of Australia
Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters

May 2007
Canberra

Chair's Foreword

As one of the sixth longest continuous democracies in the world, Australia has a proud history and solid foundation of democratic principles. A basic understanding of our political and voting systems is fundamental to a vibrant participatory democracy.

It is of some concern to the Committee that surveys have shown that Australians between the ages of 15 and 35 typically have limited knowledge of Australia's political history and political system, and have little interest in Australian political affairs.

Young people are not alone in this feeling of disconnection: evidence suggests that Indigenous Australians and migrant citizens also experience some difficulties in their interactions with the democratic process.

The Committee's inquiry sought to examine the reasons for low rates of electoral participation amongst young people, Indigenous Australians and migrants, and to find more meaningful ways to encourage citizens to participate more directly in Australian democracy, primarily based on their poor English language skills.

The terms of reference for the inquiry were very broad, enabling us to hear from a diverse range of Australians, from school children and teachers to community leaders, academics and practitioners. The Committee conducted 11 public hearings which included hearings in every state and territory.

The Committee also visited ten schools (both primary and secondary) and held two school forums, during which it held discussions with 244 students and 47 of their teachers.

The Committee has made a series of recommendations which we believe will contribute to a healthier democracy with more citizens who are informed, involved and engaged in the issues that are important to them.

While many of the Committee's recommendations focus on matters regarding the provision of civics education, we also recommend a number of practical measures aimed at reducing the disenfranchisement of eligible voters.

I take this opportunity to thank my fellow Committee members, including the previous Chairman, Peter Lindsay, for their dedication to the inquiry. I also acknowledge the support the Australian Electoral Commission provided to the Committee throughout the inquiry.

Finally, I wish to thank all groups, organisations and individuals who gave their time to prepare submissions and appear as witnesses before the Committee.

Sophie Mirabella MP
Chair

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Membership of the Committee

Chair	Mrs Sophie Mirabella MP (from 26/2/07)
	Mr Peter Lindsay MP (to 24/1/07)
Deputy Chair	Senator Glenn Sterle (from 6/12/06)
	Mr Michael Danby MP (to 6/12/06)

Members		
Mr Steven Ciobo MP	Senator Judith Adams (from 26/2/07)
Mr Michael Danby MP	Senator George Brandis (to 26/2/07)
Mr Alan Griffin MP	Senator Kim Carr
Mr John Forrest MP (from 14/02/07)	Senator Fierravanti-Wells (from 26/2/07)
	Senator John Hogg (to 6/12/06)
	Senator Brett Mason (to 26/2/07)
	Senator Andrew Murray

Committee Secretariat

Secretary	Stephen Boyd
Inquiry Secretary	Sonia Palmieri (to 9/3/07)
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Terms of reference

A healthy democracy needs citizens who are informed, appreciate and participate in the various elements of our representative democracy. Civics education, including electoral education, is a key part of this goal and helps to ensure that citizens are adequately informed and able to participate effectively.

The Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters is inquiring into the adequacy of electoral education focusing on but not limited to:

- the current status of young people's knowledge of, and responsibilities under, the Australian electoral system;

- 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;

- the school age at which electoral education should begin;

- the potential to increase electoral knowledge through outside school programs;

- the adequacy of electoral education in indigenous communities;

- the adequacy of electoral education of migrant citizens;

- the role of the Australian Electoral Commission and State and Territory Electoral Commissions in promoting electoral education;

- the role of Federal, State and Local Governments in promoting electoral education;

- the access to, and adequacy of funding for, school visits to the Federal Parliament; and

- opportunities for introducing creative approaches to electoral education taking into account approaches used internationally and, in particular, in the United States, Canada, Germany, United Kingdom and New Zealand.

List of abbreviations

AEC   Australian Electoral Commission

AFSSSE   Australian Federation of Societies for Studies of Society and Environment

AISSA   Association of Independent Schools of South Australia

AMEP   Adult Migrant English Programme

ATSIEIS   Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Electoral Information Service

BTN   *Behind The News*

CEF – A   Constitution Education Fund – Australia

CEIO   Community Electoral Information Officer

CVP   Citizenship Visits Programme

DEST   Commonwealth Department of Education, Science and Training

DIAC   Commonwealth Department of Immigration and Citizenship

DRO   Divisional Returning Officer

ETR   Education Travel Rebate

HREOC   Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission

ICT   information communication technology

IEA	International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement
LGANT	Local Government Association of the Northern Territory
MCEETYA	Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs
NCETP	National Capital Educational Tourism Project
NESB	non-English speaking background
OMI	Office of Multicultural Interests (WA)
PACER	Parliament and Civics Education Rebate
SCG	Southern Cross Group
SOSE	Studies of Society and Environment
TAFE	Technical and Further Education

List of recommendations

2 Young people's civic engagement

Recommendation 1 (para 2.62)

> The Committee recommends that in the lead up to the expected 2007 federal election, the Australian Electoral Commission should keep a detailed record of the number of electoral commission birthday cards sent to Australian secondary students and report on the success of this rollout in its submission to the Committee's inquiry into the conduct of that election.

Recommendation 2 (para 2.64)

> The Committee recommends that the Australian Government, through the Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs, encourages the cooperation of state and territory education authorities, including boards of secondary school studies, in providing the Australian Electoral Commission with appropriate data for the purposes of electoral enrolment.

Recommendation 3 (para 2.68)

> The Committee recommends that the Australian Electoral Commission determine the feasibility and costing of the following initiatives, and implement these initiatives where possible:

> - emailing all Year 12 students an electoral enrolment form at a school email address;

> - sending out enrolment forms with tertiary institution (including university and TAFE college) application forms; and

> - establishing an SMS service by which young people can ask the AEC for an enrolment form.

3 Young people's civic knowledge

Recommendation 4 (para 3.113)

The Committee recommends that the Australian Electoral Commission, in collaboration with the State Electoral Commissions, develop a short, focused electoral education unit to be delivered to either Year 9 or 10 students, and Year 11 and 12 students, in all secondary schools.

The Australian Government—through the Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs—should ensure that the delivery of this unit is incorporated into all secondary schools.

Recommendation 5 (para 3.114)

The Committee recommends that the Australian Electoral Commission be granted sufficient funds to create several electoral education officer positions in each state and territory with responsibility for the development and presentation of electoral education teaching resources.

Recommendation 6 (para 3.115)

The Committee recommends that the Australian Electoral Commission provide an assessment of statistics regarding the delivery of civics education, which includes both students and teacher training, for inclusion in its submission to the Committee's regular inquiries into the conduct of federal elections.

4 Inspiring future civic participation

Recommendation 7 (para 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.

Recommendation 8 (para 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.

5   Indigenous Australians

Recommendation 9 (para 5.59)

The Committee recommends that State and Territory education authorities develop induction strategies incorporating the delivery of civics education for pre-service teachers bound for regional and remote communities.

Recommendation 10 (para 5.61)

The Committee recommends that a modified civics education website be created for an Indigenous audience.

The website should be established through collaboration between the Office of Indigenous Affairs and the Department of Education, Science and Training, and should be developed in consultation with local governments in remote and regional areas.

Recommendation 11 (para 5.76)

The Committee recommends that the Australian Electoral Commission provide adequate training and guidelines for polling officials in communicating with Indigenous Australians.

6   Migrant citizens

Recommendation 12 (para 6.68)

The Committee recommends that the Australian Electoral Commission review the languages it currently translates its materials into and consider introducing languages spoken by more recent migrant arrivals to Australia.

Recommendation 13 (para 6.69)

The Committee recommends that the Australian Government urge migrants and candidates for citizenship to undertake as much language training as is currently made available to them by the Government.

Recommendation 14 (para 6.70)

The Committee recommends that the Australian Government amend the Australian Citizenship Ceremonies Code to include the additional mandatory requirement that during citizenship ceremonies there be a presentation regarding the notion of citizenship, voting rights and obligations in Australia, including the opportunity for enrolment at the ceremony.

Recommendation 15 (para 6.73)

The Committee recommends that the Department of Immigration and Citizenship, in consultation with the Australian Electoral Commission, develop a programme of electoral education, to be implemented through migrant resource centres.

Recommendation 16 (para 6.74)

The Committee recommends that the Australian Electoral Commission prepare a professional development seminar for migrant resource workers to enable them to deliver this programme of electoral education.

Recommendation 17 (para 6.75)

The Committee recommends that the Australian Electoral Commission provides a programme of electoral education in the lead up to federal elections which specifically targets areas of high informal voting including those with a high proportion of voters from non-English speaking backgrounds and those in areas where there are different voting systems in place for State elections.

1

Introduction

1.1 There is much to be proud of in Australia's democratic history. This country has been, in many respects, a democratic pioneer: Australia was the first country in the world to adopt the secret ballot, and to grant women the right to vote and stand for election; Australian democracy emerged not from a bloody revolution, but from a series of enlightened constitutional debates.

1.2 Nonetheless, a healthy democracy needs citizens who are informed and who are involved and engaged in the issues that are important to them. It is therefore concerning that there is evidence to suggest increasing apathy and a decline in traditional forms of political participation such as joining political parties, attending party meetings and voting.

1.3 Evidence suggests a sense of disengagement amongst young people and also a sense of disillusionment with the political process. This does not imply, however, that young people are not interested in the world around them or in broader political issues. Rather, young people do not appear to make the connection between these issues and politics as a vehicle through which to address them and have their say.

1.4 Young people are not alone in this feeling of disconnection: Indigenous Australians and new migrant citizens also appear to have some difficulties in their interactions with the democratic process.

1.5 Although not easily quantified, it is estimated that Indigenous Australians are under-enrolled, and face a series of challenges in participating in elections. Due to lower than national average literacy and numeracy levels, it has been difficult to implement civics and electoral education

programmes, especially in remote Indigenous communities where general civic awareness is already low.

1.6   Australia's increasingly diverse migrant population also face challenges when engaging in the Australian democratic process, often due to comparatively low levels of English language proficiency, and their experiences under previous regimes. While enthusiastic about the Australian democratic process, new citizens are most likely to cast informal ballots and, thereby, miss their chance to 'have a say'.

1.7   The question is why this disconnection is so apparent. Is it that the 'product', being the democratic process, is not seen as particularly attractive, or is that the 'customers' require the product to be more effectively marketed? To what extent should it be the role of policy and law makers to engage citizens and ensure their participation in democratic processes? Conversely, to what extent should the onus be on citizens themselves to engage in these processes and have a sense of civic duty?

1.8   Throughout this inquiry, then, the Committee was keen to find meaningful ways in which to engage citizens more constructively so they want to participate more directly and enhance Australian democracy.

Background to the inquiry

Calls for a dedicated inquiry

1.9   The Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters is well known for its regular reviews on the conduct of federal elections.[1] In the course of its inquiry into the 2004 Federal Election, the Committee recommended that it be referred an inquiry into electoral education.[2]

1.10   At the time, the Committee reflected on the continued decline in young people's electoral enrolment, and was concerned that efforts to inform young voters of their obligations had not been particularly effective. The Committee concluded that 'more effort is needed to promote democratic opportunities as well as obligations'.[3] To this end, the Committee recommended:

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1   The Committee and its predecessor have reviewed federal elections since 1983.
2   Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters, *2004 Federal Election Report,* Recommendation 56, p. 354.
3   Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters, *2004 Federal Election Report,* p. 346.

> …that State, Territory and Federal education authorities coordinate their contributions to students' understanding and appreciation of Australia's system of government
>
> [and] that State, Territory and Federal education authorities increase their financial contribution to enable students in grades five and six to visit the National Capital to further their understanding of democracy.[4]

1.11   In its response to this report, the Australian Government supported these recommendations in principle, 'subject to the outcomes of the current inquiry … into civics and electoral education'.[5]

Civics, values and Australian history

1.12   The civics and electoral education inquiry follows an interesting phase in primary and secondary education, with strong emphasis currently being placed by the Australian Government on civics and citizenship education, values education and Australian history.

1.13   Between 1997 and 2004, the Australian Government allocated $31.5 million towards civics and citizenship education and an additional $4.9 million over four years in its 2004-2005 Budget.[6] These funds developed the *Discovering Democracy* programme, which was distributed to all schools across the country (Chapter Three details this initiative further). Civics and citizenship have now become a national priority area in education.

1.14   In 2005, $29.7 million was allocated to values education initiatives to be implemented over the following four years through the Values Education Programme.[7] The Programme aimed to help make values education a core part of Australian schooling and promoted values such as care and compassion, doing your best, giving people a fair go, freedom, honesty and trustworthiness, integrity, respect, responsibility, and understanding, tolerance and inclusion.[8]

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4   Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters, *2004 Federal Election Report,* p. 354.

5   Australian Government, *Response to the JSCEM 2004 Federal Election Report*, 30 August 2006, p. 23.

6   Department of Education, Science and Training, *Submission no. 100*, p. 2.

7   Australian Government, Values Education website, <http://www.valueseducation.edu.au/values/default.asp?id=8880>. Accessed 18 January 2007.

8   Australian Government, 2005, *National Framework for Values Education in Australian Schools*, p. 3.

1.15   On 17 August 2006, the Minister for Education, Science and Training, the
        Hon. Julie Bishop MP, met with 23 leading Australian historians, public
        figures who promote the study of history and educational leaders at the
        Australian History Summit in Canberra. The Summit communiqué
        concluded that:

> Australia's history is longer than that of many European countries,
> and is in many ways unique. Australia is one of the world's oldest,
> continuous democracies. A knowledge of our history is therefore
> vital. Nearly all of the crucial public debates embody and appeal
> to history. We are convinced of the urgent need for a nation wide
> revival in the teaching of Australian History and its global,
> environmental and social contexts. We urge that steps be taken to
> enlist all States and Territories and relevant authorities in the task.[9]

1.16   It is by no means coincidental that these areas of education are mutually
        reinforcing. Indeed, fundamental to all these initiatives is an examination
        of the Australian national character and identity.

What is civics and electoral education?

1.17   Civics education has been defined as:

> …the development of citizenship or civic competence by
> conveying the unique meaning, obligation, and virtue of
> citizenship in a particular society or the acquisition of values,
> dispositions, and skills appropriate to that society.[10]

1.18   A clear objective of civics education is the development of 'active citizens',
        namely those who are able to 'discharge the formal obligations of
        citizenship' and 'make an informed judgment about the extent of their
        civic participation.'[11]

1.19   In this respect, electoral education forms a fundamental part of civics
        education. Many political theorists have argued that only politically active
        citizens enjoy 'full political independence'.[12] Unless citizens are aware of
        the mechanisms through which they can participate, they cannot fully

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9   Australian History Summit Communiqué, 17 August 2006, available online at:
     <http://www.dest.gov.au/Ministers/Media/Bishop/2006/08/b002170806.asp>.

10   See Saha, L. 2000. 'Political activism and civic education among Australian secondary school
     students', *Australian Journal of Education*, Vol. 44, No. 2, pp. 155-74.

11   Civics Expert Group 1994. *Whereas the People: Civics and Citizenship Education*. Report of the
     Civics Expert Group, AGPS, Canberra, p. 6.

12   See Saha, L. 2000. "Political activism and civic education among Australian secondary school
     students", *Australian Journal of Education*, Vol. 44, No. 2, pp. 155-74.

become 'active citizens' of their polity. Electoral education thus provides citizens with the keys to active and informed participation.

Conduct of the inquiry

1.20   The inquiry was referred by the Hon. Gary Nairn MP, Special Minister of State, on 24 March 2006, and advertised in *The Australian* on 27 March 2006.

1.21   To ensure a broad range of submissions were received, letters of invitation were sent to a number of individuals and organisations including: Members of the House of Representatives and Senators, Premiers and Chief Minsters, after school care organisations, teacher/education associations and unions, state and federal electoral offices, multicultural and ethnic organisations, government agencies and local government associations, media organisations, parliamentary education departments, political parties, and research institutions and 'think tanks'.

1.22   In total, the inquiry received 118 submissions and 10 exhibits (a full list of submissions and exhibits is available at Appendix A).

1.23   The Committee conducted 11 public hearings in total, which included hearings in every state and territory, where it spoke to a wide variety of groups and individuals (the public hearing programme is available at Appendix B).

1.24   In the early planning stages, the Committee decided that a key feature of this inquiry should be an extensive programme of school visits. In a sense, these visits became a form of focus group research for the Committee's inquiry, with members seeking the views of school students, both primary and secondary, in regional and metropolitan areas, on levels of civic engagement and civic knowledge. The Committee spoke with senior students of each of the ten schools it visited.

1.25   In an effort to speak to a diverse range of students from different schools, the Committee also held two school forums, the first in the South Australian House of Assembly, Adelaide and the second at Parliament House, Canberra. The 60 students who attended the forum in Adelaide came from a range of metropolitan schools in the Adelaide area, while the students participating in the Canberra forum had been selected from across Australia to participate in *Celebrate Democracy Week* activities. In total, the Committee spoke with 244 students and 47 of their teachers (see Appendix B for the schools and forums).

1.26   The Committee is particularly appreciative of the efforts made by schools to accommodate its visits and thanks the students for their sincere and frank discussions. It was clear that all students appreciated the opportunity to speak to parliamentarians and learnt a great deal from the interaction, not least of which being the process of presenting evidence to parliamentary committees.

Structure of the report

1.27   The terms of reference for this inquiry specify three target audiences: young people, Indigenous Australians and migrant citizens. The report is therefore structured according to these target groups.

1.28   Chapter Two concerns young people's civic engagement, defined as firstly, their awareness of democratic rights and responsibilities and secondly, the ways in which young people interact with the democratic process.

1.29   Chapter Three deals with young people's civic knowledge, including the current state of civics and electoral education in schools and the tertiary sector.

1.30   Chapter Four examines the accessibility of students to the National Capital, widely recognised as a premier location for civics and electoral education.

1.31   Chapter Five is concerned with Indigenous Australians' civic engagement, knowledge and participation, with specific emphasis on factors likely to impact levels of enrolment and participation, and activities being undertaken by federal and state electoral commissions.

1.32   Chapter Six examines the issues surrounding the civic engagement of migrants and, more particularly, new Australian citizens.

2

Young people's civic engagement

> …there is a worrying trend of disengagement from our democratic
> processes particularly amongst younger Australians. The issues
> that interest them are often overshadowed by the rough and
> tumble of politics, however justified that may be in a robust
> democracy. If we cannot find ways to spark their interest and
> involvement, we risk the consequences of more young Australians
> simply turning away.[1]

2.1   Young Australians are, according to the Australian Electoral Commission
       (AEC), significantly under-enrolled and many commentators have
       interpreted this as an indication of young people's disinterest in
       conventional forms of democratic engagement. This chapter examines
       these trends amongst 17-25 year-olds in Australia.

Defining civic engagement

2.2   Citizenship infers both rights and responsibilities. The Department of
       Immigration and Citizenship, for example, notes that as citizens,
       Australians are entitled, *inter alia*, to:

- stand for public office or nominate for election to Parliament;

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1   Address by his Excellency, Major General Michael Jeffery AC CVO MC, Governor-General of
    the Commonwealth of Australia, on the occasion of his Australia Day Address, 26 January
    2005.

- vote for Australia's parliamentary representatives;

- apply to enlist in the armed forces and for government jobs;

- live in Australia and apply for an Australian passport and leave and re-enter the country without a resident return visa; and

- seek consular assistance from Australia's diplomatic representatives while overseas.

2.3   In return, Australian citizens are required to:

- obey the laws and fulfil their duties as an Australian citizen;

- enrol on the Electoral Register and vote at Federal and State/Territory elections and referenda;

- serve on a jury, if called on; and

- defend Australia, should the need arise.[2]

Are young people apathetic and cynical?

2.4   In evidence to the Committee, it was submitted that if young people are to be characterised as apathetic and cynical, it is essentially because:

- they see conventional forms of politics as unappealing, often due to the media's negative portrayal of politics and politicians;

- young people tend to perceive conventional politics and the democratic process as removed from them—that these processes do not directly effect their lives; and

- there is a sense that conventional forms of politics and democratic processes do not take heed of young people's voices.

Conventional forms of politics as 'unappealing'

2.5   Whether it be because of the way politics is conceptualised and portrayed in society, the media or at school, many of today's young people appear to

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2   Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs, *Privileges and Responsibilities of Australian Citizenship*, available online at: <http://www.citizenship.gov.au/becoming-a-citizen/why-should-i.htm>. Accessed 24 January 2006.

consider politics unappealing and therefore tend not to want to be associated with it.[3]

2.6　　Some students attributed young people's civic apathy to the fact that they considered the political system itself unappealing. A student from Melbourne High School explained:

> I think you need to draw a distinction between cynicism and apathy. Cynicism generally denotes some form of informed decision making. I think that is a large issue with the youth today—that a lot of it is not to do with informed decision making; it is a general apathy towards a political system. So it is not that they are going to take the time to involve themselves enough in the process to make such decisions.[4]

2.7　　Another student suggested that it was the party system in particular that contributed to young people's apathy:

> It might be apathy due to the fact that in a country like Australia things are good, but also you have a two-party system where it is all about safe seats versus marginal seats. No matter what happens, the outcome is that it will be one of those two parties that gets elected. I live in a safe Liberal seat; I may not necessarily vote Liberal but, in that sense, my vote will not count. It is easy to convince me that my vote will not count in that sense because I think Goldstein returns some of the highest Liberal primaries in Australia. In that sense, with an adversarial system where there will be one of only two outcomes, I think it is easy to convince people who live in a safe seat not to care. That is probably indicative of one factor of young people's apathy.[5]

2.8　　Mr Patrick McConville, of the United Nations Youth Association of Tasmania, submitted that 'the onus is really on the formal structure of civic involvement to make itself known and to make itself attractive to young people and indeed to the broader population.'[6]

3　　The advent of televised parliamentary proceedings (and, more particularly, of Question Time) has often been blamed for the low level of political distrust amongst citizens, see for example, Mutz, D.C. and B. Reeves, 2005, 'The new videomalaise: Effects of televised incivility on political trust', *American Political Science Review*, 99(1), pp. 1-15.

4　　Melbourne High School, *Transcript of Evidence*, 22 August 2006, p. 16.

5　　Melbourne High School, *Transcript of Evidence*, 22 August 2006, p. 16.

6　　Mr Patrick McConville (United Nations Youth Association of Tasmania), *Transcript of Evidence*, 31 August 2006, p. 6.

2.9   The media's negative portrayal of politics was most frequently referred to as a major contributor to students' apathy.[7]

> Too often young people are surrounded by negative presentations of political and civic figures and situations. Politics is offered to the public as problematic, limited, lacking in connections, dichotomised, confusing, superficial and media driven. Characterised like this, it is hardly surprising that young people in particular are not expressing an interest.[8]

2.10   Students themselves are not blind to the machinations of the Canberra Press Gallery. At the Committee's school forum in Canberra, one student remarked:

> I think the media sometimes blow things up just for the entertainment value. We watched question time yesterday and the way that they managed to pull out the big uproars and stuff. As far as I can see, that is one part of government, but having been here I can see that there is a lot more stuff that goes on that the media just ignores because it is not entertaining and with-it and fast action for the public to get interested in.[9]

Conventional forms of politics as 'irrelevant'

2.11   Young people's apathy is possibly derived from a belief that the world of politics bears little or no effect on their lives. Politics, according to this theory, is about budgets, interest rates and housing prices, and these are issues that will only have an impact on young people in the future.[10] Students are also, by definition, primarily concerned with their studies, particularly in the more senior years of schooling.

2.12   When they become aware, however, of the significance of politics on their daily lives, it was evident that young people were more likely to take an interest.[11]

2.13   Teachers often submitted that while they did not consider students to be apathetic, it was important for teachers and other adults to draw an

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7   See, for example, Mr Stephen Paul, *Transcript of Evidence*, 23 October 2006, p. 42.

8   The Students' Association of the University of Adelaide, *Submission no. 43*, pp. 4-5.

9   Canberra School Forum, *Transcript of Evidence*, 19 October 2006, p. 3.

10 Research conducted by the National Youth Affairs Research Scheme in 2004 found that only 21.2% of young people ranked the economy as 'very important'. See Manning, B. and R. Ryan, 'Youth and Citizenship', National Youth Affairs Research Scheme, March 2004, p. 43.

11 See for example, Adelaide School Forum, *Transcript of Evidence*, 22 September 2006, p. 9; and Centralian Senior Secondary College, Alice Springs, *Transcript of Evidence*, 28 July 2006, p. 20.

explicit connection between politics and its relevance to young people's lives. Young people did not necessarily make the connection themselves.[12]

Conventional forms of politics as 'exclusionary'

2.14   Apathy and cynicism also appear to spring from a sense of disconnection; a feeling that young people do not have an impact on the workings of government. The Australian Clearinghouse of Youth Studies 2002-03 report found that, of 800 young people aged 12–15 who were surveyed in 2003, only 13 per cent believed 'that governments were responsive to the views of young people.'[13]

2.15   The Youth Electoral Study's second report similarly noted that 'some students express disappointment at their perceived lack of success and older groups' perception that kids are "too young too understand."'[14]

2.16   Some students, however, argued that civic engagement did not have to be driven by self-interest alone:

> I think it is also very easy to categorise the fact that youth are not getting involved in political structures purely because they are not being interested by the political system. But I think a committee like this really should be addressing the problem of youth not being actively involved in the decisions being made by parliament. The issues around such decisions do not necessarily have to influence youth. It is a very individualistic view to say that youth will only be interested in issues that have a direct bearing on them. They should also be interested in military deployment… That issue involves the whole country and everyone in the country, regardless of their age, should be engaging themselves in it. I think that is the problem here.[15]

Committee comment

2.17   There is a view that young people's 'apathy' and 'cynicism' are symptoms of wider concerns. While politics is seen by some as unappealing, young

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12   See, for example, Ms Julie Parker, Sir Joseph Banks School (Sydney), *Transcript of Evidence*, 13 October 2006, p. 25; Dr Harry Phillips, *Transcript of Evidence*, 21 September 2006, p. 44; Australian Federation of Societies for Studies of Society and Environment, *Submission no. 25*, p. 1.

13   Cited in Western Australian Electoral Commission, *Submission no. 12*, p. 6.

14   Print, M., L. Saha and K. Edwards, 2005, *Youth Electoral Study 2: Youth, Political Engagement and Voting*, Australian Electoral Commission, p. 14.

15   Melbourne High School, *Transcript of Evidence*, 22 August 2006, pp. 19-20.

people are involved in forms of activism and community engagement not traditionally understood as 'conventionally political'. Where an explicit connection is made between politics and the reality of young people's lives, political and electoral processes are seen as interesting. Moreover, when young people understand the way in which these processes work, they are more likely to participate.

2.18   Equally, it does not seem that young people are simply disinterested. As Dr Phillips noted, 'there is never an insufficient base of interested young people.'[16]

2.19   Nor is it the case that young people lack a sense of pride in their Australian heritage. In fact, the Australian national report of the international comparative study of 14 year-olds in 28 countries noted that four in five Australian students 'are very sure they do not want to live anywhere else, and believe Australia should be proud of what it has achieved.'[17] Mr Stephen Paul, Principal of John Paul College in Brisbane concurred:

> I believe there is a degree of patriotism and a great degree of Australian pride, but they do not see that as necessarily a requirement to be knowledgeable about government, knowledgeable about civics and to undertake civic duty by voting responsibly and regularly.

> …Young Australians today and young people in schools are very proud Australians, but they then do not make the extrapolation to say, 'I need to be conversant with what is happening in the political context.'[18]

2.20   If, as Print and Saha suggest, 'we need to find more meaningful ways to engage young people', then for many submitters, the key to this challenge lies in providing more information.[19]

16   Dr Harry Phillips, *Transcript of Evidence*, 21 September 2006, p. 44.

17   Mellor, S., K. Kennedy, and L. Greenwood, 2001, *Citizenship and Democracy: Students Knowledge and Beliefs, Australian Fourteen Year Olds and the IEA Civic Education Study*, p. 6.

18   Mr Stephen Paul, *Transcript of Evidence*, 23 October 2006, pp. 40-41.

19   Print, M., L. Saha and K. Edwards, 2004, *Youth Electoral Study 1: Enrolment and Voting*, Australian Electoral Commission.

Information sparks interest

2.21   When asked why they had not yet enrolled to vote, a number of students canvassed during the inquiry responded that they did not know they were entitled to vote, or that they did not know how to enrol to vote. Furthermore, some students did not feel that they had enough information at their disposal to make an informed decision. As one student explained:

> I think having an interest in voting and so on really comes down to understanding. Personally, I do not know much about all the parties and everything, so I do not think I would be able to make a valuable and proper vote because I do not know enough about all of it… We are not educated enough about the different parties and about what they will do for us, so it really does come down to understanding whether we are interested in all the voting.[20]

2.22   One teacher expressed this as a 'fear' of engaging with the electoral process:

> I am quite young myself and I think a lot of it has to do with apathy and a lot of it has to do with fear… Fear that they will make a wrong decision and, if that person gets in and then maybe does not stick with some of the things they have promised, perhaps they will feel responsible for that decision.[21]

2.23   In the first Youth Electoral Study, Print and Saha reported on students' 'preparedness to vote'. They found that:

- about one in two students feel they lack the knowledge to understand the issues, the political parties, to make a decision about voting and about voting in general;
- young people do not perceive themselves as generally well prepared to participate in voting; and
- generally, young people do not understand the voting system.[22]

2.24   While recognising this feeling of being unprepared, students who spoke with the Committee expressed a desire to learn more:

> In your opinion, would you say that we need to spark interest? I believe that we do, because we just have no understanding and we

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20   Adelaide School Forum, *Transcript of Evidence*, 22 September 2006, p. 9.

21   Ms Rebecca Brown (Heatley Secondary College), *Transcript of Evidence*, 24 October 2006, p. 20.

22   Print, M., L. Saha and K. Edwards, 2004, *Youth Electoral Study 1: Enrolment and Voting*, Australian Electoral Commission, pp. 11-12. See also Democratic Audit of Australia, *Submission no. 21*, p. 1.

> do not know how any of it ties back to us. We need to basically be
> more informed so that we can have that understanding that the
> big things that go on in this very place [i.e. the Parliament] do
> actually affect our lives and the lives of the people around us.[23]

2.25   Information on voting and other forms of civic engagement comes from a
        variety of sources. In addition to school,[24] young people tend to learn
        about these things from three main sources:

- their parents;

- the media; and

- electoral commissions.

Parents as a source of information

2.26   According to the Youth Electoral Study, parents are regarded as the most
        important source of information about voting.[25] Parents influence their
        children in two main ways: first, in some families, they provide a forum of
        political discussion in which clear and definite political views are
        conveyed, and second, parents facilitate their children's civic engagement
        by prompting electoral enrolment processes or other civic activities. Print
        and Saha note that there is a gender division of labour in the provision of
        this information: while fathers tend to talk more about politics, it is
        mothers who get forms signed and take them down to the post office.[26]

2.27   Students were keenly aware of the impact parents' views had on their
        civic engagement. One student, for example, suggested that if her parents
        voted a certain way, she would probably follow suit. A show of hands
        confirmed that this pattern would be reflected amongst most students in
        that classroom.[27]

2.28   For another student, however, this influence was not necessarily
        constructive:

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23 Canberra School Forum, *Transcript of Evidence*, 19 October 2006, p. 18.

24 School education is the focus of the next chapter on 'Civic knowledge'.

25 Print, M., L. Saha and K. Edwards, 2004, *Youth Electoral Study 1: Enrolment and Voting*,
    Australian Electoral Commission. See also Democratic Audit of Australia, *Submission no. 21*,
    p. 2.

26 Print, M., L. Saha and K. Edwards, 2006, *Youth Electoral Study 3: Youth, the Family, and Learning
    about Politics and Voting,* Australian Electoral Commission. See also Mr Warwick Gately
    (Western Australian Electoral Commissioner), *Transcript of Evidence*, 21 September 2006, p. 8.

27 Our Lady of the Sacred Heart College, Alice Springs, *Transcript of Evidence*, 28 July 2006, p. 10.

> A lot of people are sheltered by their families and their opinions
> and who they vote for—Liberal, Labor or whatever it is. It gets to
> the stage where it is what your parents believe and how it affects
> them. It is like: 'Mum and Dad vote for them; I don't really care, so
> I'll just vote for them.' You say, 'You can make a difference.' But, if
> it gets to the stage where no-one cares and they are just doing it
> because they have to and their parents are telling them to do it, I
> do not see how that makes a difference. It is not having your own
> opinion about it and being strong about it. I think parents
> influence it a lot.[28]

The media as a source of information

2.29   During its school visits, the Committee often took a straw poll of students'
        preferences for where they got their information from.[29] While the
        responses varied between television, radio and newspapers, it was clear
        that students today are media savvy—even those in primary school. As
        Mr Poynter noted about his Year 6 class:

> Not only [are] they aware of things that are happening locally and
> in the state, but they are certainly very aware of stories that are
> happening around the world as well.[30]

2.30   The International Association for the Evaluation of Educational
        Achievement (IEA) Report on civic engagement noted that for 80 per cent
        of Australian students, television news is the preferred source of
        information, though about two-thirds of them also read about what is
        happening nationally and internationally in the newspapers, and
        62 per cent of them also listen to the news on the radio.[31]

2.31   During school visits and forums, the students expressed some concern
        that information provided by media outlets was not always well targeted.
        For example, one student felt that:

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28   Adelaide School Forum, *Transcript of Evidence*, 22 September 2006, p. 8.

29   See for example, Centralian Senior School, *Transcript of Evidence*, 28 July 2006, p. 21; Our Lady
      of the Sacred Heart College, *Transcript of Evidence*, 28 July 2006, p. 10; Melbourne High School,
      Transcript of Evidence, 22 August 2006; Adelaide School Forum, *Transcript of Evidence*,
      22 September 2006, p. 10; and Heatley Secondary College, *Transcript of Evidence*, 24 October
      2006, p. 6.

30   Mr Tony Poynter (Rosetta Primary School), *Transcript of Evidence*, 31 August 2006, p. 45.

31   Mellor, S., K. Kennedy, and L. Greenwood, 2001, *Citizenship and Democracy: Students Knowledge
      and Beliefs, Australian Fourteen Year Olds and the IEA Civic Education Study*, p. 4.

> …more information should be available. Ad campaigns are always
> being run about everything except enrolling to vote. I think the
> main target audience watch the TV and listen to the radio and it
> would probably be really effective if you had some sort of
> campaign available for them.[32]

2.32   Legal Studies students from Centralian College noted that while they were
        more inclined to read newspapers, their friends in other classes were more
        likely to obtain information from current affairs programmes which screen
        immediately prior to, or following, popular soaps. It was therefore
        suggested that civics information would perhaps be more accessible if
        presented through these programmes or through targeted advertising
        during TV shows popular amongst young people.[33]

2.33   A student from Melbourne High School referred to an initiative of *The Age*
        newspaper whereby students can subscribe to receive a newspaper every
        Monday to Friday for $10 a year.[34] In fact, 73 per cent of Victorian primary
        schools and 88 per cent of Victorian secondary schools take up *The Age*'s
        initiative.[35]

2.34   A second concern was with the factual content and level of objectivity
        evident in media sources. The students of Heatley Secondary College,
        particularly, were quite critical:

> With the media, each show's biased towards one party most of the
> time.

> …I think it is more that the media is based on false representations
> of parliament and politics and everything that is going on at the
> moment.

> …We do see what is going on, but we feel that there is no truth to
> it.[36]

2.35   In addition to these more traditional forms of media, however, the Internet
        has come to play a critical role in the dissemination of information for
        young people. Students today are able to Google any topic, anywhere,
        anytime. Personal web logs (or blogs) have become a new source of

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32   Adelaide School Forum, *Transcript of Evidence*, 22 September 2006, p. 5.

33   Centralian Senior School, *Transcript of Evidence*, 28 July 2006, p. 22.

34   Melbourne High School, *Transcript of Evidence*, 22 August 2006, p. 22. It appears that this sort of
      subscription service is also offered by a number of newspapers around the country, although
      the number of schools taking up these offers is unknown.

35   Personal communication, Youth Marketing section, *The Age*, 30 January 2007.

36   Heatley Secondary College, *Transcript of Evidence*, 24 October 2006, p. 5.

information, or more precisely, a source of other people's views on global events and issues. As one student noted:

> When I look at blogs, I am actively looking out for different viewpoints on the subject. So I will go to global security and then to global issues, the left- versus right-wing ideas on different issues. That is what I would actively be doing. I would be consciously trying to find different viewpoints.[37]

2.36   Students submitted that blogs are also an alternative to the 'dry' newspaper based media:

> When you are finding information, you find that a lot of the stuff that is written is really dry. Unless you are really interested in a particular topic, it is boring. Reading and getting interested in matters is hard. You have to have your interest engaged in some way…[38]

2.37   As with more traditional media, students are aware that information found on the Internet needs to be understood within particular contexts:

> Personally, I think you have to be careful about any information you get on the internet, whether it is political information or for a school project. You have to approach it with the mindset, 'Right, I am reading this blog; obviously it will not be correct.' Obviously it will not be totally objective, otherwise the person would not be writing it. You have to read it more out of interest or maybe to gain some new insight, but you cannot read it saying, 'Hey, this is the whole story; this guy is showing both sides of the issue.'[39]

> …you will find that most young people are not the passive consumers of the media that people would make us out to be. They critically consume information. They do not always take it as factual. Young people do not just absorb what is given to them at face value. They need to be given a lot more credit for how they pick and choose what they consume in the media.[40]

37   Melbourne High School, *Transcript of Evidence*, 22 August 2006, p. 21.

38   Canberra School Forum, *Transcript of Evidence*, 19 October 2006, p. 19.

39   Melbourne High School, *Transcript of Evidence*, 22 August 2006, p. 20.

40   Ms Amber Sierek, *Transcript of Evidence*, 13 October 2006, p. 43. See also Ms Daniela Giorgi, *Transcript of Evidence*, 29 September 2006, p. 12; and the Australian College of Educators, *Submission no. 10*, p. 2.

Electoral commissions as a source of information

2.38   Electoral commissions have, as one of their key functions, the role of promoting electoral awareness in the community. The success of electoral commissions in reaching their audiences, however, depends very much on the methods of communication used. As the United Nations Youth Association of Tasmania indicated:

> The AEC has a vital role in providing electoral education. Young people are generally unaware about their ability to enrol at age seventeen. It is also an effort for young people to enrol, as they are generally not provided with enrolment forms without asking for them. Active engagement is required rather than passively waiting for young people to express an interest.[41]

2.39   Since 2003, the AEC has considered its younger target audience 'a priority', and in conjunction with its state and territory counterparts, has worked to improve levels of electoral awareness and enrolment amongst young people.

2.40   During the inquiry, it was evident that different approaches were used across the states and territories. In some states, birthday cards were sent to young people when they turned 17, inviting them to enrol provisionally.[42]

2.41   Other states used a 'bounty system' whereby students are offered an amount of money (e.g. $2.50) for a completed enrolment form.[43]

2.42   The Victorian Electoral Commission advised that it also sent invitations to enrol to students applying to tertiary education institutions, to new drivers licence holders, to those applying for a Proof of Age card, to new tenants, and those who notify utility companies of a change of address.[44]

2.43   Much of this activity depends on data-matching activities between electoral commissions and a range of other government agencies. In some states, the degree to which electoral commissions engage in these data-matching activities and actively seek young people's enrolment falls short. The Democratic Audit of Australia, for example, was concerned that:

> The Electoral Council of Australia's Continuous Roll Update Report 2004-2005 noted that NSW and NT were the only

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41   United Nations Youth Association of Tasmania, *Submission no. 44*, p. 2.

42   See for example, Victorian Electoral Commission, *Submission no. 36*, p. 11, and Western Australian Electoral Commission, *Transcript of Evidence*, 21 September 2006, p. 3.

43   Elections ACT, *Transcript of Evidence*, 11 August 2006, p. 29. This system is also used in Tasmania.

44   Victorian Electoral Commission, *Submission no. 36*, p. 11.

jurisdictions where there had been no specific school enrolment programmes undertaken to get young people enrolled. In the other jurisdictions, these programmes capture up to 20 per cent of the eligible 18 year-olds.[45]

2.44 Students in New South Wales confirmed that they did not receive birthday cards. While not universal across the state, one Sydney-based teacher noted that at their school:

> Just before federal and state elections, the local enrolling officer comes to the school to speak with Year 11s and 12s and they are all given forms and have the opportunity to enrol. The local enrolling officer from Banks, which is our local area, comes out a few months before elections to give that information out to students, just in case some do turn 18 at the time. It also gives the chance for a whole group to be enrolled. He will come to the school to do that just before the next state or federal election.[46]

2.45 In New South Wales and South Australia, privacy concerns were often cited as a principal reason for the lack of shared information between government agencies and electoral commissions.[47]

2.46 However, in evidence to the Committee at its final public hearing in Canberra, the AEC stated:

> We have been working with each of the state electoral commissions to bring on [the birthday card] program next year. We have locked in just about every state now to do that, including South Australia, where there had been some initial difficulty; that now seems to have been rolled out.[48]

2.47 The birthday card rollout forms part of the AEC's comprehensive communications strategy in the lead up to the next federal election. As part of this strategy, the AEC will also:

- in conjunction with the ABC's youth radio network, triple j, promote enrolment at national events such as the Big Day Out and through the Rock Enrol website <www.rockenrol.com.au>; and

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45 Democratic Audit of Australia, *Submission no. 104*, p. 1.

46 Ms Sarah Hawke (Sir Joseph Banks High School), *Transcript of Evidence*, 29 September 2006, p. 4.

47 See for example, Ms Daniela Giorgi, *Transcript of Evidence*, 13 October 2006, p. 8.

48 Ms Gail Urbanski (Australian Electoral Commission), *Transcript of Evidence*, 4 December 2006, p. 3.

- write to the principals of every secondary school, advising of a national 'enrol to vote' week, in which coordinators in each school will develop a range of promotional activities for that week.[49]

Committee comment

2.48   If the students canvassed in the course of this inquiry are typical of their generation, then it seems that for young people today, not only are they media savvy, but civic engagement for them is not simply a matter of blindly following their parents' footsteps. Nor do young people digest news and current affairs uncritically.

2.49   However, many of these young people do not actively seek information on electoral enrolment. In this respect, electoral commissions are faced with the difficult challenge of engaging them 'on their field'.

Communicating with a generation of 'digital natives'

2.50   A common view put to the Committee was that the communication methods used to reach young people needed to be updated, for, as Mr Stephen Paul noted, this is a generation of 'digital natives'.[50] Young people, he stressed, communicate digitally. Other submitters agreed:

> I am making a tentative statement at this stage that I think there are certain characteristics out of this new group… this is a group that has grown up entirely in a very strong technological age. These are people who are wired. These are people who are on the move. These are people who want instant responses to things, because they can get it through technology.[51]

2.51   This digital reliance has an impact on the way in which young people expect to receive information and engage with their communities.

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49   Ms Gail Urbanski (Australian Electoral Commission), *Transcript of Evidence*, 4 December 2006, p. 3.

50   Mr Stephen Paul, *Transcript of Evidence*, 23 October p. 41; see also, Dr Print and Dr Saha, *Transcript of Evidence*, 7 August 2006; Dr Lucas Walsh, *Transcript of Evidence*, 21 August 2006; and United Nations Youth Association of Tasmania, *Transcript of Evidence*, 31 August 2006.

51   A/Prof Murray Print (Youth Electoral Study), *Transcript of Evidence*, 7 August 2006, p. 58.

Civic engagement

2.52   A significant body of research has investigated the public's changing interactions with Parliament, parliamentarians and political parties in light of information communication technologies (ICTs).[52] A common underlying assumption has been that young people could be better 'captured' if these bodies became more 'digitally accessible'.[53]

2.53   The Bristol City Council (2006) report, *Democracy, what does that mean?*, commissioned as part of a United Kingdom Local E-Democracy National Project, found mixed results about young people's digital engagement. While e-democracy is seen as being less intimidating for many young people, and they are very comfortable with text messaging as a medium, many would question whether or not they would really want to engage in text messaging as a means of participation in democracy. Text messaging would only be appropriate for 'one-off' contact, and/or for the council to send them information.

2.54   In his evidence to the Committee, Dr Lucas Walsh also confirmed that research into digital democracy has, to date, produced mixed results. He agreed that while SMS usage has risen 'exponentially', it had not yet resulted in increased democratic participation.[54] However, Dr Lucas suggested that:

> As the technology becomes more integrated—that is, the way we use this technology becomes more seamless, moving from newspaper to web page to SMS—[from blog to email]—I think the possibilities there will… increase significantly.[55]

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52   See, for example, Lusoli, W., S. Ward and R. Gibson, 2006, '(Re)connecting Politics: Parliament, the Public and the Internet', *Parliamentary Affairs*, 59(1):24-42; Åström, J., 2001, *Digital Democracy: Ideas, Intentions and Initiatives in Swedish Local Government*, Paper presented to the ECPR Joint Sessions of Workshops, Grenoble; Campbell, A., A. Harrop and B. Thompson, 1999, 'Towards the virtual parliament – what computers can do for MPs', *Parliamentary Affairs* 52(3): 388-403; Coleman, S., 2001, *Democracy Online: What do we want from MPs' websites?*, Hansard Society; Hoff, J., 2004, 'The democratic potentials of information technology: attitudes of European MPs towards new technology', *Information Polity*, 9:55-66; Kerber, M.R., and J. D. Bloom, 2005, 'Blog for America and civic involvement', *Press/Politics* 10(4):3-27; Pedersen, K., 2006, 'Danish Party Members: Plugged or Unplugged?', *Representation,* 42(3):223-33, p. 230.

53   See, for example, Iyengar, S. and S. Jackman, 2004, 'Technology and Politics: Incentives for Youth Participation', The Centre for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement, Working Paper 24; and Pammett, J. H. and L. LeDuc, 2003, 'Chapter 9: Youth and Education' and 'Chapter 10: The Internet' in *Explaining the Turnout Decline in Canadian Federal Elections: A New Survey of Non-Voters*, Elections Canada, pp. 50-59

54   Dr Lucas Walsh, *Transcript of Evidence*, 21 August 2006, p. 42.

55   Dr Lucas Walsh, *Transcript of Evidence*, 21 August 2006, p. 42.

2.55   Blogging itself has become a form of political activism, and the digestion
        of other bloggers' views has become a form of political dialogue. The
        Australian Children's Television Foundation referred to blogs and
        podcasts as the first stage of children's production and creation of their
        own media. The Foundation notes that:

> Digital technology and simple software applications are
> increasingly giving children the capacity to create sophisticated,
> broadcast quality content.[56]

2.56   Given the capacity of young people to broadcast their own ideas and
        views on a wide range of issues, the submission from the Queensland,
        New South Wales and Tasmanian children's commissioners
        recommended that policy makers take into account young people's
        preferred media when developing strategies to enhance their civic
        engagement, (e.g. campaigning through, and supporting, NGOs, personal
        internet blogs).[57]

2.57   Political parties also have a role to play in encouraging the involvement of
        young adults. Rebecca Huntley has argued that the political parties 'must
        become more open, flexible and democratic if they are to recruit younger
        members.[58]

2.58   Daniel Shea and John Green recently summarised the 'best practices' of
        political parties with regard to mobilising young voters, including strong
        leadership, targeting youth in their media, giving volunteers meaningful
        work, using peer-to-peer programmes and rewarding achievement.[59] Shea
        has argued elsewhere that:

> local parties will have to develop novel outreach programmes and
> expand their social activities. Simply put, they have to get hip. A
> sharper focus on Internet-based communications will likely bring

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56   Australian Children's Television Foundation, *Submission no. 82*, p. 2.

57   Commission for Children and Young People and Child Guardian Queensland, New South
      Wales Commission for Children and Young People, Commissioner for Children, Tasmania,
      Submission no. 74, p. 5.

58   Huntley, R., 2006, 'Politics a turnoff for Generation Y', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 22 March 2006.

59   Shea, D. and J. Green, 2006, *The Fountain of Youth: Political Parties and the Mobilization of Young
      Americans*, Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement,
      University of Maryland. Available online at:
      <http://www.civicyouth.org/PopUps/WorkingPapers/Fountain%20Youth_CPP.pdf>.
      Accessed 23 January, 2007.

> more young citizens into party politics and the electoral system as well.[60]

2.59   In Denmark, political parties have introduced new ICTs to facilitate only party activities. A recent study has found that while limited, ICTs have made some difference in increasing the participation of young (particularly male) members.[61]

Committee's conclusions and recommendations

2.60   Disconnection with politics appears to have the greatest impact on enrolment levels. More must be done to improve young people's interest in the political process.

2.61   The Committee remains concerned that the AEC has, to date, been unable to access students' contact details from education authorities, including boards of secondary school studies, for the purposes of inviting students to enrol to vote. While the AEC indicated to the Committee at its final public hearing that it had 'locked in just about every state',[62] the Committee will require a progress report. The Committee therefore recommends that the AEC report back to the Committee on the success of its birthday card roll out.

Recommendation 1

2.62   **The Committee recommends that in the lead up to the expected 2007 federal election, the Australian Electoral Commission should keep a detailed record of the number of electoral commission birthday cards sent to Australian secondary students and report on the success of this rollout in its submission to the Committee's inquiry into the conduct of that election.**

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60   Shea, D., 2004, 'Throwing a better party: Local mobilizing institutions and the youth vote', CIRCLE Working Paper 13, Centre for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement, p. 2.

61   Pedersen, K., 2006, 'Danish Party Members: Plugged or Unplugged?', *Representation,* 42(3):223-33, p. 230

62   Ms Gail Urbanski (Australia Electoral Commission), *Transcript of Evidence*, 4 December 2006, p. 3.

2.63   The Committee is aware, however, that education authorities also have a role to play in ensuring the AEC has appropriate information and therefore recommends that the Australian Government, through the Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs, ensures the cooperation of state and territory education authorities.

Recommendation 2

2.64   **The Committee recommends that the Australian Government, through the Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs, encourages the cooperation of state and territory education authorities, including boards of secondary school studies, in providing the Australian Electoral Commission with appropriate data for the purposes of electoral enrolment.**

2.65   The exponential rise of information communication technologies, particularly in the form of the Internet, email and SMS, creates an expectation amongst young people that they can be reached instantaneously and that they, in turn, can access vast amounts of information instantaneously.

2.66   There may be, therefore, significant potential to involve young people through this media, rather than through paper-based methods used in the past.

2.67   The Committee is of the view, therefore, that in addition to birthday cards, the AEC, in collaboration with secondary school and tertiary education institutions, should try to reach young people in a more 'digitally-friendly' format.

Recommendation 3

2.68   **The Committee recommends that the Australian Electoral Commission determine the feasibility and costing of the following initiatives, and implement these initiatives where possible:**

        - **emailing all Year 12 students an electoral enrolment form at a school email address;**

- **sending out enrolment forms with tertiary institution (including university and TAFE college) application forms; and**

- **establishing an SMS service by which young people can ask the AEC for an enrolment form.**

2.69   The Committee notes that some submissions called for lowering the voting age from 18 to 16, and that this is being considered in a number of jurisdictions overseas. The Committee, however, is not convinced that this will achieve the desired effect.

2.70   Civic engagement, of course, does not only concern electoral enrolment. The Committee accepts the role of both Members of Parliament and political parties in encouraging young people to become active citizens.

2.71   The Committee therefore encourages all Members of Parliament to create interactive personal websites to facilitate young people's access to Parliament.

2.72   The Committee further encourages all political parties to create distinct and engaging youth sections on their websites which will actively seek the involvement of young people and an exchange of views. Internships and opportunities to volunteer for the party should be prominently displayed. In this way, parties can also make an explicit link between politics and its relevance to young people.

3

Young people's civic knowledge

3.1   Links between civic education and civic knowledge have been made
        repeatedly in the education literature. Saha, for example, recently reported
        that 'having taken a civics subject in school is positively and significantly
        related to… political knowledge'.[1]

3.2   The level of Australian students' civic knowledge, as revealed in a number
        of recent studies, however, appears to indicate that many have not had the
        benefit of comprehensive civics education.

3.3   The Australian national report of the International Association for the
        Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA) Civic Education Study,
        comparing Australian students' knowledge with those of students in
        28 countries, revealed that:

> …only half of the Australian students have a grasp of the essential
> pre-conditions for a properly working democracy. It seems that
> Australian students are not strong in their understandings of what
> constitute their civil rights. The Civic Knowledge items with which
> Australian students had the most difficulty were those which deal
> with the forms and purposes of Democracy.[2]

3.4   A more recent assessment of Australian students' understanding of civics
        was that conducted under the auspices of the Ministerial Council on
        Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA) in

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1   Saha, L., 2000, 'Political activism and civic education among Australian secondary school
     students', *Australian Journal of Education*, 44(2), pp.155-74.
2   Mellor, S., K. Kennedy, and L. Greenwood, 2001, *Citizenship and Democracy: Students Knowledge
     and Beliefs, Australian Fourteen Year Olds and the IEA Civic Education Study*, p. 4.

October 2004 of Year 6 and 10 students across the country.[3] Data were gathered from 10 712 Year 6 students from 318 schools and 9 536 Year 10 students from 249 schools.[4]

3.5   The report analyses students' responses to the survey questions according to a framework of 'proficiency levels': students attaining the lowest proficiency level demonstrated a basic understanding of civics and citizenship issues and concepts using vague terminology, whilst those attaining the highest level demonstrated a more sophisticated understanding using precise and appropriate terminology. Table 3.1 shows the percentages of students at each year level attaining these proficiency levels.

Table 3.1   Percentages of Year 6 and Year 10 students attaining each proficiency level, by sex

Proficiency level	Year 6 (%)			Year 10 (%)		
	Male	*Female*	*All*	*Male*	*Female*	*All*
Five	--	--	--	0	0	0
Demonstrates precise and detailed interpretive responses to very complex civics and citizenship concepts underlying principles or issues, in field-specific terminology.						
Four or above	0	0	**0**	4	6	**5**
Demonstrates precise and detailed interpretive responses to complex civics and citizenship concepts or issues. Appropriately uses conceptually-specific language.						
Three or above	7	10	**8**	35	44	**39**
Demonstrates comparatively precise and detailed factual responses to complex civics and citizenship concepts or issues, and some interpretation of information.						
Two or above	47	53	**50**	76	85	**80**
Demonstrates accurate responses to relatively simply civics and citizenship concepts or issues, with limited interpretation or reasoning.						
One or above	87	91	**89**	94	97	**96**
Demonstrates a literal or generalised understanding of simple civics and citizenship concepts, using vague terminology without interpretation.						

Source: Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs, 2006, National Assessment Program: Civics and Citizenship Years 6 and 10 Report 2004, p. xiv and 24.

3   More information about the National Assessment, including the full report, is available online at: <http://www.mceetya.edu.au/mceetya/default.asp?id=17149>. Accessed 30 January 2007.

4   Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs, 2006, *National Assessment Program: Civics and Citizenship Years 6 and 10 Report 2004*, p. 21.

Figure 3.1   Distribution of Year 6 and 10 students on the Civics and Citizenship Scale

Year 6		Year 10
0%	**Level 5** Demonstrate precise and detailed interpretative responses to very complex civics and citizenship concepts, underlying principles or issues, in field-specific terminology.	0%
0%	**Level 4** Demonstrate precise and detailed interpretative responses to complex civics and citizenship concepts or issues. Appropriately uses conceptually-specific language.	5%
8%	**Level 3** Demonstrate comparatively precise and detailed factual responses to complex civics and citizenship concepts or issues, and some interpretation of information.	35%
42%	**Level 2** Demonstrate accurate responses to relatively simple civics and citizenship concepts or issues, with limited interpretation or reasoning.	41%
39%	**Level 1** Demonstrate a literal or generalised understanding of simple civics and citizenship concepts, using vague terminology without interpretation.	15%
11%	**Below Level 1**	4%

795 · 665 · 535 · 405 · 275

Year 10 Proficient Standard

Year 6 Proficient Standard

Year 6   Year 10

Note: The percentages for this figure have been rounded.

Source: Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs, 2006, National Assessment Program: Civics and Citizenship Years 6 and 10 Report 2004, p. xiii.

3.6   As can be seen in Figure 3.1 (p. 29), very few students, in either Years 6 or 10, were able to demonstrate a sophisticated understanding of Australian democracy and related civics and citizenship issues or concepts. In fact, 11 per cent of Year 6 students and 4 per cent of Year 10 students were not even able to display a literal or generalised understanding of simple civics and citizenship concepts.

3.7   The report describes the concepts and understandings with which students appeared to have the greatest difficulty as being of two types:

- concepts such as 'the common good' or strategies that refer to how individuals can influence systems for the benefit of society. It is unclear whether students do not have such a concept at all, don't believe in the common good or do not see how individuals can act for the common good; and

- so-called 'iconic knowledge': the widespread ignorance of key information about national events and nationally representative symbols, which, it had generally been assumed, had been 'taught to death' in Australian schools, was a surprise.[5]

3.8   Irrespective of this apparent low level of civic knowledge amongst young Australians, some surveys indicate students' significant level of interest in learning more about civics and citizenship at school. The Australian Clearinghouse of Youth Studies 2002-03 report, for example, found that, 'Of 800 young people aged 12–15 who were surveyed in 2003:

- 50% were taught about citizenship at school; [and]

- 85% thought that they should have been taught about it.'[6]

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5   Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs, 2006, *National Assessment Program: Civics and Citizenship Years 6 and 10 Report 2004*, pp. 90-91. The lack of 'iconic knowledge' was raised in several submissions, including that of the Democratic Audit of Australia which noted, 'A grasp of basic political history is sadly lacking. For example, very little is known about the issues involved in Federation. Most students are hard pressed to name more than three or four of Australia's 25 prime ministers', *Submission no. 21*, p. 2. See also Senate Legal and Constitutional Affairs References Committee, 2004, *The road to a republic*, for a discussion of young people's limited knowledge of constitutional processes in Australia.

6   Cited in Western Australian Electoral Commission, *Submission no. 12*, p. 6. The Democratic Audit of Australia reports the findings of an informal survey of 150 first year political science students at the ANU in which 'nearly everyone said there should be more politics/civics in schools. A common theme was 'if it is compulsory to vote there should be proper education about the political system', *Submission no. 21*, p. 1.

Civics and citizenship education in Australian schools

3.9   Both the IEA and MCEETYA reports note that at the time of their respective surveys, civics and citizenship was not an area of study well established in the curricula of the Australian states and territories.[7]

3.10   In 1994, the then Labor Government asked a Civics Expert Group to recommend a series of strategies to improve the dire state of civic literacy even then apparent amongst young people. Following Labor's electoral defeat in 1996, the newly-elected Liberal-National Coalition Government embraced the central tenets of the Civic Expert Group's work by introducing its *Discovering Democracy* programme. Between 1997 and 2004, the Australian Government allocated $31.5 million to this programme which included:

- development of curriculum materials and professional learning resources, which were distributed to all Australian schools between 1997 and 2004. The *Discovering Democracy* resources included a primary and a secondary kit of teaching and learning materials, readers, posters, a number of CD-ROMs and the development of a website to support professional learning and provide extra teaching and learning materials (the *Discovering Democracy* units are presented in Tables 3.2 and 3.3, pp. 32-33);

- funding for professional development programmes in all states and territories; and

- a programme of national activities that included funding for principal, parent, academic and key learning area groups, as well as the initiation of Celebrating Democracy Week and the National Schools Constitutional Convention.

3.11   The programme was intended to lay the foundations for ongoing civics and citizenship education across a range of education sectors: schools, higher education, adult and community education, and vocational education and training institutions.

3.12   A further $4.9 million over four years was allocated to civics and citizenship education in 2004.[8] While new resources are no longer

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7   Mellor, S., K. Kennedy, and L. Greenwood, 2001, *Citizenship and Democracy: Students Knowledge and Beliefs, Australian Fourteen Year Olds and the IEA Civic Education Study*, p. 7; Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs, 2006, *National Assessment Program: Civics and Citizenship Years 6 and 10 Report 2004*, pp. 3-4.

8   Department of Education, Science and Training, *Submission no. 100*, p. 26.

produced,[9] the initiative continues, through Celebrating Democracy Week, the school grants programme and the National Forum for Civics and Citizenship Education held in Canberra in early June.[10]

Table 3.2   Discovering Democracy—primary school units

	Middle Primary	Upper Primary
Themes		
Who rules?	**Stories of the People and Rulers**	**Parliament versus Monarch**
	Who rules?	What does it mean to have absolute power?
	Should one person rule?	What is a parliament?[ii]
	Should the people rule?	What is the difference between 'divine right' and 'citizen's right'?
	Who rules in Australia?[i]	
	How should a nation be ruled?	How has the power moved from the monarch to the people?
		How does Australian parliamentary democracy reflect its British inheritance?[iii]
Law and rights	**Rules and Laws**	**The Law Rules**
	Why do we need rules and laws?	How do you get a fair trial?
	What is a rule and what is a law?	Who makes the law?[iv]
	Why should laws apply equally and be public?	Should the courts be independent?
	What are Aboriginal laws?	Should people be equal before the law?
	How are laws made in Australia?	How does the law rule in Australia today?
	What makes a good law?	
The Australian Nation	**We remember**	**The People Make a Nation**
	Which symbols do Australians use to show who they are and what they value?	Was Australia always organised in states and territories?
	Which symbols represent our democratic nation?[v]	What were the arguments for and against Federation?
	How do we commemorate significant events and lives in Australia?	How did the people make the nation?
	How and why have the symbols and events changed over the years?	How does the Australian federal system of government work?[vi]
	Which symbols and events are relevant to the Australian nation today?	

Source: Discovering Democracy Units, <http://www.curriculum.edu.au/ddunits/units/units.htm>.

i   Representative democracy; Australian government
ii   Introducing parliament; Westminster system
iii Australia's system of government
iv   Law making in a parliamentary democracy
v   Parliamentary symbols
vi   Levels of government; structure of federal system; people in parliament

9   When Erebus Consulting evaluated the *Discovering Democracy* roll out for a second time in 2003, it found that there was 'no demand for new curriculum resources'. See Department of Education, Science and Training, *Submission no. 100*, p. 21.
10   Department of Education, Science and Training, *Submission no. 100*, p. 26.

Table 3.3   Discovering Democracy—secondary school units

	Lower Secondary	Middle Secondary
Themes		
Who rules?	**Should the People Rule?**	**Parties Control Parliament**
	Who rules us?[i]	What role do political parties have in parliament and government?[iii]
	What are the main types of government?	Who do Australia's political parties represent?[iv]
	What was it like to live in a democracy in ancient Athens?	How do parties select policies and campaign for government?[v]
	How do the people rule in Australia?[ii]	
Law and rights	**Law**	**A Democracy Destroyed**
	Why do we need laws?	What are the features of a healthy democracy?
	What are the sources of Australian law?	How and why was democracy lost in Germany in 1933?
	How do we make laws today?[ix]	Which people resisted the Nazis?
	Who has the final say about laws in Australia?[x]	What are the key features of a democracy and how did the Nazis take them away?
	How does Australia's legal system attempt to ensure fairness and to protect people?	How is democracy in Australia protected?[vi]
		Human Rights
		What are human rights?
		Where did human rights come from?
		Where have Australians' human rights come from and how are they protected?[vii]
		What is Australia's record on Indigenous people's rights?[viii]
The Australian Nation	**Democratic Struggles**	**Making a Nation**
	What is democracy and what was Australia like before we had it?[xi]	Why do people decide that governments should federate?[xiii]
	How did democracy develop in Britain?	How do you make a federation work?[xiv]
	What influence did the Chartists have on the goldfields and did the struggle at Eureka contribute to the establishment of democracy in Australia?	Why do federations break apart?[xv]
	To what extent and when were the Chartists' six points achieved in Australia?	Should Australia become a republic?
	Why didn't all adults get the vote at Federation and how did those excluded work to achieve it?[xii]	**What Sort of Nation?**
		What sort of nation has Australia been? What sort of nation is it today?
		How has immigration shaped the kind of nation we are?
		How do economic factors shape and reflect the kind of nation we are?
		What responsibilities do individuals, communities and governments have for the welfare of Australian citizens?[xvi]
		What kind of country do we want Australia to be?

Citizens and public life	Men and Women in Political Life	Getting Things Done
	What is 'political activity'?	How can Australian citizens influence government action?
	What can we learn from people who have worked in parliament?[xvii]	How do governments and political parties respond to new issues?[xviii]
	What can we learn from people who have worked outside parliament?	How can Australian citizens influence the media and how does the media influence governments and political parties?[xix]
		How are disputes between State and Federal governments resolved?[xx]

Source: Discovering Democracy Units, <http://www.curriculum.edu.au/ddunits/units/units.htm>.

i   Influencing government decisions in a democracy

ii   Representative democracy; Senate and House of Representatives; Preferential voting; Direct democracy in Australia

iii   Public opinion of political parties; Political parties; Functions of political parties; Forming governments; Reasons for having political parties; Party discipline

iv   Australia's political parties 'Left' and 'right'; the 1949 election campaign; The middle ground

v   The 1972 election campaign: media; polls; issues

vi   Democratic principles in Australia and elsewhere today; Reflection on democracy in Australia and its destruction in Germany

vii   Rights established in Australian Constitution; Acts of Parliament (including role of Ombudsman and Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission) and court rulings

viii   Changes to laws and establishment of new laws to protect human rights of Indigenous people

ix   The law-making process

x   Introduction of constitutional rule-making powers; Our Constitution

xi   Introduction to key elements of democracy

xii   Why women didn't have the vote; Methods used by women to gain the vote; Why some Aboriginal people lost the vote following Federation; Aboriginal people's struggles for full citizenship status; The 1967 Referendum; A timeline of Aboriginal people's achievement of the right to vote

xiii   Federation: arguments for and against

xiv   Australian and United States constitutions; Reasons why the Australian Constitution does not include a Bill of Rights; The balance of power between Commonwealth and State and Territory governments

xv   WA votes to secede

xvi   Individual and government responsibilities

xvii   The lives of Chifley and Menzies; A day in the life of a contemporary Australian prime minister; Qualities and attributes required for the position of Prime Minister; The lives of Goldstein and Cowan; Milestones in the achievement of women's political rights in Australia; Comparison of the current leaders of the Liberal Party of Australia and the Australian Labor Party with Chifley and Menzies; Representation of women in current Australian parliaments

xviii *Definitions:* political parties and public policy; Definition and comparison: party policy, public policy, political values and power; Description: the political values of the Labor and Liberal parties; Comparison of Labor and Liberal; States' rights and central power; Making public policy: parliament, interest groups, the public service, and the media; Timeline: development of the Franklin dam issue; National versus Tasmanian opinion.

xix   Interest groups, political parties and the media

xx   Tasmania and the Commonwealth lock horns: Australia: a Federation of States

3.13   In April 1999, MCEETYA met in Adelaide to endorse a new set of National Goals for Schooling in the 21st century.

3.14   The National Goals include an emphasis on educating students to understand their role in Australia's democracy and made explicit the expectation that students, when they leave school:

- be active and informed citizens with an understanding and appreciation of Australia's system of government and civic life (Goal 1.4); and

■ have the capacity to exercise judgement and responsibility in matters of morality, ethics and social justice, and the capacity to make sense of their world, to think about how things got to be the way they are, to make rational and informed decisions about their own lives, and to accept responsibility for their own actions (Goal 1.3).

3.15   Since the *Discovering Democracy* initiative and the publication of the National Goals, all states and territories have recognised that civics and citizenship education is central to effective schooling and have incorporated civics and citizenship education into their curriculum documents and school practices.

Lessons learned from the implementation of civics and citizenship programmes

3.16   Evidence to the Committee elicited the following major 'lessons learned' from the implementation of civics and citizenship education in Australian schools to date:

■ given the significant discrepancy in the subjects in which civics and citizenship is taught across the states and territories, a more concerted, coordinated approach is required;

■ civics and electoral education can (and should) be taught from primary school up;

■ more needs to be done to explicitly link the goals of civic knowledge and civic engagement and that this is especially required at senior secondary level;

■ continuing professional development for teachers is essential;

■ there should be variety in the source material used to teach civics and electoral education;

■ while links exist between civics, Australian history and values education curricula, often these are not clearly defined for teachers;

■ parents provide an important reinforcement of civics lessons; and

■ outside school activities stimulate greater civic awareness, knowledge and engagement.

3.17   Each of these 'lessons' is elaborated in the following sections.

Requiring a more coordinated approach across states and territories

3.18   At present, state and territory governments are responsible for the development and implementation of primary and secondary school curricula. Civics and citizenship is therefore taught through different subjects in the various states and territories. For example:

   ■ in the Australian Capital Territory, civics and citizenship education can be integrated through the ACT Studies of Society and Environment (SOSE) framework, all the Key Learning Areas and the ACT Essential Learnings which have been developed for the ACT High Schools Development Project;[11]

   ■ in New South Wales, civics and citizenship is part of the Human Society and Its Environment (HSIE) K-6 primary school syllabus and the secondary History and Geography Years 7-10 syllabuses, with a mandatory test of Australian Geography, History, Civics and Citizenship being part of the NSW School Certificate for all Year 10 students;[12]

   ■ in the Northern Territory, Civics, Governance and Social Justice is incorporated into the learning area of SOSE, which also incorporates the disciplines of History, Geography, Politics, Economics, Business and Careers;[13]

   ■ in Queensland, *Discovering Democracy* is implemented across the curriculum in subjects including SOSE, history, business studies, English and Technology;

   ■ in South Australia, Civics and Citizenship education is incorporated into Society and Environment Studies and Legal and Political Studies in the South Australian Curriculum Framework;

   ■ in Tasmania, Civics and Citizenship is incorporated into the Essential Learnings Curriculum of Society and Environment Studies, which itself is inter-disciplinary;

   ■ in Victoria, Civics and Citizenship was a cross-curriculum priority in the Victorian Curriculum and Standards Framework. Cross-curriculum emphases are seen in key learning areas including Health and Physical

11   Civics and Citizenship in the ACT, available online at: <http://activated.det.act.gov.au/learning/civics/index.htm>. Accessed 30 February 2007.

12   NSW Cabinet Office, *Submission no. 10*, p. 2.

13   Studies of Society and Environment Learning Area. Available online: available online at: <http://www.deet.nt.gov.au/education/ntcf/docs/learning_areas_soc_env.pdf>. Accessed 6 February 2006.

Education (outdoor education), Science (acting responsibly) and English (discussion of contemporary social and political issues). Under the new Victorian Essential Learning Standards (implemented from 2007), schools will be required to report against defined standards for civics and citizenship;[14] and

- Civics and Citizenship is a cross-curriculum priority in the Western Australian Curriculum and Standards Framework, with particular focus on civic responsibility and social competence in the Society and Learning area.

3.19   Dr Bede Harris submitted that while 'all states and territories include at least some civics-related subject matter as part of the syllabus… the depth of coverage of civics varies from jurisdiction to jurisdiction, and even from school to school.'[15] In many respects, this is why the MCEETYA Report uncovered that:

> The delivery of instruction in civics and citizenship was fragmented and marked by a lack of formality. The definitions associated with certain key concepts were not generally agreed across the jurisdictions, nor was their appearance in formal curriculum documents universal. The year levels at which some treatment of these concepts and knowledge was to be undertaken, how much time was to be spent on the teaching of civics and citizenship and within which key learning areas have been matters for debate during recent developments. These issues had a significant influence on what students were taught and could learn at school.[16]

3.20   For a number of submitters, the decline in interested students has led to calls for a more comprehensive approach to the implementation of civics and citizenship in Australia. Dr Harris, for example, noted that:

> The ability of the Commonwealth to fund projects in the States by means of tied grants provides an opportunity for the Commonwealth to be proactive in this regard, by granting supplementary funds to the States, on condition that such funds

14   Department of Education and Training Victoria, *Transcript of Evidence*, 21 August 2006, p. 2.
15   Dr Bede Harris, *Submission no. 4*, p. 2.
16   Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs, 2006, *National Assessment Program: Civics and Citizenship Years 6 and 10 Report 2004*, pp. 3-4.

are used to include at least a core element of the *Discovering Democracy* programme in school curricula.[17]

3.21 Dr Phillips suggested a voluntary Civics (Citizenship) Certificate, that:

> …would be available to all, but particularly youth, who could satisfy an examination which includes the rudiments of government, the operation of the voting system and the judicial structure. This course would be in the context of Australian values and include avenues for 'reflective' engagement. This Civics course outline should be brief. It would be necessary to appoint a well qualified advisory committee to undertake the task.[18]

3.22 Other submitters were more comfortable in asserting the need for a mandatory civics curriculum.[19] On the understanding that with the exception of NSW, civics remains a discretionary unit of school curricula, the Northern Territory Electoral Commission submitted that:

> The delivery of electoral education through schools will never be really consistent and effective unless it is made mandatory in the school curriculum. At the moment, schools are under a great deal of pressure to include non-core education items in school time and electoral education, whilst undoubtedly deemed important, simply does not currently rate with other competing priorities with many decision makers in the education fraternity.[20]

3.23 The Committee did hear certain reservations, however, on making civics compulsory. Education coordinator Ms Larraine Caldwell, for example, stated:

> In principle, yes, because I think it is really important, but in practice… who is actually going to deliver it, is it going to be delivered by the teachers in the schools or are groups, such as parliaments and the electoral commissions, going to get together and create and deliver the programme? It is all very well to say, 'Let's make it compulsory.' In principle I would agree with that—I think it is important that the students have that sort of background—but it comes down to delivery: who is actually going to deliver it?… If we made it compulsory without having all those

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17 Dr Bede Harris, *Submission no. 4*, pp. 2-3. See also, Human Rights and Equal Opportunities Commission, *Submission no. 34*, pp. 6-7.

18 Dr Harry Phillips, *Submission no. 22*, p. 4.

19 See, for example, Western Australian Electoral Commission, *Submission no. 12*, p. 8; Dr Aborjsen *et al.*, *Submission no. 21*, p. 3; Ms Jane Gray, *Submission no. 68*, p. 1.

20 Northern Territory Electoral Commission, *Submission no. 98*, p. 6.

> basics organised—what is the content of the programme, what are the outcomes—and having all those established first, you would probably have the negative effect. If teachers have to teach it and do not really want to teach it… or they do not understand it, then you could actually end up with a worse problem on your hands as far as cynicism is concerned.[21]

3.24   Even where civics is currently considered a 'compulsory component' of the Year 10 school certificate curriculum (as is the case in New South Wales), challenges in teaching the subject persist. As Ms Julie Parker explained:

> …[students] are given only 400 hours in which to do it from [Years] 7 to 10. It is up to the school how it approaches those 400 hours, as long as it is done from 7 to 10. There is a certain amount in what we call stage 4, which is 7 and 8, and a required 100 hours in history and a required 100 hours in geography in stage 5, which is 9 and 10. Within those times, they have to cover the mandatory syllabus. It is very overcrowded as far as history and geography are concerned, because they are joined as one. There is only 100 hours given to history and 100 hours given to geography, whereas science would have the 200 hours together. So it is a very crowded curriculum and it is very hard to get through it.[22]

3.25   It was therefore suggested that the Commonwealth had a major role to play in facilitating a more comprehensive approach to civics and citizenship. Dr Harris, for example, submitted that, given the great variance in the teaching of civics across the states and territories:

> …as a first step towards achieving uniformity, it would be useful if the Commonwealth funded research on civics education as it is currently delivered and on how it could be made uniform both in breadth and in content.[23]

3.26   In August 2006, MCEETYA released its National Statements of Learning for Civics and Citizenship to be implemented by all states and territories by 2008. The National Statements of Learning are a clear attempt to systematise the curricula used to teach students in all states and territories across five main areas, namely English, Science, Mathematics, Civics and

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21   Ms Loraine Caldwell and Mrs Julie Hearnden, *Transcript of Evidence*, 20 November 2006, p. 23.

22   Ms Julie Parker, Deputy Principal, Sir Joseph Banks High School, *Transcript of Evidence*, 29 September 2006, p. 18.

23   Dr Bede Harris, *Submission no. 4*, pp. 2-3.

Citizenship and Information and Communication Technologies. Statements of Learning have been developed for Years 3, 5, 7 and 9.

3.27   While the Statements do not represent the totality of the curriculum, states and territories are expected to use these as core curriculum opportunities for all students. States and territories may add to the statements, but not 'delete'.[24]

3.28   Mr Simpson, from the Department of Education, Science and Training, noted that the Australian Government was beginning to exert a little more influence, in the form of 'conditions of funding', on state and territory education curricula. He noted:

> In the current quadrennium funding that the Australian government gives to education authorities for schools, for the first time with this quadrennium, 2005-08, a number of conditions have been applied to that funding, such as the use of plain English report cards and so on. You are probably aware that at the Australian history summit, which the Minister held in August, there was a call from the summiteers in the communiqué to make Australian history a compulsory stand-alone subject in years 9 and 10. That in effect is a recommendation to government. Government will need to consider the normal mechanism for something to be done about that, if something is to be done about it, in the quadrennium beginning in January 2009.[25]

Committee comment

3.29   The Committee supports the National Statements of Learning for Civics and Citizenship produced by MCEETYA. MCEETYA's work in this area has revealed that the 'delivery of instruction in civics and citizenship was fragmented and marked by a lack of formality.' It is essential that there be progress in ameliorating the deficits identified by MCEETYA. The States and Territories are encouraged to deliver learning objectives identified by MCEETYA as quickly as possible.

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24   Mr Noel Simpson (Department of Education, Science and Training), *Transcript of Evidence*, 7 August 2006, p. 8. The National Statements of Learning for Civics and Citizenship are available online at: <http://www.mceetya.edu.au/verve/_resources/Civics_SOL06.pdf>. Accessed 30 January 2007.

25   Mr Noel Simpson (Department of Education, Science and Training), *Transcript of Evidence*, 4 December 2006, p. 22.

Civics and electoral education can begin at primary school

3.30   Submissions were generally in favour of beginning civics education 'earlier rather than later':[26] As the WA Government noted:

> It is the belief of the Constitutional Centre and its Advisory Board that civics education cannot start too early. The Constitutional Centre has developed a programme for Years 1 to 3 called Larfalot's Letter. This is a big book story about an imaginary Australian town and how it uses democratic processes to elect representatives to develop a constitution for the town. With the aid of puppets, students become the characters in the story, hold an election, identify the problems that need to be solved and develop a constitution or set of rules for the town.[27]

3.31   There are several advantages, as expressed in these submissions, to starting civics and electoral education at primary school level. In the first instance, given the different approaches to class timetables in primary and secondary schools, there are considerably more opportunities for primary teachers to 'weave' civics and electoral education into their daily lessons.[28]

3.32   For example, in their presentation to the Committee, the students of Rosetta Primary School, in Hobart, explained that they had participated in mock UN Assemblies, World Vision global leadership conferences and had been involved in local government programmes such as precinct meetings.[29] The students of Hambledon State School, in Cairns, were very well versed in parliamentary practices, using weekly class parliaments to decide on any arising classroom issues.[30]

3.33   Second, the Australian Centre for Educational Studies submitted that:

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26   See, for example, Mr Ian Martin, *Submission no. 8*, p. 1, Mr David Westaway, *Submission no. 9*, p. 1; Western Australian Electoral Commission, *Submission no. 12*, p. 9, the Australian Centre for Education Studies, *Submission no. 19*; and Ms Yvonne Goudie, *Submission no. 27*. A notable exception was that of the Civil Liberties Australia (ACT Branch) which argued that 'Electoral education should begin at 17 years 9 months in most circumstances, but only… where an election is in the offing. Electoral education is a waste of time and effort if there is no immediate practical focus on electoral involvement', *Submission no. 53*, p. 4.

27   Government of Western Australia, *Submission no. 13*, p. 2.

28   Senior secondary school students have the option to elect subjects. It was submitted that one of the difficulties arising from the secondary school class timetable is that the number of students electing to take politics or legal studies classes has continued to decline over a period of 20 years, see Mr Glenn Marchant, *Submission no. 2*, p. 1.

29   See *Transcript of Evidence*, 31 August 2006, pp. 26-28.

30   See *Transcript of Evidence*, 24 October 2006, pp. 5-9.

> Research evidence indicates that children form values at an early age and prior to commencing formal education. They are influenced by family and community attitudes and experiences. Therefore it is considered appropriate that civics and electoral education begin in the early years of primary schooling. In recognition of this formative process students should engage in teaching and learning activities in developing a critical awareness of issues related to citizenship and participation in civic life and an understanding of democratic processes.[31]

3.34   The students of Monbulk Primary, in Melbourne's outskirts, demonstrated their ability to learn and grasp such civic values when they recited key events in Australia's democratic history, including the Eureka Stockade, the date and meaning of Federation, the significance of the First and Second World Wars and distinctions in Australia's three tiers of government.[32]

3.35   Third, educators have found that teaching younger students can be easier because of their higher levels of enthusiasm and participation. Educators at the ACT Legislative Assembly, for example, found that:

> 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 programmes run by the Assembly for students in years 8 -11 such as the Interschool Debates Programme and the A.C.T. Schools Constitutional Convention.[33]

3.36   The students of Al Zahra College in Sydney demonstrated high levels of enthusiasm and were keen to demonstrate to the Committee their knowledge of Australia's political system, including the political parties and tiers of government, and the values underpinning our society.[34]

3.37   Once primary school students' imaginations are caught, however, educators emphasised the need for continuing education. In a survey conducted by the WA Electoral Commission (WAEC), one primary school teacher noted that students 'know what is taught when it is taught, but do

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31   Australian Centre for Educational Studies, *Submission no. 19*, p. 1.
32   See *Transcript of Evidence*, 22 August 2006, pp. 12-14.
33   ACT Legislative Assembly, *Submission no. 14*, p. 3.
34   See *Transcript of Evidence*, 29 September 2006.

not retain it unless a continuous programme is developed and worked on.'[35]

Civic knowledge and civic engagement

3.38 A number of submissions pointed to a lack of civic skills amongst young people or a capacity to translate civic knowledge into action.[36] In this respect, two elements appear to be missing from the civics curriculum, particularly at the senior secondary level:

- first, the basic tenets of electoral education; and

- second, mechanisms by which to contribute to the political process, namely through political parties.

3.39 In relation to electoral education, the WAEC reported on the findings of its survey of teachers using the Commission as a resource for the learning outcome Society and Environment. The Commission noted that:

> Of those surveyed, the adequacy of electoral education in the schools was seen to be dependent on such initiatives as that of the Commission in providing a resource in this arena.[37]

3.40 As indicated above, secondary schools attribute this to what is known as the 'crowded curriculum', particularly pertinent during the final years of school (11 and 12).[38]

3.41 However, Goudie and others submitted that electoral education is best conducted in the context of a civics and citizenship programme.[39] Moreover, Year 11 and 12 students require a specific electoral focus given that they are closest to the voting age.

3.42 Both the Australian Electoral Commission (AEC) and the Victorian Electoral Commission (VEC) submitted that a course unit on electoral education should therefore be developed for implementation at senior secondary school level:

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35 Western Australian Electoral Commission, *Submission no. 12*, p. 9. See also Ms Yvonne Goudie, *Submission no. 27*.

36 See for example Ms Sandra Kenman (Australian Federation of Societies for Studies of Society and Environment), *Transcript of Evidence*, 4 December 2006, pp. 34-35.

37 Western Australian Electoral Commission, *Submission no. 12*, p. 9. See also Parliamentary Education and Community Relations Section, Parliament of NSW, *Submission no. 16*, p. 2.

38 Western Australian Electoral Commission, *Submission no. 12*, p. 9.

39 Ms Yvonne Goudie, *Submission no. 27*, p. 2.

It is a matter of concern to the AEC that there appears in most States and Territories to be a significant time lag between the point at which students encounter CCE, and the point at which they become eligible to enrol and later vote. This time lag cannot but decrease the salience for the students of messages encouraging their participation in elections; particularly given that the "electoral" component of the CCE curriculum is but one element of a substantial body of learning. One way of addressing this problem, in the AEC's view, would be the development of an "electoral education" course unit - not necessarily requiring more than two one-hour classes - which could be delivered to year 11 students (most of whom would be turning 17 close to the time at which they took part in the classes). The content of such a unit would need to reflect the distinctive electoral arrangements in each State and Territory… the AEC could seek to pursue it in consultation with its State and Territory counterparts, and with the relevant educational authorities.[40]

3.43   A second concern raised during the inquiry related to young people's limited understanding of how they could translate concern with issues into action. Most notably, it was submitted that while the curriculum describes the formal structures—the parliament, the chambers of the parliament, the role of the cabinet and so forth—the curriculum does not sufficiently describe the way in which Australian democracy actually works, in particular through the political parties. The *Discovering Democracy* National Sample Survey conducted in 1999 found that students were not 'well informed of the political parties'.[41]

3.44   Students did not disagree with this statement:

I think in schools, in my experience, what we have really been learning is about the system: yes, there is the lower house and then the upper house, and how a bill gets passed. But there is only a limited time in schools, and so a limit on what you can learn about, and I think it is more important that we understand our part in democracy more than the whole overall system. We really need to know about the parties and what they stand for and how we can take our place, rather than how the system works, because

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40   Australian Electoral Commission, *Submission no. 72*, p. 11. The Victorian Electoral Commission also submitted that students could have a 'Passport to Democracy' to be stamped each time a student progresses from one stage to another. See *Submission no. 36*, p. 17.

41   See Department of Education, Science and Training, *Submission no. 100*, Attachment E, p. 3.

> if we do not know about that it is still going to work, but if we do
> not know about our role it is not going to work.[42]

3.45   Teachers who spoke with the Committee were also not averse to teaching
        the philosophies of the political parties, although, in the Northern
        Territory, it was noted that on occasions, it can be the parents who find
        this subject matter confronting:

> We were at a parents group meeting last week and we were
> briefing parents on what we are teaching students about
> statehood. There was a comment by a parent who was quite
> cynical about what we were doing. The parent said, 'Next thing
> you'll want us to do is have the Labor Party in here telling
> students what Labor Party policy is.' My thought was: 'Yes, why
> not? And then we could have the Coalition and so on.' But there
> was resistance. There was a lot of reluctance from parents thinking
> that we were propagandising to their children to some extent.[43]

3.46   While political parties are currently included in the *Discovering Democracy*
        curriculum, it was evident that certain teachers may find this area more
        challenging to teach.

Continuing professional development for teachers

3.47   Teacher enthusiasm is one of the most important factors in implementing
        civics and citizenship in schools. Where passion for the subject matter is
        evident in the teacher, that passion is often replicated in the students.

3.48   It is clear from evidence to the Committee, however, that teaching civics
        and electoral education can be quite difficult, especially for young and/or
        new teachers.[44] It was submitted that the difficulty stems from teachers'
        generally low levels of knowledge about the subject matter itself, and
        therefore, a lack of confidence in teaching it. As one passionate teacher
        from Western Australia noted:

> …most teachers do not even know about the Australian
> Constitution. They do not know what it is. They would not even
> know where to begin teaching it. In my experience, I have actually

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42   Ms Alice Hudson (Canberra Forum), *Transcript of Evidence*, 19 October 2006, p. 21.

43   Mr Michael Tatham, *Transcript of Evidence*, 20 November 2006, p. 27.

44   In informal discussions with Australian Electoral Commission staff from Western Australia,
      for example, the Committee was advised that it is often young teachers, with generally no
      teaching experience, who are sent to remote communities. It was submitted that these teachers
      are generally 'ill-equipped' to teach civics and electoral education, especially when little of this
      subject matter is covered in pre-service university courses.

>   sat and delivered a kind of theory to teachers just to give them the
>   confidence to feel that they can walk into a classroom and talk
>   very confidently about the subject matter…[45]

3.49   The Australian Education Union's submission cited research pointing to
        teachers' low understanding and interest in both electoral and civics
        education.[46] The Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission's
        Rights of Passage report similarly found that the degree of civic knowledge
        in young people varies greatly because, among other things, 'it is largely
        up to the discretion of the individual teachers whether or not to teach
        civics.'[47]

3.50   Inevitably, in a 'crowded curriculum' environment, this lack of confidence
        and interest means that teachers tend to teach what they know:

>   …teachers certainly do not have the confidence that they would
>   have in subjects in which they obviously did their studies. When
>   you are confronted with some of the students that we have, it is
>   much better to be dealing with something that you feel confident
>   in so that you feel you have some control over that, if you are
>   struggling with control of the kids.

>   …People take refuge in what they are familiar with. The NT
>   framework is very broad and you cannot hope to do everything
>   that is in it; it is just overwhelming. You have to make decisions
>   and, of course, people tend to make decisions that support their
>   understanding and strengths rather than decisions that perhaps do
>   not.[48]

3.51   The VEC submitted that teachers' level of confidence in teaching civics
        and electoral education was also related to the 'changing resourcing levels
        in schools'. Ms Lang, the VEC's Manager of Communication, Education
        and Research, explained that:

>   Teachers come in to teach a course that they perhaps have not
>   taught before, so their level of confidence is quite low. They are
>   not quite sure what the students have learnt to that point and,
>   therefore, the temptation, if they have the opportunity, is to go
>   with something that they know. That tends to be something that is
>   not civics and citizenship; it might be something like SOSE—social

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45   Mrs Melissa Rasmussen, *Transcript of Evidence*, 23 October 2006, p. 37.

46   The Australian Education Union's Submission (no. 48, p. 12) cites research by Prior (2005) and
      the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement study.

47   Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, *Submission no. 34*, pp. 4-5.

48   Ms Anne Channing, *Transcript of Evidence*, 28 July 2006, p. 3.

> education—et cetera. Civics and citizenship tend to suffer
> somewhat from this effect.[49]

3.52 Unlike the teaching of mathematics or science, for example, teachers of civics and citizenship often have no formal training. In fact, the 1999 evaluation of *Discovering Democracy* found that 70 per cent of teachers did no professional development in this subject area.[50] This being the case, it was suggested that professional development is essential and should include opportunities to network with other civics and citizenship teachers to facilitate the sharing of teaching experiences/practices.

3.53 It was further submitted that the absence of formal training cannot (and, indeed, should not) be compensated by the production of manuals and 'resource kits'. As Ms Goudie stated:

> There is evidence from Australia and overseas that confirms that
> the training of staff who are implementing CCE [civics and
> citizenship] and EE [electoral education] programmes is vital.
> Whilst it is tempting for CCE/EE providers to produce 'glossy'
> materials (in an attempt to satisfy the desired 'outcomes' of
> funders & policy-makers), it is not an effective strategy (and
> ultimately a waste of money). The intrinsic value of training (and
> professional development programmes) cannot be over-stated.[51]

3.54 Electoral education is considered especially challenging to teach because teachers are often not familiar with electoral systems and processes.[52] To this end, the VEC submitted that 'teachers are not confident in teaching something they don't fully understand'.[53] Electoral education officers often remarked on the benefit teachers derived from school visits to their education centres and their programmes.[54]

3.55 In many respects, federal and state/territory electoral commissions and parliamentary education offices are the specialist agencies in this field of education. The Australian Federation of Societies for Studies of Society and Environment submitted that teachers would welcome the involvement of these agencies in the delivery of civics and electoral education, although it also submitted that 'train the trainer' type courses

49   Victorian Electoral Commission, *Transcript of Evidence*, 21 August 2006, p. 4.

50   Department of Education, Science and Training, *Submission no. 100*, p. 20.

51   Ms Yvonne Goudie, *Submission no. 27*, p. 3.

52   See Dr Murray Print and Dr Lawrence Saha, *Transcript of Evidence*, 7 August 2006, p. 56.

53   Victorian Electoral Commission, *Transcript of Evidence*, 21 August 2006, p. 2.

54   See *Transcripts of Evidence*: Elections ACT (11 August 2006), Victorian Electoral Commission (21 August 2006), Western Australian Electoral Commission (21 September 2006).

would be very effective, 'along with suggestions for practical activities and case studies to inspire discussion and individual student learning'.[55]

3.56   Recently, the Parliamentary Education Office (PEO) has targeted pre-service teachers studying in university towards a teaching qualification. In its submission to this inquiry, the PEO stated that it:

> …establishes parliamentary programs in local schools for these pre-service teachers, in their internship, to learn how to use the Parliament as a teaching methodology. The following year the interns take this practical teaching strategy with them into their first classroom.[56]

3.57   The WA PEO similarly reported on a series of workshops it has been running for second and third year education students. The WA PEO stated:

> These workshops introduce pre-service teachers to Civics and Citizenship Education exploring the ways in which citizenship education can be translated into effective classroom practice. Positive attitudes, ideas and strategies for future curriculum development are fostered in the area of Civics and Citizenship Education and pre-service teachers are encouraged to become informed, interested and actively involved in getting Civics and Citizenship Education into the classroom curriculum.[57]

3.58   A number of these specialist agencies submitted that there should be greater collaboration between these bodies and education authorities, not only in the development of curriculum resources, but also in the provision of formal training for all civics teachers.[58] The ACT Legislative Assembly, for example, submitted that:

> 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 programmes is to promote knowledge of the electoral and

55   Australian Federation of Societies for Studies of Society and Environment, *Submission no. 25*, p. 5; see also Australian Catholic University, Faculty of Education, *Submission no. 90*.

56   Department of the Senate, *Submission no. 28*, p. 13.

57   Ms Jane Gray, *Submission no. 68*, p. 3.

58   See, for example, South Australian Electoral Office, *Submission no. 84*, Western Australian Electoral Commission, *Submission no. 12*, Victorian Electoral Commission, *Submission no. 36*. See also Australian Federation of Societies for Studies of Society and Environment, *Submission no. 25*, p. 5.

parliamentary process but also to provide teachers with additional resources and to increase their awareness of the range of programmes offered by the Assembly or Elections ACT.[59]

3.59   A necessary part of professional development is teacher release. Teachers require time off in order to participate in their development courses and, for schools, this involves the organisation of a substitute teacher during school hours. Ms Goudie was concerned that the AEC's *Your Vote Counts* professional development programme no longer provides for teacher relief. In fact, the AEC's Annual Report indicates that in 2005-06, teachers only participated in an abridged version of the AEC course, rather than the two-day workshop it had previously provided.[60]

Civics education requires a variety of source materials

3.60   While *Discovering Democracy* kits were distributed to all schools, the materials and resources have not always been considered an effective means by which to capture students' interest and engagement. As Mr Marchant submitted:

> The *Discovering Democracy* kits that have been distributed to schools are, to be frank, both 'a hit and a miss'. I say this because, although the material itself is important, the presentation: a constant stream of handouts and folders in green packs, lacked the capacity to have an impact with many (most?) teachers and students and, I suspect, most are simply gathering dust in a storeroom somewhere.[61]

3.61   The second evaluation of the programme found that the *Discovering Democracy* kits were more often used as a 'set of resources to be "dipped into" on an as required basis' and very rarely taught in totality.[62] As Ms Caldwell noted:

> Kids who are visual learners need to see things in a visual context; others need to have stories that they can relate to… The key to it is that you do not just have one kitbag that you take out; you have several kitbags that you are delving into, depending on your audience, because one size does not fit all. It just depends on the learning styles of the kids and the age group. You really have to cater to that. You cannot just have text based materials, you cannot

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59   Speaker of the ACT Legislative Assembly, *Submission no. 14*, p. 4

60   Australian Electoral Commission, *Annual Report 2005-06*, p. 92.

61   Mr Glenn Marchant, *Submission no. 2*, p. 3.

62   Department of Education, Science and Training, *Submission no. 100*, p. 21.

just have picture based materials and you cannot just have factuals: sometimes you have to use a bit of fiction and weave it in. It is how you engage. That is why it is important to have educators involved in the teaching of civics and electoral education, because that is what we are trained to do—we are trained to engage kids.[63]

3.62   For this reason, teachers often submitted that a variety of source materials should be used to engage students on civics issues. Most commonly, teachers cited Australian narratives and inspiring stories in engaging their students:

> I firmly believe that students should be familiar with a range of inspirational political speakers; incorporating the words of historical and contemporary figures. This should include Australian speeches. A text such as Well May We Say… The Speeches That Made Australia, edited by Sally Warhaft, is an excellent resource that I use regularly in Politics and Australian History classes. Students should have an understanding of our cultural and political values including the evolution of our country through the views of our leaders.[64]

> We do not have revolutions. We have not had wars; we have not had civil wars. Dean Jaensch says that we have had two civil wars, one was called the Eureka Stockade and the other one was two Afghan camel drivers shooting at a train in the Northern Territory. You are fighting a historical event. It is up to the teachers in the classroom to make these events relevant to these young people coming through. If you go back over the last 20 years, with the number of committees such as yours that have come through, an enormous amount of money has been spent on resources which we as teachers cannibalise, plagiarise and use for our own programs.[65]

3.63   In addition to these 'inspiring narratives', a number civics teachers surveyed in the IEA Civic Education Study also nominated "media: newspapers, magazines, television" as the "most important" resources available in teaching civics.[66]

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63   Ms Loraine Caldwell (Education Coordinator, NT Legislative Assembly), *Transcript of Evidence*, 20 November 2006, p. 22.

64   Mr Glenn Marchant, *Submission no. 2*, p. 4.

65   Mr Igor Plisko, *Transcript of Evidence*, 22 September 2006, p. 10. See also Mrs Melissa Rasmussen, *Transcript of Evidence*, 23 October 2006, p. 37.

66   Mellor, S., K. Kennedy, and L. Greenwood, 2001, *Citizenship and Democracy: Students Knowledge and Beliefs, Australian Fourteen Year Olds and the IEA Civic Education Study*, p. xxii.

3.64   Current events are seen as a 'way into' civics and citizenship education and a means by which to examine what is happening in the international context:

> The Australian community is perhaps more interested now in civic values, national identity and our place in the world, than in the recent past… Events in both our national context and the international context, such as the Bali bombings, international terrorism, war in Afghanistan and Iraq, press home this point and highlight the importance of links to studies of Asia, learning about regional and global citizenship.[67]

3.65   It was often remarked that teaching students about civil and electoral rights, for example, is best done in the context of examining the civil rights of citizens in less democratic, or developing, countries.[68]

3.66   The role of television was also not to be underestimated in teaching civics.[69] Mr Tony Poynter, for example, referred to the ABC's production, *Behind the News (BTN)*, which he noted, examined issues according to a range of views.[70]

3.67   It was argued, however, that with the exception of *BTN*, Australian television networks do not regularly produce programmes with educational content for children, specifically relevant to civics and electoral education.[71] On this basis, the Australian Children's Television Foundation submitted that a dedicated, free-to-air, children's channel, as recently proposed by the Foundation to the Australian Government, would fill this gap.

3.68   Developing this variety of content material also requires cooperation and consultation between a variety of stakeholders. Specifically, it was suggested that greater consultation is required between education authorities and electoral commissions.[72]

3.69   Teaching materials are also coming from relatively new sources. The Department of the House of Representatives, for example, recently began

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67   Department of Education, Science and Training, *Submission no. 100*, p. 21.

68   See, for example, *Transcripts of Evidence*, Western Australian Electoral Commission, 21 September 2006 and Dr Bede Harris, 11 August 2006.

69   See Australian Children's Television Foundation, *Submission no. 82*, and Australian Catholic University, *Submission no. 90*, p. 1.

70   Mr Tony Poynter, *Transcript of Evidence*, 31 August 2006, p. 38. With respect to *Behind The News*, a student at the Adelaide forum stated that a version of the program that catered to 'teenagers' would also be welcome, see *Transcript of Evidence*, 22 September 2006, p. 4.

71   See Australian Children's Television Foundation, *Transcript of Evidence*, 21 August 2006, p. 51.

72   South Australian Electoral Office, *Submission no. 84*, p. 5.

producing an *About the House* segment for television, showcasing recent House and committee activities. This segment, aired at 3.15pm on Sky Television on Fridays of parliamentary sitting weeks, recently showed this Committee's visit to Melbourne High School, including interviews with the Chair, the students and their teachers. The Department's *About the House* magazine is also distributed to 501 school libraries in an effort to keep students up to date with the goings on of the House.[73] Teachers have indicated that the articles in this magazine are very useful as teaching aids. Parliaments, as a whole, have become more accessible institutions for both teachers and students through their websites, with webcasts and live RSS feeds, and education sections with content developed especially for schools.

Civics, values education and Australian History

3.70   Stemming from its initiatives in civics and citizenship education, the Australian Government has been concerned to ensure both values and Australian History hold a significant place in school curricula around the country. Some submitters saw an opportunity to teach these subject areas in a more coherent approach:

> The *Discovering Democracy* initiative which grew from earlier concerns about civics and citizenship education was well funded by the Federal Government for a time but it ran out of steam, being taken over by [the] push for values education. The support for teachers and schools which came from *Discovering Democracy* should be renewed if our young people are to receive the civics education required to turn them into informed voters.[74]

> We believe that there has been a plethora of often disconnected education policy initiatives such as drug education, values education, boys' education and civics and citizenship. However, a more coherent approach to these initiatives is needed because we believe that many of these initiatives actually overlap. We need an overall coherent approach so that schools can gain maximum benefit of those initiatives.[75]

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73 Department of the House of Representatives, *Submission no. 108*, p. 2. The Department's original submission indicated that a number of teachers used the magazine in their classes. In response, the Department 'sent a copy of the magazine to all high schools in Australia, inviting them to join the magazine's mailing list.' *Submission no. 91*, p. 1.

74 Australian College of Educators, *Submission no. 10*, p. 3.

75 Association of Independent Schools South Australia, *Transcript of Evidence*, 22 September 2006, p. 2.

3.71   There are strong links between civics and citizenship education, and both values education and Australian History. The SA Electoral Office submitted that civics should be understood as part of Australian history, and as being entrenched in particular values.[76]

3.72   Mr Marchant was strongly in favour of making the links between civics and values education much clearer. In his view, civics is not value-neutral:

> There has been a lot of debate about Australian values. I would like to strongly endorse the idea that we must, as a nation, have a clear set of core values… I would point out that the Australian Constitution, political institutions, culture and history, as well as political conventions have contributed to core values. These include: a secular society, democracy (with rights and responsibilities), the rule of law, freedom and human rights…[77]

3.73   Accepting that Australian democracy is not value-neutral, a number of teachers were supportive of the use of critical analysis as a basic pedagogy for civics and citizenship education. Teachers acknowledged that students required a level of critical literacy in determining their own thoughts and opinions about the subject matter they learned in class.[78]

School governance

3.74   Research presented to the Committee revealed that students' experience of school governance can shape their views on elections and democracy outside school and can also have a strong impact on their levels of civic knowledge.

3.75   The Youth Electoral Study project, for instance, found that student government (either voting or standing for office) is positively related to the intention to vote in federal elections.[79] The authors noted:

> Insofar as schools do have student governments of one form or another, and they have elections to determine which students hold office in those governments, then the failure to hold proper democratic elections, and the failure to treat the student governments seriously, represents a serious missed opportunity.

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76   South Australian Electoral Office, *Submission no. 84* and see also, Australian Catholic University, Faculty of Education, *Submission no. 90*.

77   Mr Glenn Marchant, *Submission no. 2*, p. 4.

78   See Melbourne High School, *Transcript of Evidence*, 22 August 2006 and Ms Leslie McFarlane (Queensland Teachers' Union), *Transcript of Evidence*, 23 October 2006, pp. 9-10.

79   Print, M., L. Saha and K. Edwards, 2005, *Youth Electoral Study 2: Youth, Political Engagement and Voting*, Australian Electoral Commission, p. 22.

> That the experience of democracy can be a more important agent of political learning than the academic knowledge about democracy suggests that some practices in some schools at least, may be undermining efforts to effectively produce active and participatory adult citizens.[80]

3.76   The 2006 MCEETYA Report found that there is an 'association between being in a school that provides opportunities for participation in governance and civics achievement scores amongst Year 10 students.'[81] Opportunities described in the report include those reported in Table 3.4.

Table 3.4   Opportunities for participation in civics-related activities at school, by year level

At my school …	Year 6 'Yes'	Year 10 'Yes'
	%	%
Students vote for class representatives	77	63
Students are represented on student councils	81	93
Student representatives contribute to decision making	85	92
Students can help prepare a school paper or magazine	56	75
Students can participate in peer support programs	90	80
Students can participate in activities in the community	84	93
Students can participate in activities outside the classroom	97	97

Source: Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs, 2006, National Assessment Program: Civics and Citizenship Years 6 and 10 Report 2004, p. 74

3.77   Many submissions were therefore supportive of integrating civics lessons with other areas of school activity, or as Ms Yvonne Goudie phrased it, integrating 'civic knowledge' with 'civic dispositions' and 'civic skills'. She considered the most effective civics programmes to be those containing each of these three elements and which are used in both:

- formal instruction in schools and other community programmes; and
- the informal school setting or 'hidden curriculum' (the informal curriculum refers to the governance of the school community and relationships among those within it). These relationships should embody the fundamental values and principles of constitutional democracy – 'schools should be managed by adults who govern in accordance with constitutional values and

80   Print, M., L. Saha and K. Edwards, 2005, *Youth Electoral Study 2: Youth, Political Engagement and Voting*, Australian Electoral Commission, p.26.

81   Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs, 2006, *National Assessment Program: Civics and Citizenship Years 6 and 10 Report 2004*, p. 82.

principles and who display traits of character worth emulating'.[82]

3.78 Some submissions saw this 'whole school approach' as a means by which to implement civics and citizenship within the crowded curriculum:

> Follow up work with teachers after the IEA study revealed that 91% of teachers recognized the importance of civics education in preparing young people for citizenship. And young people agreed that good citizenship included the obligation to vote. It is very important, therefore, that schools find space and time in their overcrowded curricula to give civics education the attention it deserves. Schools that model democratic practice through their ethos and structures are most effective in promoting civic knowledge and engagement.[83]

3.79 Other submissions explained that using parliamentary and electoral models to structure school representative councils captures students' imagination and also adds an element of fun to what can be a 'dry' subject area.

3.80 Two different initiatives presented to the Committee are illustrative. The first was the Parliamentary Club, an initiative developed by Mr Don Perna of St Joseph's High School in Albion Park, NSW. Mr Perna described the Club as 'a microscopic political system within the school. It allowed students to form political parties, to present candidates for elections and to form a student parliament that reflected the federal system.'[84]

3.81 The Parliamentary Club has two major roles:

- first, to educate its members and the wider school community about democracy; and

- second, to form a student government.[85]

3.82 The parliament is formed according to a written constitution and has, to date, passed a number of bills. The club also includes political journalists and cartoonists, a security and intelligence organisation and an independent commission against corruption.[86]

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82 Ms Yvonne Goudie, *Submission no. 27*, p. 2.

83 Australian College of Educators, *Submission no. 10*, p. 2; see also Mr Patrick Tacey, *Submission no. 1*, p. 1.

84 Mr Don Perna, *Transcript of Evidence*, 13 October 2006, p. 52.

85 Mr Don Perna, *Transcript of Evidence*, 13 October 2006, p. 53.

86 Mr Don Perna, *Transcript of Evidence*, 13 October 2006, p. 54.

3.83   The second school to illustrate its use of parliamentary and electoral models was Hambledon State School in Cairns. At this school, the AEC's Divisional Returning Officer (DRO) for Leichhardt, Mr Tony Anderson, conducts student leadership elections using polling materials (such as screens, ballot boxes, and pencils) saved from federal elections.

3.84   The school encourages all potential candidates for election to submit an 'application', addressing specific leadership selection criteria, to teachers. Successful applicants may then create a campaign poster, make an electoral speech and begin seeking the support of the student body. In evidence to the Committee, Mr Anderson stressed the importance of running the election 'according to democratic principles that apply to the electoral process of local, state and federal elections'.[87]

3.85   The 'learning as doing' approach was also said to provide students with the skills to become active citizens. In the Northern Territory, the Committee heard of a case where a teacher encouraged her students to participate in a committee inquiry on sport in the Territory. In this process, the students not only learned about parliamentary committees, but also how they can participate and have 'a real voice'.[88]

3.86   To successfully implement a whole school approach, however, it was submitted that school communities not only have to be supportive of the initiative, but they, in turn, may require additional support. As the Australian College of Educators stated:

> It may be that schools will need support to create the ethos and structures required to develop the 'active and informed citizens with an understanding and appreciation of Australia's system of government and civic life', referred to in the Adelaide Declaration.[89]

3.87   The case of conducting school elections is an important example of where schools may require additional support. Electoral commissions, for example, understand school council elections as 'as a means of enabling students to take part in the decision-making process at a level that is both immediately relevant and empowering.'[90]

3.88   In 2005-06, the WAEC coordinated 48 school elections involving 9 816 students. Elections ACT similarly reported that conducting student

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87   Mr Tony Anderson, *Transcript of Evidence*, 24 October 2006, p. 11.

88   Mrs Jane Hearnden, *Transcript of Evidence*, 20 November 2006, pp. 20-21.

89   Australian College of Educators, *Submission no. 10*, p. 2.

90   Western Australian Electoral Commission, *Submission no. 12*, p. 11.

representative council elections was one of its 'most successful electoral education tools', because:

> When we are in a school running an election, we do it usually from go to whoa. We take the nominations, we get the ballot papers ready, we attend the school to help with the voting, we get the young people involved as polling officials and those sorts of things and then we stay with the students and count the election. They actually see the whole process from beginning to end. I suspect, in that case, the cynicism is less.[91]

3.89   Evidence was therefore in favour of electoral commissions contributing more resources (in terms of materials and staff) to the conduct of school elections.[92]

3.90   Currently, however, there are several challenges to implementing this proposition:

- there is limited coordination between the AEC and its state and territory counterparts in terms of access to schools and programmes delivered;[93]

- given the current staffing structure of AEC divisional offices, DROs are not able to cover the majority of schools within their electorates, and would find it particularly difficult to do so if all schools requested school election assistance at the same time;[94]

- the AEC has had some difficulty in gaining access to schools to make presentations or conduct elections, although this could also be due to a range of factors including the timing of presentations offered, AEC letters of invitation being misdirected, and competing offers from other organisations wishing to make presentations to students;[95] and

- AEC DROs are often not equipped with the presentation skills to be able to provide schools with this education service. The AEC Commissioner advised that DROs are currently selected on their ability

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91   Ms Alison Purvis, Elections ACT, *Transcript of Evidence*, 11 August 2006, p. 31. See also, Elections ACT, *Submission no. 83*, p. 2.

92   See, for example, Parliamentary Education and Community Relations Section, NSW Parliament, *Submission no. 16*; Dr Murray Print and Dr Lawrence Saha, *Transcript of Evidence*, 7 August 2006, p. 56.

93   Australian College of Educators, *Submission no. 10*, p. 3.

94   See Mr Patrick Tacey, *Submission no. 1*, p. 1; Australian College of Educators, *Submission no. 10*, p. 3.

95   Mr Ian Campbell (Australian Electoral Commission), *Transcript of Evidence*, 7 August 2006, p. 40 and follow up correspondence to the Committee on 18 August 2006.

to conduct elections, maintain the electoral roll, and run a small staff rather than on education qualifications and skills.[96]

3.91   The Parliamentary Education and Community Relations Section of the NSW Parliament submitted that DROs should be supported through professional development, and that ultimately, they could become responsible for running professional development seminars for teachers. They also submitted that given election periods were particularly busy periods for DROs:

> …consideration should be given to the employment of temporary education staff (e.g. casual teachers) to continue and accelerate electoral education programmes for both adults and students at such times.[97]

3.92   Mr Glenn Marchant also recommended that every school have a Student Leadership Coordinator with the specific responsibility of developing programmes to stimulate students' interest in civics and citizenship activities.[98]

Parents and civics education

3.93   The MCEETYA Report found a strong association between civics achievement and 'talking about politics and social issues with family' among Year 10 students.[99] Moreover:

> Parental occupation had large effects on civics and citizenship literacy. The difference in civics and citizenship achievement between children of unskilled labourers, office, sales and service staff and senior managers and professionals is just less than 80 score points for both Year 6 and Year 10.[100]

3.94   If whole school approaches are to be implemented, it was submitted that parents need to play a role in the development of activities as well as in fostering political awareness at home through family discussions.[101]

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96   Mr Ian Campbell (Australian Electoral Commission), *Transcript of Evidence*, 7 August 2006, p. 39.

97   Parliamentary Education and Community Relations Section, NSW Parliament, *Submission no. 16*, p. 4.

98   Mr Glenn Marchant, *Submission no. 2*, p. 2.

99   Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs, 2006, *National Assessment Program: Civics and Citizenship Years 6 and 10 Report 2004*, p. 84.

100 Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs, 2006, *National Assessment Program: Civics and Citizenship Years 6 and 10 Report 2004*, p. 71.

101 See, for example, Australian Education Union, *Submission no. 48*, p. 5.

Outside school activities and civic knowledge

3.95 The MCEETYA Report also indicated that 'there is an association between participation in civics-related activities outside of school and civics achievement.'[102] The Constitution Education Fund–Australia submitted that it was:

> …especially committed to the concept of civics education in schools being supplemented by education outside of schools. Considering school constraints on time and budget, and the demand of the school syllabus, it is a stark reality that civics and electoral education are not given enough of a focus within ordinary school activities. Organisations like CEF-A exist solely for the purpose of addressing this disparity.[103]

3.96 The Committee received submissions from a wide range of organisations running civics programmes outside school. For those aware of such programmes, there are numerous opportunities for young people to become involved with their communities, such as:

- Rotary clubs have a range of initiatives dedicated to young people, including the Rotary Youth Leadership Awards, Rotary Youth Exchange Programme, INTERACT, Model United Nations Assembly, ROTARACT, Rotary Adventure in Citizenship, and the Rotary Youth Programme of Enrichment;

- Lions clubs have similar programmes, including Youth Exchange, Youth of the Year Quest, Youth Camps, Lions Quest, Leos, Youth In Search,

- United Nations Youth Associations;

- YMCA Youth Parliament;

- OXFAM Australia and its Oxfam International Youth Parliament; and

- World Vision's Global Leadership Convention.

3.97 The Parliamentary Education and Community Relations section of the NSW Parliament emphasised that electoral education did not always have to form a separate unit in outside school programmes:

> Rather than creating new programs, electoral education could be very effectively included in many such existing programs,

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102 Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs, 2006, *National Assessment Program: Civics and Citizenship Years 6 and 10 Report 2004*, p. 83.

103 Constitution Education Fund – Australia, *Submission no. 72*, p. 9.

> strengthening them but also gaining impact from its inclusion in already established valid programs, fostering knowledge about the system, encouraging young people to enrol to vote and empowering them to make decisions and participate in society and their community.[104]

3.98   While certain schools would encourage students' participation in these activities, others may not be as forthcoming. Year 10 students at Melbourne High School for example have been expected to engage with their local community in a number of ways for some time. The students were supportive of this initiative:

> We have compulsory community involvement in year 10. That is where we have Red Cross Day, where all year 10 students jog into the city and do a bit of fund-raising. There is also I think 20 hours of community involvement. That is compulsory in order to receive your report in year 10. But it is definitely something that is not implemented in all schools; I think that is quite specific to our school and only a few others.[105]

3.99   The Hon. Teresa Gambaro, MP presented the Committee with her proposal for an Active Civics Programme which aims to increase students' connectivity with their local communities. The Programme has found success in her electorate, with students of home economics and catering, for example, receiving credit for their studies for work in volunteer community organisations such as Meals on Wheels.[106]

Committee Comment

3.100   The recent MCEETYA report concluded that students cannot be expected to achieve high proficiency standards in civics and citizenship education in the absence of formal, consistent instruction.[107]

3.101   Submissions to this inquiry expressed the view that civics and electoral education, at the school level, requires a more coordinated and coherent approach, not only across states and territories, but between education authorities and parliamentary and electoral education agencies such as electoral commissions and parliamentary education offices.

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104   Parliamentary Education and Community Relations Section, Parliament of NSW, *Submission no. 16*, p. 4.

105   Melbourne High School, *Transcript of Evidence*, 22 August 2006, p. 11.

106   The Hon. Teresa Gambaro, MP, *Transcript of Evidence*, 4 December 2006, pp. 46-50.

107   Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs, 2006, *National Assessment Program: Civics and Citizenship Years 6 and 10 Report 2004*, p. 93.

3.102 The role of teachers was also found to be fundamental in inspiring young students to engage with their democracy. Submissions stressed that teachers need to be supported, not only through professional development, but with a range of source materials to make civics and electoral education interesting and fun.

The tertiary sector

3.103 If civics and electoral education form a fragmented component of the primary and secondary school curricula, then they fare less well at the tertiary level. While very few submissions touched on the adequacy of civics and electoral education in the tertiary sector, those that did were clearly of the view that there is an almost complete absence of such units of study in universities or Technical and Further Education (TAFE) colleges.[108]

Technical and Further Education (TAFE) Colleges

3.104 At the TAFE level, adult English classes, targeted at recently arrived migrants, tend to include a component of civics and electoral education.[109] The Parliamentary Education Office in Canberra submitted that it delivers programmes for students in TAFE colleges, and students in the community education and welfare sectors,[110] as does the WAEC.[111]

3.105 Doctors Print and Saha note in their submission that while their research into TAFE students is limited, they found 'no evidence of electoral education taking place in TAFE institutions'.[112]

Universities

3.106 Civics and electoral education at university level is predominantly taught through political science or government courses. Doctors Print and Saha,

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108 Parliamentary and Community Relations Section, Parliament of NSW, *Submission no. 16*, p. 3; Dr Murray Print and Dr Lawrence Saha, *Submission no. 54*, p. 12; Australian Education Union, *Submission no. 48*, p. 9; Australian Federation of Societies for Studies of Society and Environment, *Submission no. 25*, p. 4.

109 Parliamentary and Community Relations Section, Parliament of NSW, *Submission no. 16*, p. 3.

110 Department of the Senate, *Submission no. 28*, p. 14.

111 Western Australian Electoral Commission, *Submission no. 12*, p. 11.

112 Dr Murray Print and Dr Lawrence Saha, *Submission no. 54*, p. 12.

however, submitted that 'these units are studied by only a small proportion of the total student body'.[113]

3.107   The National Union of Students alerted the Committee to a six-credit point mandatory course on civics, politics and government for all students at the University of New South Wales.[114] Ms Jackson stated that:

> The pass rates, from what I understand, are particularly good. But I think that students do enjoy it because it is something different. They are learning something that is not necessarily a core part of their degree in aeronautical engineering, but it is a core part, I think, of their lives as citizens of this country.[115]

3.108   Parliamentary education offices and departments also offer university lectures. For example, the Department of the House of Representatives submitted that it has conducted a university lecture programme known as *House Calls* for the past few years:

> Under the program, the Speaker and Clerk of the House deliver guest lectures on the realities of working in today's House of Representatives to tertiary students. Each lecture is accompanied by a question and answer session that allows students to explore issues of interest to them regarding the House and the way it operates. The lectures are provided at no cost to the universities. The universities that have participated in the program in recent years include: Australian National University; Bond; Murdoch; New England; New South Wales; Newcastle; and Southern Queensland.[116]

3.109   The (WA) Parliamentary Education Office also offers educational programmes for tertiary groups, including students from the schools of Politics, International Studies, Law, Business Law, Journalism, and Information Studies.[117]

3.110   University students also have the opportunity to participate in student council elections, although only a very small percentage are actively

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113 Dr Murray Print and Dr Lawrence Saha, *Submission no. 54*, p. 12.

114 Ms Rose Jackson, National Union of Students, *Transcript of Evidence*, 21 August 2006, p. 38.

115 Ms Rose Jackson, National Union of Students, *Transcript of Evidence*, 21 August 2006, p. 38.

116 Department of the House of Representatives, *Submission no. 91*, pp. 3-4. The Department's magazine, *About the House*, is also distributed to 34 university libraries; see *Submission no. 108*, p. 2.

117 Ms Jane Gray, *Submission no. 68*, p. 3.

engaged in student politics.[118] Various electoral bodies noted that they were involved in the conduct of these elections.[119]

Committee's conclusions and recommendations

3.111   The Committee accepts that education is the key to greater civic engagement and acknowledges the challenges faced in inspiring students with its importance given current curriculum restrictions discussed in this chapter. However, the Committee encourages further debate among federal, state and territory governments on the implementation of a national curriculum, particularly as it relates to civics and electoral education.

3.112   It is evident that electoral education, particularly for those closest to voting age in Years 11 and 12, suffers the most. The Committee therefore endorses recommendations put to it that a short but focused electoral education unit be developed by electoral commissions to be delivered once in Year 11 and again in Year 12. Given that a number of students leave school at the end of Year 10, this course should also be delivered to students in either Year 9 or 10.

Recommendation 4

3.113   **The Committee recommends that the Australian Electoral Commission, in collaboration with the State Electoral Commissions, develop a short, focused electoral education unit to be delivered to either Year 9 or 10 students, and Year 11 and 12 students, in all secondary schools.**

The Australian Government—through the Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs—should ensure that the delivery of this unit is incorporated into all secondary schools.

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118 Dr Murray Print and Dr Lawrence Saha, *Submission no. 54*, p. 12.
119 See for example, Elections ACT which runs the ANU student union elections.

Recommendation 5

3.114   **The Committee recommends that the Australian Electoral Commission be granted sufficient funds to create several electoral education officer positions in each state and territory with responsibility for the development and presentation of electoral education teaching resources.**

Recommendation 6

3.115   **The Committee recommends that the Australian Electoral Commission provide an assessment of statistics regarding the delivery of civics education, which includes both students and teacher training, for inclusion in its submission to the Committee's regular inquiries into the conduct of federal elections.**

3.116   State and territory education authorities, may also consider funding of teacher secondments to electoral education centres, so that teachers may learn how to use electoral education strategies in their own classrooms.

3.117   The Committee is cognisant of the many lessons to be learned from overseas which are detailed in Appendix C. The United States of America has successfully established centres for civics education which have produced useful 'best practice' manuals. The Committee heeds the recommendations made during this inquiry for the establishment of a national centre for research into teaching civics and electoral education. Such a centre would be well placed to conduct an audit of civics and electoral education programmes currently implemented in Australia.

4

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]

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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]

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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>.*

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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.ncetp.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.

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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	*Schools*	63	11	4	78
(rate $200/student)	*Students*	1598	217	80	1895
% of total students receiving subsidy		**10**	**1**		**11**
2002-03	*Schools*	65	15	2	82
(rate $200/student)	*Students*	1447	344	36	1827
% of total students receiving subsidy		**9**	**2**		**11**
2003-04	*Schools*	76	13	--	89
(rate $230/student)	*Students*	1937	279	--	2216
% of total students receiving subsidy		**11**	**2**	**--**	**13**
2004-05	*Schools*	86	13	2	101
(rate $230/student)	*Students*	2046	259	28	2333
% of total students receiving subsidy		**11**	**1**		**12**
2005-06	*School*	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
State									
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 (n=385) %	*2003 (n=250) %*	*2002 (n=179) %*	*2001 (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.*

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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).

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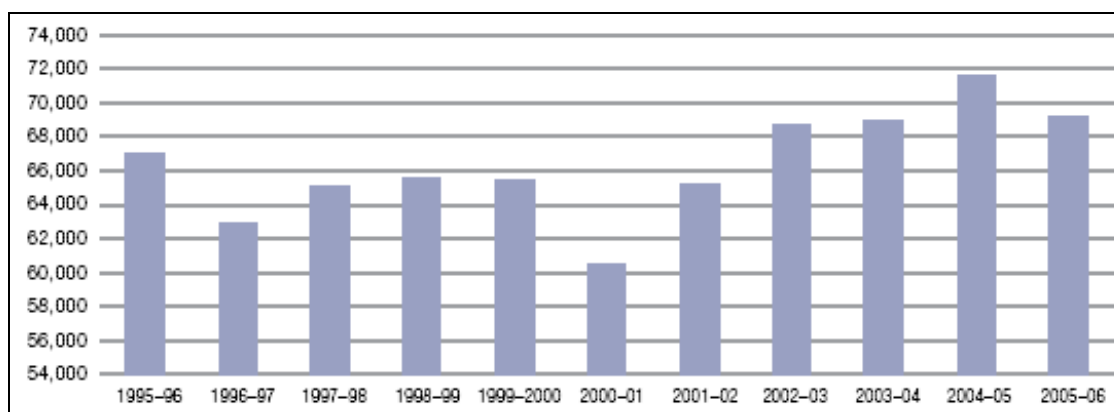
Source: AEC, Annual Report 2005-06, p. 85.

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]

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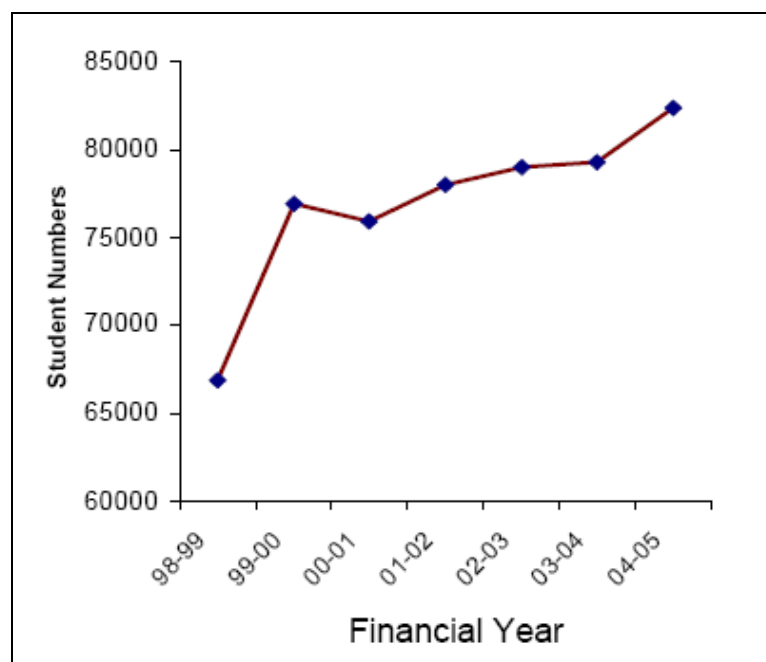
Source: Department of the Senate, Submission no. 28, p. 11.

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:

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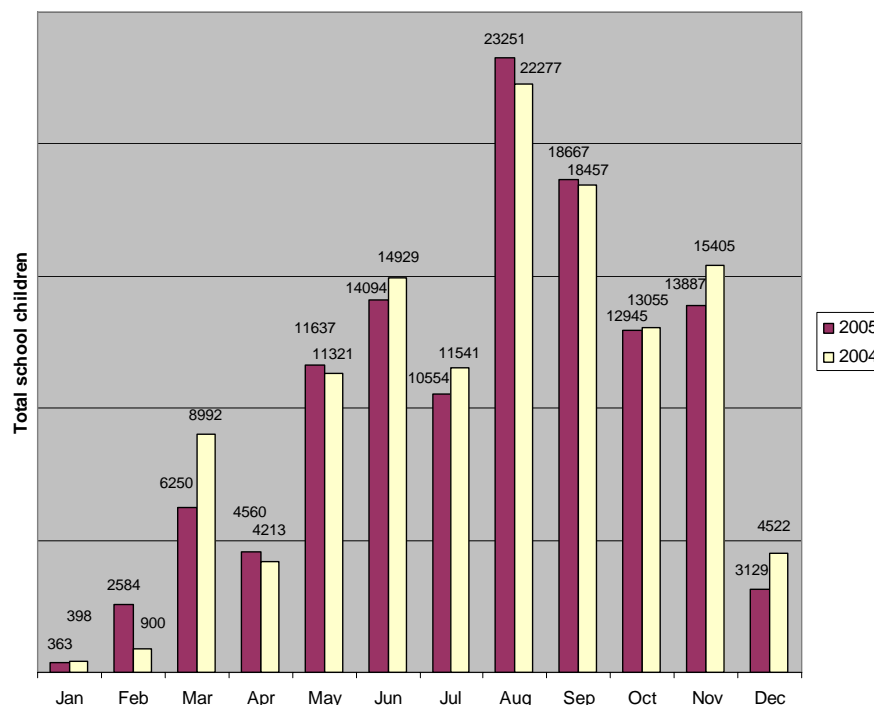
Source: National Capital Educational Tourism Project, Submission no. 51, p. 6.

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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]

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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

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24   Parliament of New South Wales, *Submission no. 16*, p. 4.

■ 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:

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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

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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.**

5

Indigenous Australians

Introduction

5.1   In 1984, legislative reforms extended compulsory enrolment requirements to Aboriginals and Torres Strait Islanders (herewith referred to as Indigenous Australians or Indigenous people), granting them the same enrolment and voting rights enjoyed by the majority of Australians. Yet a higher than average proportion of Indigenous people remain disenfranchised. This chapter examines some of the factors which are inhibiting Indigenous Australians from participating in Australia's democratic processes, and examines the strategies being developed and implemented in an effort to combat the problem.

5.2   It is important to note that this chapter devotes much of its attention to remote dwelling Indigenous people, which overlooks the fact that a majority of the Indigenous population live in major cities or regional areas. However, this is a reflection of the weight of evidence obtained by the Committee which addressed the particular challenges of providing civics and electoral education to Indigenous people in remote communties.

5.3   It also reflects the estimation that Indigenous people living in urban centres are more likely to vote than those in regional or remote areas. For example, in the 2005 Northern Territory Legislative Assembly General Election, the turnout figure for urban Divisions was 85 per cent whilst for

remote Divisions it was 70 per cent.[1] Furthermore, evidence suggests a considerable gap in literacy between remote and urban Indigenous communties. The Centre for Independent Studies stated:

> There is an alarming educational gap facing remote Aboriginal communities. The gap in literacy between remote and urban Aboriginal children is even bigger than the gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal children… Literacy levels among children and adults in remote communities are seriously low. Nationally in 2004, 83% of Aboriginal students and 93% of students overall in Year 3 achieved the literacy benchmark for their year. But Northern Territory data tells us that only 20% of Aboriginal students in remote communities in the Northern Territory achieved the benchmark.[2]

5.4   The chapter is divided into three sections:

- the first section, which concerns Indigenous Australians' civic engagement, looks at factors likely to impact on enrolment levels in Indigenous communities, and examines public awareness activities being undertaken by the Australian Electoral Commission (AEC) and state/territory electoral commissions targeting Indigenous Australians;

- the second section deals with Indigenous Australians' civic knowledge, from students through to school-leavers; and

- the final part of this chapter examines the practical activities associated with the conduct of elections and the appropriateness of these activities in ensuring Indigenous people are equipped to cast a formal vote, particularly during mobile polling in remote communities.

Civic Engagement

Enrolment trends

5.5   As no precise figures are available, the Committee must rely on anecdotal evidence which suggests that Indigenous Australians remain under represented on the electoral roll. The Hon. Shelley Archer MLC submitted

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1   Northern Territory Electoral Commission, *Submission no. 98*, p. 9.

2   Storry, K. (2006), *Tackling literacy in remote Aboriginal communities*, The Centre for Independent Studies, Issues Analysis No. 73, 31 August 2006. Available online: <http://www.cis.org.au/IssueAnalysis/ia73/ia73.pdf >. Accessed 30 January 2007.

that in her home state of Western Australia, an estimated 15 to 20 per cent of Indigenous citizens in remote communities are not enrolled, compared with an estimated five to seven per cent of unenrolled people across the rest of the state.[3]

5.6   At 30 June 2001 the estimated resident Indigenous population of Australia was 458 520 or 2.4 per cent of the total population (see Table 5.1 below). While many Indigenous Australians live in major cities of Australia, a much greater proportion than in the general population live in remote parts of Australia (see Figure 5.1 below).

Table 5.1   Estimated resident Indigenous population of Australia (as at 30 June 2001)

State/Territory	Estimated Indigenous population	Proportion of the total Australian Indigenous population	Proportion of the total state or territory population
	no.	%	%
New South Wales	134 888	29.4	2.1
Victoria	27 846	6.1	0.6
Queensland	125 910	27.5	3.5
South Australia	25 544	5.6	1.7
Western Australia	65 931	14.4	3.5
Tasmania	17 384	3.8	3.7
Northern Territory	56 875	12.4	28.8
Australian Capital Territory	3 909	0.9	1.2
Total	**458,520**	**100.0**	**2.4**

Source: ABS, Population Characteristics, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, 2001.

Figure 5.1   Estimated resident population by remoteness areas (2001)
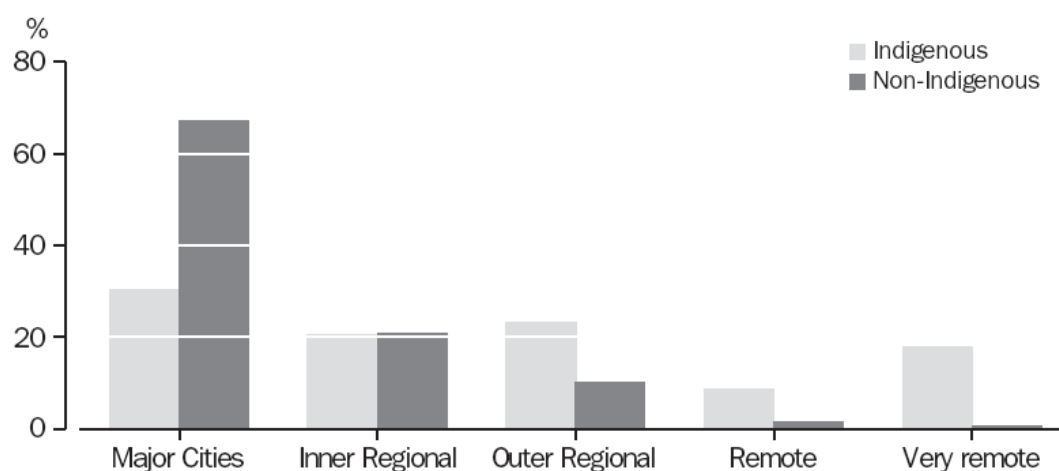
Source: ABS, Population Characteristics, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, 2001.

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3   Hon. Shelley Archer MLC (WA), *Submission no. 24*, p. 4.

5.7   In 2003, the AEC reported on a series of workshops conducted under its service charter in order to gain an insight into its customers' perceptions about enrolment, voting and the services provided by the AEC. As part of this series of workshops, the Commission held workshops in Darwin and Alice Springs which enabled the AEC to gather feedback from Indigenous electors about its services. The AEC reported that one of the main messages from its Indigenous clients was that:

> they want information about how they can participate in enrolment and voting.[4]

Barriers to Indigenous electoral participation

5.8   Factors which impact on enrolment levels and voter participation in Indigenous communities include literacy and numeracy levels, cultural activities, school retention rates, health and social conditions, as well as the general remoteness of Indigenous communities and the transient nature of their inhabitants.

5.9   The Independent Schools Council of Australia (ISCA) noted in its submission that participation by Indigenous Australians in mainstream democratic processes 'is often viewed with skepticism, anxiety and distrust'.[5]

5.10   In 2002, the then State Secretary of the Tasmanian Aboriginal Centre, Ms Trudy Maluga stated that 'many Aborigines do not consider themselves part of the Australian nation and so have deliberately decided not to vote in white elections.'[6]

5.11   The challenge of engaging Indigenous people in the election process is further exacerbated by the act of voting being perceived as 'irrelevant' to their everyday lives. Mr Brian Moore, an experienced remote polling officer, stated that:

> 'Relevance' is a word which really strikes home when you are dealing with Indigenous communities.[7]

5.12   ISCA concurred that Indigenous people are often not active participants in democratic processes 'unless their own local council or lands governance body is active and promotes that broader participation.'[8]

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4   Australian Electoral Commission, 2003, Annual Report 2002-03, p. 104.
5   Independent Schools Council of Australia, *Submission no. 89*, p. 6.
6   Cited in Sanders, W., 2003, *The Tasmanian electoral roll trial in the 2002 ATSIC Elections*, ANU Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research, Discussion Paper No. 245/2003, p. 9.
7   Mr Brian Moore, *Transcript of Evidence*, 21 September 2006, p. 14.

5.13   WA Electoral Commissioner, Mr Warwick Gately, explained the ongoing difficulties the WA Electoral Commission faced in keeping Indigenous citizens in remote communities involved in electoral processes:

> …from the experience that we see in those remote communities, I imagine that because of the transient nature and because of the lack of consideration as to how government and politics affect them they essentially opt out of the electoral process. Notwithstanding our programs to get them enrolled and to keep them active in the process, they just seem to fall through the net.[9]

The impact of cultural activities

5.14   Cultural activities also affect participation rates of Indigenous Australians. The itinerant nature of some in the Indigenous population means that many community members are regularly moving to other settlements, sometimes for months at a time, and often crossing state borders. According to the Hon. Shelley Archer, absences from polling places may be caused by:

> …anything from family funerals in other locations, to being in sorry camp, to hunting and fishing.[10]

5.15   Mourning or 'sorry' camp occurs when a family member has passed away and usually extended family groups will congregate and withdraw from access. Where a prominent elder of a community has died, the entire population of an Indigenous community may form a sorry camp. The unpredictability attached to the timing of sorry camp can add to the logistical difficulties encountered by electoral staff. WA Electoral Commissioner, Mr Warwick Gately, stated:

> We are trying to give some formality to a remote and rural strategy where we get into the communities as best we can. That is difficult in itself. Quite often we have turned up to find that there is a sorry camp for different reasons and you cannot get access to talk to them.[11]

5.16   It was acknowledged during the inquiry that the importance attached to some of the cultural activities of Indigenous people meant that there was

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8   Independent Schools Council of Australia, *Submission no. 89*, p. 6.

9   Mr Warwick Gately (WA Electoral Commissioner), *Transcript of Evidence*, 21 September 2006, pp. 4-5.

10   The Hon. Shelley Archer MLC (WA), *Submission no. 24*, p. 3.

11   Mr Warwick Gately (Western Australian Electoral Commissioner), *Transcript of Evidence*, 21 September 2006, p. 5.

no simple solution to addressing some of these issues. The Hon. Shelley Archer noted:

> It is unlikely, for example, that voting would be given precedence over sorry business.[12]

5.17   Mrs Archer argued that electoral education of Indigenous people was necessary. She noted that many cultural activities would not preclude Indigenous people from submitting an absent or postal vote, if they were aware that such options existed and what those processes involved.[13] The following section examines electoral education programmes and strategies undertaken by the AEC.

AEC service delivery to Indigenous Australians

Public awareness programmes

5.18   In the lead up to federal elections, the AEC conducts public awareness for Indigenous communities through the Community Electoral Information Officer (CEIO) programme. The AEC's submission noted the following activities which were conducted prior to the 2004 election:

- 22 CEIOs visited over 600 Indigenous communities and organisations, encouraging enrolment and conducting public awareness sessions.
- An 8 minute-long video on enrolling and voting — *Vote, It's Important*—together with a brochure reinforcing the messages contained in the video, was distributed to communities and organisations via CEIOs and AEC State and Divisional Office contacts.
- A variety of printed materials, also with the *Vote, It's Important* theme, were distributed to Indigenous communities and organisations via CEIOs and AEC State and Divisional Office contacts. Posters were also inserted in 4 editions of the *Koori Mail*.
- Six 'infomercials' on enrolling and voting were included in the *Beyond their Limits* television program on Imparja Television (broadcast from Alice Springs, NT).[14]

5.19   The AEC also attends indigenous festivals and sporting carnivals to conduct electoral education. For example, AEC staff deliver education sessions at the Croc Festival, an annual civics related event held in a

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12   The Hon. Shelley Archer MLA (WA), *Submission no. 24*, p. 4.
13   The Hon. Shelley Archer MLA (WA), *Submission no. 24*, p. 4.
14   Australian Electoral Commission, *Submission no. 73*, p. 14.

number of locations around Australia that builds partnerships whilst celebrating youth and culture in rural and remote communities.[15]

5.20 The Local Government Association of the Northern Territory acknowledged certain difficulties in conducting public awareness in Indigenous communities. The Association stated:

> …raising public awareness on any subject matter (in remote areas) can only be done effectively with generous allocations of time and resources. Raising public awareness in indigenous communities presents quite a challenge but experience has shown that the best results are achieved where:
>
> ■ Local people are enlisted to assist;
> ■ A local champion or sponsor for the cause exists;
> ■ Sessions are conducted face-to-face;
> ■ Information is delivered when elections are about to be conducted or have recently occurred;
> ■ Hands-on activities are included for participants;
> ■ Written material or oral presentations are made both in English and local dialect and are culturally sensitive;
> ■ Certain sections of the community are specifically targeted (e.g. youth, non voters, etc.) and those particular sessions are customised to suit;
> ■ Educational support material contains a high degree of local content (e.g. local electoral event, local personalities); and
> ■ Graphics and colour is used widely in published material.[16]

5.21 The importance of the formulation and presentation of electoral education programmes targeting Indigenous people to be culturally sensitive was reinforced throughout the Committee's inquiry. The Hon. Shelley Archer suggested that prior to the development of an electoral education programme, there needs to be a detailed and culturally sensitive examination of the issues impacting on Indigenous communities in conjunction with leaders of those communities. While she acknowledged that the issues are complex, Mrs Archer stated that there is an obligation to develop special programmes to meet the needs of Indigenous Australians, adding that:

> Failure to do so disenfranchises a group which is already the most disadvantaged in Australian society.[17]

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15 Australian Electoral Commission, *Submission no. 72*, p. 15.
16 Northern Territory Electoral Commission, *Submission no. 98*, p. 10.
17 The Hon. Shelley Archer MLC (WA), *Submission no. 24*, p. 7.

5.22   While acknowledging the significant efforts being undertaken by the AEC and the WA Electoral Commission, Mrs Archer was critical that education programmes appear to be focused on enrolment and, as a result, there is 'little by way of systematic education about more general electoral matters'.[18] Mrs Archer stated:

> …the turnout figures for the remote Aboriginal communities are so poor that the efficacy of these various activities has to be questioned.[19]

5.23   Taking into consideration resource availability and logistical challenges, the majority of evidence relating to Indigenous electors suggested that the most effective time in which to conduct electoral education in remote communities was in the lead up to an election. Mr Brian Moore suggested combining the delivery of electoral education with the conducting of roll checks.[20]

5.24   Mrs Archer questioned whether the delivery of electoral education immediately prior to elections was significant enough to achieve real change. She contended that further research, as well as a significant injection of funds, is required to deliver an ongoing education programme. Mrs Archer stated:

> …what is required is a continuing education and training program rather than occasional visits and a flurry of activity prior to elections. Such a program needs to be directed towards ensuring that indigenous electors – particularly those in the remote communities – are made aware of and understand electoral processes generally, and of the options (such as absent, provisional and postal voting) available for other than attendance at a polling place within the electorate in which the elector is registered.[21]

5.25   This view was supported by NT Electoral Commissioner, Mr Bill Shepheard, who stated:

> …one thing that comes through pretty loud and clear is that you have to have an ongoing program. And you have to build networks within communities. Those communities operate more on what you might call a congenial basis than a transactional basis.

18   The Hon. Shelley Archer MLC (WA), *Submission no. 24, p. 4.*
19   The Hon. Shelley Archer MLC (WA), *Submission no. 24*, p. 4.
20   Mr Brian Moore, *Transcript of Evidence*, 21 September 2006, p. 15.
21   The Hon. Shelley Archer MLC (WA), *Submission no. 24*, p. 4.

> So you need to build relationships fairly strongly in those communities.[22]

Taking a more comprehensive approach

5.26   The AEC acknowledged that it has been investigating ways to improve its service to Indigenous Australians. The Commission is developing a North and Central Australia Regional Electoral Strategy, which takes into account areas of Queensland, Western Australia, the Anangu Pitjantjatjara lands in South Australia and the western part of New South Wales. The strategy will look at public awareness programmes and enrolment activities with the aim of enhancing electoral knowledge and improving the accuracy of the electoral roll in remote areas.[23] The AEC emphasised that the strategy aimed to target all people in rural and remote areas covered by the strategy, not just Indigenous Australians.[24]

5.27   The AEC has moved towards the delivery of an integrated service for conducting fieldwork in remote areas, where education and information programmes are now being combined with roll checks and other enrolment activities in an effort to target these audiences more effectively.[25]

5.28   For example, a two-year project has commenced in north-east Arnhem Land in the Northern Territory where AEC staff in the Northern Territory are working with traditional elders, community representatives, community councils and resource centres in north-east Arnhem Land. The project links polling, education, and enrolment strategies into an integrated election plan with significant local community involvement and ownership in an effort to increase electoral participation and reduce informal voting.[26]

5.29   The Australian Electoral Commissioner acknowledged that in developing electoral strategies for Indigenous people, sometimes the question of those who reside in urban areas can be 'lost a little bit'.[27] The AEC has therefore begun preliminary work focusing on Indigenous people in urban areas

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22   Mr William Shepheard (Northern Territory Electoral Commission), *Transcript of Evidence*, 20 November 2006, p. 3.

23   Australian Electoral Commission, *Submission no. 72*, p. 14.

24   Mr Ian Campbell (Australian Electoral Commission), *Transcript of Evidence*, 4 December 2006, p. 4.

25   Australian Electoral Commission, *Submission no. 72*, p. 14.

26   Australian Electoral Commission, *Annual Report 2004-05*, p. 88.

27   Mr Ian Campbell (Australian Electoral Commission), *Transcript of Evidence*, 4 December 2006, pp. 4-5.

which is still in its embryonic stage.[28] With respect to the delivery of electoral education to Indigenous Australians in urban areas of the Northern Territory, the AEC has arrangements in place with Indigenous representative organisations. The Commission stated:

> The delivery of electoral education to urban indigenous people is co-ordinated within these partnerships, using interpreters from these organisations to assist with delivery of the sessions.[29]

Committee comment

5.30   As is the case with all Australians citizens, Indigenous people are obliged to enrol to vote. While there are no precise figures, the Committee is concerned that many Indigenous Australians may not be enrolled. The Committee also notes that non-voting in federal, state or local elections are considered a legitimate form of 'protest' in certain remote communities.

5.31   The Committee appreciates the collaborative efforts being made by federal, state and territory electoral commissions in reaching this target group, and welcomes initiatives which seek to maximise the effectiveness of electoral officers' visits to remote communities. The Committee encourages these commissions to continue with their 'comprehensive' approach in these communities.

5.32   It is clear that simple, straightforward messages, with an emphasis on visual material, appear to be the most effective when targeting Indigenous communities. The Committee further encourages electoral commissions to use effective advertising campaigns involving role models such as sportspeople, which carry a simple, yet effective message. The Committee also commends the collaboration evident between the AEC and its Western Australian counterpart in producing the Story Book for electoral awareness purposes and suggests that these story books continue to be produced.

5.33   The Committee cautions all electoral commissions to work collaboratively with each other and with Indigenous leaders when timing their visits to remote communities. It should not be the case that field officers arrive in a community only to find that its members are on a 'sorry' camp. Better awareness of the community's activities and an understanding of the community's cultural practices may be required by electoral commission

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28   Mr Ian Campbell (Australian Electoral Commission), *Transcript of Evidence*, 4 December 2006, pp. 4-5.

29   Australian Electoral Commission, *Submission no. 72*, p 15.

staff. The AEC may need to develop a more appropriate training manual for its staff in relation to dealing with Indigenous communities.

Civic Knowledge

Challenges for the provision of civics education to school aged children

5.34   Submission argued that learning programmes in civics education need to be developed with special consideration for Indigenous students, having regard for the low literacy and numeracy levels in Indigenous communities.

5.35   The Constitution Education Fund-Australia (CEF-A) further argued that civics and electoral education should be taught:

> in a manner which reflects the nature of the indigenous community, while using a model they can educationally support and resource.[30]

5.36   CEF-A explained how it had achieved this in 2005 when it brought Indigenous students from Yirrara College in Kintore—a remote Indigenous community in Central Australia—to Canberra as part of its Democracy in Schools Programme. CEF-A stated:

> The education was provided with great care as to literacy and linguistic needs. Students welcomed the opportunity to present their work in the format of works of art instead of in a more formal written piece of work or oral presentation. This is reflective of the need to teach civics in a range of different media for the benefit of diverse school populations.[31]

5.37   The Committee travelled to a remote community to speak informally with teachers from a school with predominantly Indigenous students. During these discussions, the Committee heard that much of the content of the *Discovering Democracy* programme is unsuitable for Indigenous school children given their low literacy levels; English often being a second language. Rather, teachers find themselves having to develop modified programmes with an emphasis on visuals.

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30   Constitution Education Fund-Australia, *Submission no. 73*, p. 10.
31   Constitution Education Fund-Australia, *Submission no. 73*, p. 10.

5.38   The Australian Education Union submitted that:

> It would be valuable to investigate developing innovative
> programs which investigate ways of building upon the cultural
> experiences of young Indigenous people in ways which facilitate
> their understanding of the legal electoral processes whilst also
> respecting and facilitating their cultural development within their
> own communities.

> It should also be remembered that it is valuable for all students,
> whether Indigenous or not, to study other cultures, especially
> those of our Indigenous people, as part of a wider understanding
> of different ways decisions can be made and democracy operate.[32]

5.39   It was submitted that a key factor in providing civics education in remote
         communities is the training of teachers working in classrooms with
         Indigenous students. The Committee was advised that often teachers are
         posted to remote locations with no specific training in teaching Indigenous
         people.

5.40   A 1998 Senate Committee report into the status of the teaching profession
         was critical of the fact that teacher training courses do little to prepare
         people specifically for teaching in smaller schools in remote areas, or to
         familiarise students with the particular issues facing Indigenous
         students.[33]

5.41   Young teachers, particularly, are more prevalent in schools in remote
         areas, and even where they have come from university, they are often ill-
         equipped to teach civics and electoral education, lacking knowledge about
         the Australian parliamentary system and preferential voting. The AEC
         acknowledged that when it conducts school visits in remote areas, often it
         is the teachers who derive the most benefit.

5.42   The Committee also heard that much of the resource material available to
         teachers was not pitched at a suitable level for Indigenous students:

> Those schools in more isolated settings have particular difficulties
> in implementing the [*Discovering Democracy*] program, although
> there are some outstanding examples of how particular teachers in
> isolated areas have been able to achieve successful outcomes from
> the program on the strength of their own initiative. Such problems

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32   Australian Education Union, *Submission no. 48*, p. 11.

33   Senate Employment, Workplace Relations, Small Business and Education Committee, 1998,
     A Class Act – Inquiry into the status of the teaching profession, Parliament of Australia. Available
     online: <http://www.aph.gov.au/Senate/committee/eet_ctte/completed_inquiries/1996-
     99/teachers/report/>. Accessed 30 January 2007.

have been exacerbated for some teachers and students by the absence of teaching and learning materials reflecting relevance to local groups such as indigenous populations.[34]

5.43   The Association of Independent Schools of South Australia, cited comments made by a principal of one of its member schools with an Indigenous population of 72 per cent. The principal had indicated that:

> …he did not see any major difference in the engagement in the curriculum or in the projects that the school has in connecting to the community between the Indigenous students in the school and other students. Secondly, contrary to some other advice that we have received from other schools, he indicated that often the Indigenous students were more passionate and had a better understanding of some of the major social issues, such as social justice issues, and were engaging more in debates on those issues than other students.[35]

5.44   During informal discussions with teachers from a remote Indigenous school, the Committee was told that reading levels are not necessarily a good indication of academic ability. Teachers from the school explained that reading levels purely measure students' English reading, and does not reflect their ability to engage in discussions on complex issues, and offer their own opinions.

Targeting school-leavers

5.45   Indigenous teenagers experience social and cultural changes which impact on their likelihood to continue their education up to secondary school leaving age. The apparent retention rates of Indigenous students from the commencement of their secondary schooling through to Years 10, 11 and 12 remains at levels which are significantly below those of non-Indigenous students (see Figure 5.2, p.98). These statistics reinforce the need for a mechanism to engage school-leavers who miss out on civics education taught in the classroom.

5.46   During its visit to a remote community, the Committee noted that there was a particular emphasis on youth services, and that this was a reflection of the lower life expectancy rates in Indigenous communities which yield a relatively young demographic compared to the rest of Australia.

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34   Department of Education, Science and Training, *Submission no. 100*, Attachment B, p. 9.
35   Mr Gary Le Duff (Association of Independent Schools of South Australia), *Transcript of Evidence*, 22 September 2006, p. 3.

5.47   In informal discussions with the Committee, the AEC identified that young people in Indigenous communities tend to rely heavily on mentors or community leaders. It is therefore important that mentors and community leaders are identified and targeted in both promoting civic engagement and in assisting with electoral awareness programmes. The AEC acknowledged that this is one of the challenges it faces — to build networks with Indigenous communities to the extent that it is able to identify these leaders, so that they can assist in delivering electoral education.

Figure 5.2   Apparent retention rate of full-time students from Year 7/8 to Year 12
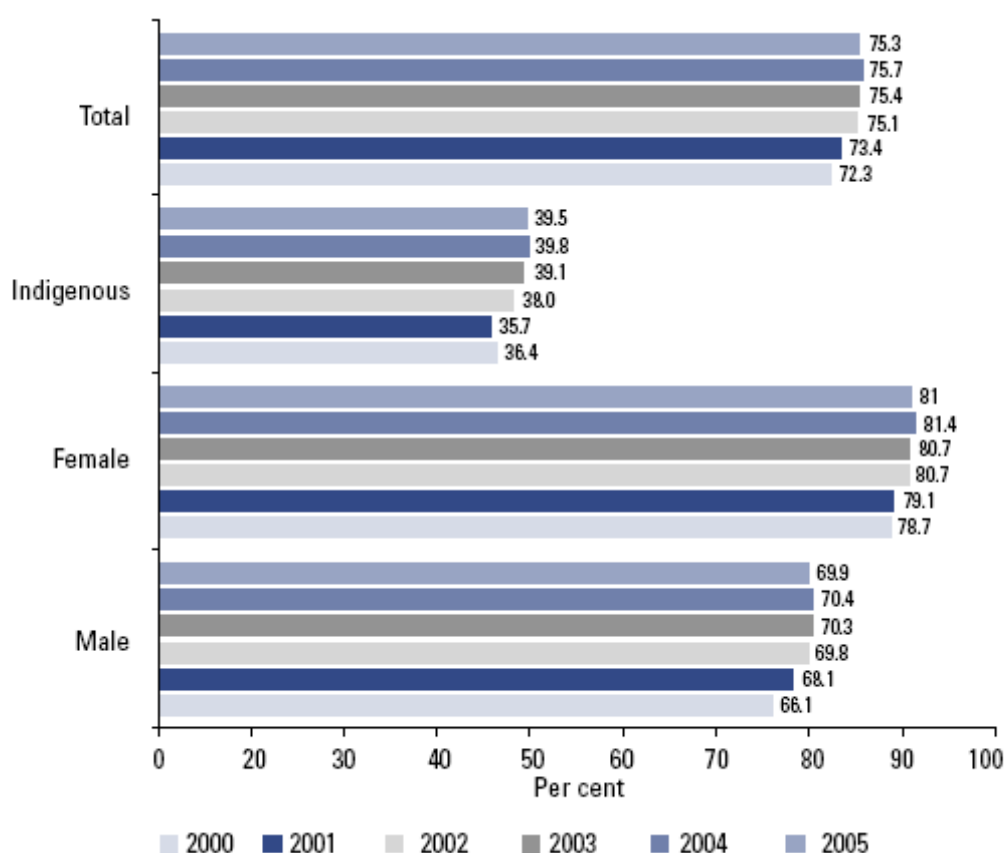
Source: Department of Education, Science and Training, Annual Report 2005-06, p. 31.

The 'tyranny of distance'

> The tyranny of distance affects so much of what we are able to do — for example, when we look at very remote communities that are inaccessible by car in the wet season and may have interrupted

> or irregular flights. So the cost of delivering any educational services in remote areas is enormous.[36]

5.48   Access to broadband and telecommunications services in regional areas of Australia is a key factor in the delivery of electoral education. A 2003-04 survey of 274 Indigenous communties in Western Australia revealed that only 14 per cent had access to the Internet, with 18 per cent having access to computers,[37] although evidence to this inquiry suggested that the situation was improving.

5.49   For example, some of Western Australia's most remote communties are soon to benefit from access to broadband and telecommunication facilities. Broadband will be extended to the remote desert communities of Warburton, Jameson, Blackstone, Wingellina, Wanarn and Warakurna within the Ngaanyatjarraku Shire which has invested heavily in information-technology infrastructure.[38] Work is also underway to provide broadband to regional towns and communities in the Kimberley region under a $1.8 million joint initiative between the WA State Government and the Commonwealth Government.[39]

5.50   During informal discussions with the Committee, the AEC acknowledged that the provision of resources for teachers in remote areas was an area where there was room for improvement. The AEC noted that while it has generally sent out resource kits to a mail address on the assumption that technology had not reached remote areas, it now recognised that an increasing number of schools in remote communities do have access to broadband. One community visited by the Committee during this inquiry had invested significantly in fibre optic cables and broadband.

5.51   While investment in broadband in remote communities has begun, its impact on the delivery of civics and electoral education has not yet been great. During a roundtable hearing in Darwin, the Committee asked a group of civics and electoral educators from the Northern Territory

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36   Ms Debra Liddiard-Taruminggi (NT Department of Employment, Education and Training), *Transcript of Evidence*, 20 November 2006, p. 25.

37   Department of Industry and Resources (WA), Response to the Department of Communications, Information Technology and the Arts Discussion Paper on Backing Australia's Ability, May 2006, p. 2. Available online: <http://www.dcita.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/40914/Western_Australian_Department_ of_Industry_and_Resources.pdf>. Accessed 30 January 2007.

38   F. Logan MLA (WA), Minister for Energy; Resources; Industry and Enterprise, *Broadband access for desert communities*, media release, 22 June 2006.

39   Office of Science, Technology and Innovation (WA), *State of the Future*, Edition 1, September 2006. Available online: <http://www.doir.wa.gov.au/documents/businessandindustry/State_of_the_Future_Sep_06 .pdf>. Accessed 30 January 2007.

whether the distance barrier had been broken down by the internet and the various facilities available through the internet. The consensus was that it had not. Ms Debra Liddiard-Taruminggi from the NT Department of Employment, Education and Training, stated:

> We have a lot of bandwidth delivery issues—those basic technological bugs that stop things happening the way they would happen in an ideal situation.[40]

5.52   In addition to accessibility to internet facilities, the South Australian Electoral Office suggested that the provision of interactive programmes on CD and the utilisation of community radio in remote Indigenous communities should be investigated.[41]

5.53   As discussed in Chapter Four, many young people in remote communities in Australia do not have the opportunity to benefit from the positive educational experiences in civics and electoral matters that a visit to Canberra offers. Nor do many have access to state parliaments or electoral education centres. It was therefore submitted that alternative methods of disseminating information to remote communities should be pursued.

5.54   The NT Electoral Commission stated that it would support a move to roll out electoral education centre facilities in all capital cities. In the case of the Northern Territory, the NT Electoral Commission added that it would contemplate providing an additional modest facility in Alice Springs. The Commission stated:

> Provision of facilities in both Darwin and Alice Springs would allow officers stationed there to co-ordinate and deliver sessions to remote electors who periodically visit those regional centres reasonably in the normal course of business or as part of school excursions (e.g. when the Legislative Assembly sits in Alice Springs).[42]

5.55   The Local Government Association of the Northern Territory (LGANT) also supported the provision of electoral education facilities in the Northern Territory. In its submission, LGANT stated:

> The Association considers that the Commonwealth Government must address the manner and frequency of electoral education (and for that matter civics education as well) for adult indigenous

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40   Ms Debra Liddiard-Taruminggi (NT Department of Employment, Education and Training), *Transcript of Evidence*, 20 November 2006, p. 25.

41   South Australian Electoral Office, *Submission no. 84*, p. 6.

42   Northern Territory Electoral Commission, *Submission no. 98*, p. 12.

Australians. The Association would like to see not only education taking place, and more often, but also to see resources such as an 'Electoral Education Centre' established in the Northern Territory to help accelerate learning outcomes. Considering the large number of indigenous persons living in the Northern Territory and their need for electoral education the Association believes such a facility would be a great boost.[43]

Committee conclusions and recommendations

5.56   Education is clearly important in increasing levels of civic knowledge and thereby, civic participation, amongst young Indigenous Australians. The Committee is therefore concerned that school retention rates are significantly lower for this group than amongst non-Indigenous Australians.

5.57   The Committee is of the view that Indigenous communities should actively encourage younger members to attend school and remain at school for longer periods of time. The Committee believes that increasing school retention rates would improve literacy and numeracy levels, and in that process, improve levels of civic knowledge and engagement. Indigenous community leaders, in tandem with local government leaders, should share responsibility in working to this end.

5.58   Teachers also need appropriate training in teaching Indigenous Australians. On the basis of Indigenous students' current literacy and numeracy levels, it is obvious that primary school trained teachers are more appropriately sent to remote communities. However, it is important that even primary school teachers receive specialised training in working with Indigenous students.

Recommendation 9

5.59   **The Committee recommends that State and Territory education authorities develop induction strategies incorporating the delivery of civics education for pre-service teachers bound for regional and remote communities.**

43   Local Government Association of the Northern Territory, *Submission no. 94*, p. 6.

5.60   The Committee acknowledges the improving reach of information and
        communication technologies in rural and remote Australia. The
        Committee believes there is scope for capitalising on the opportunities
        available due to the increasing distribution of broadband Internet into
        remote Indigenous communities. The Committee believes that the creation
        of a website which specifically targets Indigenous students, using basic
        English with an emphasis on visuals rather than text, would provide an
        effective tool for learning about civics.

Recommendation 10

5.61   **The Committee recommends that a modified civics education website
        be created for an Indigenous audience.**

        **The website should be established through collaboration between the
        Office of Indigenous Affairs and the Department of Education, Science
        and Training, and should be developed in consultation with local
        governments in remote and regional areas.**

Participating in democracy

Not every vote counts: Informal voting by Indigenous electors

5.62   High rates of informal voting, where unintentional, are usually influenced
        by low literacy/numeracy levels or a lack of understanding of voting
        processes. This chapter has canvassed the public awareness initiatives
        being conducted by the AEC for Indigenous Australians. Evidence to the
        inquiry, particularly from the NT Electoral Commission, noted that
        informal voting levels in remote areas highlighted the electoral public
        awareness needs of these areas. At the 2005 Legislative Assembly General
        Election in the Northern Territory, the informal voting rate was
        3.2 per cent for urban Divisions and 4.9 per cent for remote Divisions. The
        NT Electoral Commission stated:

> This high informal rate is even more disturbing, bearing in mind
> that it is greatly mitigated by a particularly high level of assisted
> voting (for which no reliable figures have been compiled in recent
> times) and clear evidence from informal vote surveys indicated

> that electors in remote areas are not wilfully casting informal votes
> at anywhere near the rate of their metropolitan counterparts.[44]

5.63   In the 2006 Legislative Assembly By-Election for the Division of Stuart in
        the Northern Territory, the informal vote rate was 13.6 per cent. In
        response to these statistics, NT Electoral Commissioner, Mr Bill
        Shepheard, stated:

> What we can say, although we still have to put an internal report
> together, is that one-third of the electors in Stuart either failed to
> fill in their ballot paper formally or required assistance to fill in
> their ballot paper. I think that is an important statistic to know in
> terms of the service delivery and the philosophical argument
> about what our obligations are.[45]

Qualifications and experience of polling staff

5.64   Questions were raised during the inquiry as to who should be responsible
        for conducting remote polling, given that the AEC is adopting an
        integrated approach when conducting fieldwork in remote areas
        (combining electoral education with roll checks and other electoral
        activities). Mr Brian Moore argued that the employment of temporary
        electoral officials should cease if the intention is to conduct electoral
        education at the same time, and that trained Electoral Commission staff
        should be used in their place.[46] Mr Moore stated:

> …there is a big difference between being employed for a day and
> receiving some money and going out there with a genuine interest
> to want to help.[47]

Use of interpreters

5.65   The Committee notes that the three field officers in the AEC's Northern
        Territory office are assisted by Indigenous interpreters when delivering
        electoral awareness programmes.[48]

5.66   At the 2005 Northern Territory Legislative Assembly Election, the NT
        Government provided Indigenous interpreters at polling places.

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44   Northern Territory Electoral Commission, *Submission no. 98*, p. 9.
45   Mr William Shepheard (Northern Territory Electoral Commission), *Transcript of Evidence*,
      20 November 2006, p. 4.
46   Mr Brian Moore, *Submission no. 6*, p. 3.
47   Mr Brian Moore, *Transcript of Evidence*, 21 September 2006, p. 19.
48   Australian Electoral Commission, *Submission no. 72*, p. 13.

According to the Hon. Shelley Archer, this is something which is not done for state or federal elections in Western Australia, even in communities where remote polling is conducted. Mrs Archer suggested that the use of interpreters at remote polling booths may be one way to alleviate the confusion experienced by Indigenous voters in remote communities. She briefly described the process which occurred during the NT election:

> In Alice Springs, some of the elders came in—and English is their third or fourth language—and the electoral manager of the polling booth spoke to the leader of that community and then that leader interpreted. The elders were given copies of the voting slips from all of the parties who were at that polling booth. They then went off to fill in their form. If they called for assistance, the manager of that polling booth and the interpreter provided them with assistance. It will be a process of ironing out any problems that come up. But it is a very good way. As I have said, they think that if you do not live in Kununurra you cannot vote. That is because they do not understand English. If they had an interpreter there, they might be told, 'If you live in Kalumburu, then you have the right to vote here.' It will cover those sorts of issues.[49]

'Are you enrolled in this area?' Asking the right questions

5.67   Anecdotal feedback from scrutineers at polling booths suggests that Indigenous electors are failing to comprehend questions put to them by electoral officials. The Hon. Shelley Archer, whose state electorate includes 60 remote polling places, stated:

> In my travels throughout my electorate, there has been an absolute wealth of anecdotal evidence as well as hard data to indicate that the turnout rates are affected by a number of administrative and systemic factors during election time.

5.68   Mrs Archer elaborated on the confusion that can arise if the right questions are not asked by polling officials:

> The question "*Have you already voted here or elsewhere at this election*" is sometimes misinterpreted as relating to previous elections—provoking a 'yes' response. "*Do you live in the electoral district of Xxxxx?*" simply causes confusion to itinerant people and may provoke a 'no' response if the elector is temporarily away from home…The sensitivity of poll officials or the intervention of alert scrutineers to have the questions reworded is all that

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49   Hon. Shelley Archer MLC (WA), *Transcript of Evidence*, 21 September 2006, p. 26.

> prevents the elector from being disenfranchised in such circumstances.[50]

5.69 Similarly, the failure to differentiate between state and federal government elections and a lack of awareness of electoral boundaries can cause confusion and disenchantment amongst Indigenous people when they turn up at a polling booth and are not permitted to vote. The WA Electoral Commission noted feedback from an assistant remote polling place manager, who stated:

> I had some people try to vote who were from across the border, and they felt there was something wrong with them when they were told they could not vote.[51]

Challenges with remote mobile polling

5.70 Many remote townships and communities across Australia are visited by mobile polling teams. Remote mobile teams travel along set routes, usually comprising a number of days, to collect votes. All votes collected along a particular route are considered to have been cast at a single poll. Remote mobile polling may take place up to 12 days before polling day.

5.71 At the last federal election there were 43 remote polling booths compared to 7 729 ordinary booths. Remote mobile polling booths were used in only five electorates and two electorates accounted for 80 per cent of the mobile booths (Lingiari, NT had 20; Kalgoorlie, WA had 14).[52]

5.72 The Committee was advised that there is little, if any, awareness amongst electors in remote communities of the alternatives to casting a vote at a polling place on Election Day. It was suggested that the 'itinerant voter' enrolment could be promoted as a solution to the needs of Indigenous electors with no fixed address.[53]

5.73 While there has been an increase in postal voting, the Committee understands that for some remote communities, complications concerning literacy and numeracy issues as well as the requirement to provide an address for the lawful delivery of a postal vote, means that a reliance on mobile polling services is likely to remain for some time. In addition, the AEC noted that that part of its North and Central Australia Regional

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50 Hon. Shelley Archer MLC (WA), *Submission no. 24*, p. 4.

51 Western Australian Electoral Commission, *Submission no. 12*, p. 10.

52 Australian Electoral Commission submission to JSCEM inquiry into the conduct of the 2004 Federal Election and matters related thereto.

53 Hon. Shelley Archer MLC (WA), *Submission no. 24*, p. 8.

Electoral Strategy 'may include the expansion of remote mobile polling services'.[54]

Committee's conclusions and recommendations

5.74   Given the frequency of assisted voting, the high rates of informal voting found in remote Indigenous communities are alarming. The Committee notes that on face value, the use of interpreters appears to offer an effective solution to a difficult problem. However, the Committee also acknowledges that there is potential for further difficulties to arise under this scenario, given that officials would be unable to monitor whether the interpreter is fulfilling their obligations appropriately. The Committee believes instead that funds would be better allocated to the recruitment and training of appropriate, polling officials, aware of some of the challenges faced in remote mobile polling booths.

5.75   While the AEC's website states that persons expressing interest in remote mobile polling 'must be able to demonstrate cross cultural awareness and sensitivity', evidence suggested that there was scope for polling officers to be better equipped for working with Indigenous voters.

Recommendation 11

5.76   **The Committee recommends that the Australian Electoral Commission provide adequate training and guidelines for polling officials in communicating with Indigenous Australians.**

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54   Australian Electoral Commission, *Submission no. 72,* p. 14.

6

Migrant citizens

> Despite the work already undertaken by the Australian Electoral Commission to provide adequate voting information to people from non-English speaking backgrounds, it is clear that in many cases the message is not getting through. Because our democracy depends on informed participation it is the responsibility of the government to ensure that all Australian citizens are enfranchised.[1]

Australia's diverse population

6.1 At 30 June 2005, 4.8 million, or almost one-quarter of Australia's resident population comprised of people born overseas.[2]

6.2 The leading country of origin amongst Australian migrants is the United Kingdom (over one million persons—although as a proportion of the total overseas-born it is declining), followed by New Zealand, Italy, China and Vietnam (see Table 6.1 p. 108).[3]

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1   The Multicultural Council of Tasmania, *Submission no. 33*, p. 2.
2   Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Migration*, cat. no. 3412.0, Australia, 2004-05, p. 32.
3   Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Migration*, cat. no. 3412.0, Australia, 2004-05, p. 6.

Table 6.1   Estimated resident population, country of birth—at 30 June 2005

Country of birth	Estimated resident population
United Kingdom	1 137 374
New Zealand	455 105
Italy	224 309
China (excludes SARs and Taiwan Province)	191 194
Vietnam	177 728
India	138 662
Philippines	129 401
Greece	127 226
Germany	115 215
South Africa	113 783
Other	2 019 504
Total overseas born	*4 829 501*
Australian born	*15 499 108*
Total estimated resident population	**20 328 609**

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics, Migration, cat. no. 3412.0, Australia, 2004-05, p. 39.

6.3   This chapter examines factors affecting the civic engagement of Australia's migrant citizens.

6.4   The chapter is divided into two sections:

- section one canvasses issues regarding migrants' generally lower levels of English proficiency, which was identified as one of the major barriers to migrants' participation in Australia's political processes. This section examines the correlation between English language difficulties and informal voting. It also looks at the role ethnic media plays in informing migrant communities about civics and electoral matters, and ways this role could be strengthened; and

- section two examines how, where and when migrants access information about Australia's system of government and democratic processes. In particular, this section explores opportunities to provide further electoral and civics education through the citizenship ceremony process.

Strength of English language proficiency

6.5   A lack of proficiency in English was identified as the major factor contributing to informal voting during the Committee's inquiries into the conduct of recent Federal Elections. In the 2004 Federal Election, the

10 electoral divisions with the highest levels of informal voting were among the 26 divisions with the greatest proportion of persons from non-English speaking background (see Table 6.2 below). This lends some weight to the argument that people from non-English speaking backgrounds struggle to comprehend voting terminology, the different types of electoral systems, methodology and so forth.

Table 6.2   Electoral Divisions with highest informality levels in 2004

State	Division	Total informal % 2004	Total informal % 2001	Proportion of persons born in non-English speaking country (% as at 2001)	
NSW	Greenway	11.83	6.79	24.0	(26th highest)
NSW	Reid	11.71	11.08	41.0	(3rd highest)
NSW	Blaxland	10.70	9.78	38.8	(4th highest)
NSW	Chifley	10.10	9.20	25.7	(22nd highest)
NSW	Prospect	9.24	8.99	36.8	(6th highest)
NSW	Fowler	9.11	12.75	49.7	(1st highest)
NSW	Watson	9.10	7.52	43.7	(2nd highest)
NSW	Parramatta	8.53	6.21	30.1	(12th highest)
NSW	Kingsford Smith	8.43	6.14	29.8	(14th highest)
NSW	Werriwa	7.98	8.51	27.6	(20th highest)

Source: Dario, G., 2005, Analysis of Informal voting during the 2004 House of Representatives Election, Australian Electoral Commission research report no. 7, 2005, p. 11.
Kopras, A., 2003, Electorate rankings: Census 2001, Department of the Parliamentary Library research paper no. 2, 2002-03, p. 61.

6.6   The Australian Electoral Commission has highlighted the need for electors to be proficient in English in order to avoid casting an informal vote:

> There are two plausible explanations for informal voting and electors not proficient with the English language. Firstly, once the voter enters the polling booth voting is a test of their English proficiency. The ballot paper and instructions are in English. Regardless of the amount of education and political campaigning, the voter must have more than a basic understanding of the English language to vote effectively.

> Secondly many of the voters who are not proficient in the English language arrive from countries where the voting system is far different. It must be remembered few countries practice the alternative vote system. Many use a system where a one or a tick or a cross is all that is necessary to cast a formal vote. There may also be a number of voters who do not comprehend the system,

and are afraid of making a mistake and simply return a blank
ballot paper.[4]

6.7   Following the 2001 Federal Election, the AEC identified a correlation
        between informal voting due to use of ticks and crosses and voters who
        are not fluent in English. An AEC research paper stated:

> …it is apparent that there is a positive correlation between the
> percentage of informality due to 'Ticks and crosses' and the
> statistical census variable, 'Not fluent in English'… The AEC's
> 2003 analysis of the 2001 election showed that the 'Not fluent In
> English' variable is a predictor of informality and is highly
> significant statistically. A regression analysis shows that this
> variable is a major predictor for 'Ticks and crosses' informality.[5]

Addressing Australia's increasing linguistic diversity

6.8   The WA Office of Multicultural Interests (OMI) expressed concern that,
        while the AEC provides voting information in a variety of languages other
        than English, there did not seem to be information available in languages
        spoken by some of the emerging communities from African and Middle
        Eastern countries.[6] This view was also shared by the Multicultural Council
        of Tasmania.[7]

6.9   Table 6.3 (p. 111) shows the top ten countries of birth by rates of increase
        between 1996 and 2005, although it is acknowledged that for many of
        these countries, the growth over the nine year period began from a small
        base.

6.10   Of the top 50 countries of origin, persons born in Poland, Hungary and
        Italy decreased the most between 1996 and 2005 with an average annual
        decrease of 2 per cent each. The next largest decreases were from persons
        born in Malta and Greece. The ABS reported that while these European
        countries had high levels of post-war migration to Australia, they have
        had little recent migration.[8]

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4   Medew, R., 2003, *Informal vote survey House of Representatives 2001*, Australian Electoral
    Commission research report no. 1, 2003, p. 14.
5   Dario, G., 2005, *Analysis of Informal voting during the 2004 House of Representatives Election*,
    Australian Electoral Commission research report no. 7, 2005, p. 16.
6   Office of Multicultural Interests (Department of the Premier and Cabinet, WA), *Submission
    no. 92*, p. 1.
7   See *Transcript of Evidence*, 31 August 2006, pp. 19-20.
8   Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Migration*, cat. no. 3412.0, Australia, 2004-05, p. 33.

Table 6.3   Rates of increase into Australia's population 1996-2005

Country of Birth	Estimated resident population, Country of birth—at 30 June 2005					
	1996	*2000*	*2003*	*2004*	*2005*	*Average annual 1996-2005*
Sudan	2 637	4 199	10 980	16 622	23 787	27.7
Afghanistan	6 351	11 159	14 491	15 944	17 614	12.0
Ethiopia	2 662	3 703	5 301	6 214	6 925	11.2
Nepal	1 608	2 297	3 283	3 573	3 950	10.5
Iraq	15 459	25 010	32 981	35 203	37 290	10.3
Somalia	2 305	4 069	4 891	5 146	5 431	10.0
Bangladesh	5 550	8 352	10 910	11 629	12 577	9.5
Pakistan	9 162	11 537	15 195	16 475	18 083	7.8
Zimbabwe	9 960	11 702	16 133	18 131	19 655	7.8
Colombia	2 988	4 177	5 200	5 412	5 664	7.4

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics, Migration, cat. no. 3412.0, Australia, 2004-05, pp. 39-40.

6.11   In recognition of these trends, OMI stated:

> The Australian Electoral Commission provides voting information
> in languages other than English, including Greek, Italian, Arabic
> and Macedonian. However, there does not appear to be any voter
> information available in languages spoken by members of some of
> Australia's new and emerging communities, including Eritrea,
> Ethiopia, Somalia, Sudan, Liberia, Kenya, the Democratic Republic
> of the Congo, Tanzania, Burundi and Afghanistan. It is imperative
> that these gaps are addressed so that these groups are able to
> participate effectively in the democratic progress.[9]

6.12   OMI reinforced that the effects of language barriers are relevant not only
at the polling booth, but to 'the broader experience of information
gathering in the lead up to an election'.[10]

6.13   When this issue was raised with the AEC, it responded that it had
undertaken a process of selecting a panel of consultants as part of its non-
English speaking background (NESB) strategy, who would provide advice
on which languages the AEC should use for the next election. While the
AEC does provide information services in Arabic, which a significant
number of new African arrivals do speak, the Electoral Commissioner
acknowledged the need to address those who come from parts of Africa

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9   Office of Multicultural Interests (Department of the Premier and Cabinet, WA), *Submission
no. 92*, p. 1.

10   Office of Multicultural Interests (Department of the Premier and Cabinet, WA), *Submission
no. 92*, p. 1.

where Arabic is not the first language, and confirmed that the AEC would be looking into this as part of its NESB strategy.[11]

6.14   At the same time, the Commission stressed the magnitude of the challenge confronting it with respect to addressing the use of different languages in the information it provides:

> The scale of the challenge faced by public authorities in dealing with the considerable diversity (especially linguistic diversity) of modern Australian society needs to be emphasised: an AEC Divisional Office may well find itself dealing with a voter population in which dozens if not hundreds of languages are spoken.[12]

Adult Migrant English Programme

6.15   For migrants lacking functional English, language tuition is provided under the Adult Migrant English Programme (AMEP), funded through the Department of Immigration and Citizenship (DIAC—formerly the Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs). The AMEP budget in 2006-07 was $153.7 million and around 6 million hours of adult English language tuition are provided each year.[13]

6.16   English language tuition under AMEP is provided as follows:

- refugee and humanitarian entrants under the age of 25, with low levels of schooling, are eligible for up to 910 hours of English language tuition;
- refugee and humanitarian entrants over 25 are eligible for up to 610 hours of tuition; and
- other migrants are eligible for up to 510 hours of tuition. [14]

6.17   DIAC reported that there were 36 414 AMEP clients in 2005.[15] The registration rate for adult settlers who arrived in 2005 and who self-determined a need for English tuition was 72 per cent. Retention rates (the average number of hours a client remains in the programme) for each key migration category for 2005 were:

- refugee and humanitarian—422 hours;

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11   See *Transcript of Evidence*, 4 December 2006, p. 14.

12   Australian Electoral Commission, *Submission no. 72*, p. 17.

13   Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs, *What is AMEP?* Available online at: <http://www.dimia.gov.au/living-in-australia/help-with-english/learn-english/what/index.htm>. Accessed 25 November 2006.

14   Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs, *Annual Report 2005-06*, p. 232.

15   Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs, *Annual Report 2005-06*, p. 233.

- family—370 hours; [and]
- skill (dependents)—380 hours.[16]

6.18   Learners can choose to undertake the course *Let's Participate: A Course in Australian Citizenship* as part of their 510 hours AMEP entitlement.

6.19   The *Let's Participate* course was developed to give AMEP participants an introduction to topics in Australian civics and to assist in their applications for citizenship—while also focusing on improving English language skills.[17] The course is non-compulsory, and those who do not wish to undertake the course can still apply for citizenship and be tested on their knowledge of English and of the responsibilities and privileges at their citizenship interview.

6.20   Topics covered by the course include the values and principles of Australian society, national symbols and emblems, Australia's parliamentary system of government, the responsibilities and privileges of being an Australian citizen, and Australian law.

6.21   The course includes approximately 20 hours of classroom tuition and is delivered by AMEP service providers. Participants who complete the course are taken to satisfy the requirement to have an understanding of the responsibilities and privileges of Australian citizenship.[18]

6.22   Not all migrants who complete the AMEP Citizenship course achieve a satisfactory outcome. In 2003-04 for example, a total of 123 clients completed the course but did not achieve a satisfactory outcome.[19] Participants complete the course satisfactorily if they:

- attend a minimum of 75 per cent of the Citizenship Course classes; and
- attend 100 per cent of classes covering Unit 4 (the Unit focusing on the responsibilities and privileges of Australian citizenship).[20]

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16   Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs, *Annual Report 2005-06*, p. 233.

17   Department of Immigration and Citizenship, *Exhibit no. 10*, p. 1.

18   Department of Immigration and Citizenship, *Exhibit no. 10*, pp. 1-2.

19   Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs, Answers to questions on notice, Supplementary Budget Estimates hearing, 1 November 2005, p. 1. Available online: <http://www.aph.gov.au/senate/Committee/legcon_ctte/estimates/sup_0506/dima/qon_231.pdf>. Accessed 30 January 2007.

20   Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs, Answers to questions on notice, Supplementary Budget Estimates hearing, 1 November 2005, p. 1. Available online: <http://www.aph.gov.au/senate/Committee/legcon_ctte/estimates/sup_0506/dima/qon_231.pdf>. Accessed 30 January 2007.

6.23   Migrants who satisfactorily complete the AMEP Citizenship course obtain
        the 'AMEP Australian Citizenship Responsibilities and Privileges Record'.
        The record is accepted as evidence that the holder has an adequate
        knowledge of the responsibilities and privileges of Australian citizenship.
        AMEP participants may submit this record as part of their citizenship
        application.[21]

Creating pathways to participation: the role of ethnic media

6.24   Ethnic media play a decisive role in disseminating information amongst
        Australia's significant migrant population. During a public hearing in
        Sydney, the Committee conducted a roundtable with representatives from
        a variety of ethnic media outlets. The aim of the discussion was to examine
        the role ethnic media plays in informing their communities about civics
        and electoral matters, and how the AEC could make a contribution.

6.25   Television, radio and print media from the Spanish, Chinese, Turkish,
        Russian, Greek and Persian speaking communities were represented at the
        roundtable.[22] Representatives from the AEC were also present at the
        roundtable.

6.26   There was a general consensus among the ethnic media present that it was
        part of their duty to educate their readership about electoral processes.

6.27   Mrs Arzu Agacayak, representing the *Turkish News Weekly*, acknowledged
        that advertisements provided by the AEC for ethnic publications in the
        lead-up to elections were 'very important'. Mrs Agacayak added:

>   I cannot see an editor that will not publish this information
>   because it is very important for our communities to vote in
>   elections. I am sure that is the case for all the ethnic media.[23]

6.28   Mrs Agacayak also suggested that support by way of translated editorial
        information would be welcome as ethnic publications generally did not
        have the resources of the major Australian newspapers.[24]

6.29   Mr George Minas, representing FL Press, agreed:

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21 Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs, Answers to questions on notice,
    Supplementary Budget Estimates hearing, 1 November 2005, p. 1. Available online:
    <http://www.aph.gov.au/senate/Committee/legcon_ctte/estimates/sup_0506/dima/qon_2
    31.pdf>. Accessed 30 January 2007.

22 Participants represented the Special Broadcasting Service (SBS), Radio Austral [Spanish],
    Australian Chinese Daily, *Turkish News Weekly*, *Persian Herald*, *Greek Herald*, *Novosti* and the
    Spanish Herald.

23 Mrs Arzu Agacayak (Turkish News Weekly), *Transcript of Evidence*, 13 October 2006, p. 26.

24 Mrs Arzu Agacayak (Turkish News Weekly), *Transcript of Evidence*, 13 October 2006, p. 26.

> Let's not beat around the bush: with ethnic media, for the bulk of
> its readership, its attention is focusing more on either an ageing
> population or a population that does not have any particular
> education, let's be honest. Many of these people do not know how
> to vote. They need to be educated in order to participate in the
> electoral process.[25]

6.30   SBS noted a marked improvement in support and communication
provided by the AEC in the lead-up to the 2004 Federal Election compared
to the 2001 election:

> A quick glance at the informal rate [in the electorate of Fowler]—
> and I know a lot of effort was put in by the AEC because Fowler
> was the highest in terms of the informal rate—shows that dropped
> from 12.8 per cent to 9.1 per cent in 2004. 9.1 per cent is still 9.1 per
> cent too high—I would be the first to vouch for that—but the way
> I actually see it is that there were efforts there.[26]

6.31   AEC representatives present at the roundtable welcomed the opportunity
to receive feedback from representatives of ethnic media outlets,
particularly given that the AEC is in the process of reviewing its own
strategies in this area. The Director of the AEC's Public Awareness
Programmes Section stated:

> The AEC very clearly acknowledges the role of the ethnic media
> and the role they play in informing their communities. For a
> number of years, the AEC has placed advertising in newspapers
> and on radio. I think during the last election we did some in
> language advertising on SBS television as well. We would also be
> looking to the language newspapers and radio to be providing
> information to their communities through an editorial component.
> We met with SBS radio earlier to talk about some opportunities for
> doing some programming work in language as well.[27]

Recruitment of appropriate polling place staff

6.32   The Australian Greens noted that there appears to be a limited
requirement for language and cultural skills amongst polling and
returning officers. Furthermore, the Greens argued that polling place staff,
from management level right down to local polling place level, appeared

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25   Mr George Minas (FL Press Pty Ltd), *Transcript of Evidence*, 13 October 2006, p. 27.

26   Mr Thang Ngo (Special Broadcasting Service), *Transcript of Evidence*, 13 October 2006, p. 28.

27   Ms Shauna Williamson (Australian Electoral Commission), *Transcript of Evidence*, 13 October
2006, p. 26.

to lack the necessary knowledge and ability to communicate effectively to culturally and linguistically diverse electors.[28]

6.33   While the Greens acknowledged the importance of education programmes and English learning programmes for migrants, they argued that it was just as important that polling place officials be able to explain the electoral system on polling day. Recommendations in the Greens' submission included:

- That the Australian Electoral Commission and State and Territory Electoral Offices train all electoral officials and managers in communication English as Second Language skills; [and]
- That provision be made for interpreting services in all forward and electoral budgeting.[29]

6.34   The Multicultural Council of Tasmania suggested that every effort should be made to recruit polling place staff who are able to speak relevant community languages at any polling places which are known to serve a large number of voters from non-English speaking backgrounds.[30]

Access to information about Australia's democracy

> As more migrants, whose cultures and governing processes are markedly different from those in Australia, come to our country, it is important that they are educated about Australian citizenship. While prospective migrants are now expected to attend information sessions in their country prior to coming to Australia, ongoing civics and electoral education must be provided after their arrival.[31]

Impact of previous democratic experiences

6.35   A variety of submitters commented that in many cases, migrants' disengagement derives from a reluctance to exercise democratic rights due to a suspicion of authorities and bureaucracy, or a fear of retribution, based on past experiences in their country of origin.

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28   Australian Greens, *Submission no. 30*, p. 5.
29   Australian Greens, *Submission no. 30*, p. 5.
30   Multicultural Council of Tasmania, *Submission no. 33*, p. 2.
31   Australian Catholic University, *Submission no. 90*, p. 4.

6.36   The AEC acknowledged that for some new citizens, an Australian election could represent their first experience of voting.[32]

6.37   The Australian Federation of Societies for Studies of Society and Environment stated:

> …many migrant citizens are terribly unaware of major political issues in Australia and tend to keep their opinions to themselves. This particularly applies to people from war torn countries and where human rights were severely abused. Democracy is not within the realms of experience for some migrant citizens as they have come from countries where there is no real democracy, and language barriers may prevent acquisition of knowledge.[33]

6.38   The Auburn Migrant Resource Centre suggested that in cases where migrants have endured traumatic past experiences, the assistance of a community advocate or public interest group could encourage them to participate in democracy.[34]

Learning about Australian democracy: current requirements and opportunities

6.39   Some of the current requirements for applicants for Australian citizenship include having an understanding of the nature of their application, having a basic knowledge of English and having an adequate knowledge of the responsibilities and privileges of Australian citizenship. These attributes are generally required to be demonstrated at interview. There are some exemptions for elderly applicants or those who are permanently incapacitated.[35]

6.40   Under current arrangements, an information booklet is made available to prospective citizens. The booklet, *What it Means to be an Australian Citizen*, contains background material which includes an overview of Australia's shared values, the responsibilities and privileges of citizenship, an overview of Australia's history and Australia's rule of law and form of government.

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32   Australian Electoral Commission, *Submission no. 72*, p. 16.
33   Australian Federation of Societies for Studies of Society and Environment, *Submission no. 25*, p. 5. See also, Independent Schools Council of Australia, *Submission no. 89*, p. 6; and the Office of Multicultural Interests (Department of the Premier and Cabinet, WA), *Submission no. 92*, p. 2.
34   Auburn Migrant Resource Centre, *Submission no. 37*, p. 2.
35   Australian Government, 2006, 'Australian citizenship: much more than a ceremony.' *Discussion paper – Consideration of the merits of introducing a formal citizenship test*, September 2006, p. 8.

Citizenship ceremonies: how effectively do they inform new citizens?

6.41   Over 3.5 million people have attained Australian citizenship since
        citizenship was introduced in 1949.[36] In 2005-06, 103 350 people from over
        175 different countries were conferred with Australian citizenship at
        ceremonies.[37]

6.42   Citizenship ceremonies are usually arranged by Local Government
        councils. DIAC produces the *Australian Citizenship Ceremonies Code* as a
        guide for local councils and community organisations on the procedure
        for conducting ceremonies. The code highlights the legal requirements for
        the conduct of a ceremony, outlines the role of those conducting a
        ceremony and provides practical advice to people planning to conduct a
        ceremony.

6.43   At citizenship ceremonies, electoral enrolment forms, complete with the
        applicants details, are supplied by the AEC in partnership with DIAC.
        Applicants receive the enrolment form when they receive their certificate
        following the pledge of commitment.[38] Once signed in the presence of a
        suitable witness, the enrolment form is either handed to the AEC staff
        member present at the ceremony, or posted to the AEC.

6.44   According to DIAC, councils are asked to facilitate electoral enrolment by
        informing the AEC of forthcoming ceremonies and facilitating the
        presence of AEC staff members. As part of the procedure of the citizenship
        ceremony, the Presiding Officer is expected to advise on whether the AEC
        is present, and what conferees should do in relation to completing the
        enrolment process.[39] DIAC acknowledged that processes at ceremonies
        can alter somewhat from council to council:

> …there is variability in the way in which ceremonies are
> conducted. Where issues are brought to our attention, either by
> unhappy conferees or unhappy members of the conferee's family
> or by some other observer, in terms of something they did not like
> about the ceremony, we get communications either direct to the

36   Department of Immigration and Citizenship, *Australian Citizenship Facts and Statistics*.
      Available online at: <http://www.citizenship.gov.au/resources/facts-and-stats/index.htm>.
      Accessed 24 November 2006.
37   Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs, *Annual Report 2005-06*, p. 218.
38   Department of Immigration and Citizenship, *Exhibit no. 10*, p. 3.
39   Department of Immigration and Citizenship, *Exhibit no. 10*, p. 3.

> department or through the parliamentary secretary or the
> minister, and we will pursue that with the relevant council.[40]

6.45   In 2005-06, the number of citizenship ceremonies conducted in Australia increased by 15 per cent. The AEC reported that it attended only 47.7 per cent of all ceremonies to collect completed enrolment forms.[41] AEC staff attended 462 citizenship ceremonies in New South Wales, 254 in Victoria, 115 in Queensland, 183 in Western Australia, 60 in South Australia, seven in Tasmania, 28 in the ACT and 12 in the Northern Territory. A total of 64 128 enrolment forms were collected.[42] However, the percentage of new citizens enrolling within three months of becoming citizens is relatively high: 88.4 per cent of migrants eventually enrolled to vote in 2005–06, slightly lower than the 89.7 per cent in 2004–05.[43]

6.46   The AEC affirmed its intention to increase its presence at citizenship ceremonies:

> We are going to have a big blitz on the new citizenship ceremonies. We are looking at how those ceremonies are run and what information might be provided at them. We are trying to have a much bigger presence at the Australian Day ceremony and Citizenship Week in the coming years.[44]

6.47   In evidence to the Committee, it was suggested that citizenship ceremonies offer an opportunity to provide further information about civics and participation in Australia's electoral system. The Australian Catholic University advocated the inclusion of a five-minute presentation regarding the notion of citizenship, voting rights and obligations in Australia as an obligatory component of all ceremonies.[45]

6.48   The SA Electoral Office called on the AEC to 'utilise the captive audience' by liaising with state/territory electoral administrations, local government and DIAC to jointly develop and distribute a comprehensive pack for new

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40   Mr Peter Vardos (Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs), *Transcript of Evidence*, 4 December 2006, p. 29.

41   Australian Electoral Commission, 2006, *Annual Report 2005-06*, p. 36.

42   Australian Electoral Commission, 2006, *Annual Report 2005-06*, p. 93. In Tasmania and the Northern Territory, local council staff supplied electoral information and enrolment cards at ceremonies where the AEC was unable to attend.

43   Australian Electoral Commission, 2006, *Annual Report 2005-06*, p. 36.

44   Mr Ian Campbell (Australian Electoral Commission), *Transcript of Evidence*, 4 December 2006, p. 3.

45   Australian Catholic University, *Submission no. 90*, p. 5.

citizens explaining Australia's electoral systems, structure of government and services in addition to an overview of Australia's democratic history.[46]

6.49   The Speaker of the ACT Legislative Assembly, Mr Wayne Berry MLA, submitted that in the ACT, where the majority of the community is in close proximity to the Assembly building, citizenship ceremonies held at the Assembly are also an excellent opportunity to provide civics education.[47] Having realised that new citizens often received their citizenship certificate without any education about their new country's system of democracy, the Speaker developed a *Speaker's Citizenship Evening*. These evenings are used to outline the workings of the ACT Government to new citizens, and also afford them an opportunity to meet some of their local members.[48]

6.50   In 2005-06 the Speaker hosted four citizenship evenings for approximately 140 new Australian citizens, where participants also viewed a captioned film on the Assembly, undertook a tour of the building and participated in a question and answer session with the Speaker in the Chamber. The Assembly reported that feedback from these evenings continued to be 'very positive'.[49]

6.51   While acknowledging the manifest benefits owing to the ACT community's close proximity, the Speaker suggested that where possible, similar programmes should be replicated around the country. Mr Berry stated:

> It would be a good idea if some sort of formula can be found to assist (new citizens) in a better understanding of how our democracy works. We ask them to participate fully in our democracy, but many of them who take out their citizenship certainly do not fully understand how our democracy works.[50]

Timing: providing information sooner or later?

6.52   There was some discussion during the inquiry about how soon after their arrival migrants should be targeted with information about civics and electoral matters.

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46   South Australian Electoral Office, *Submission no. 84*, p. 45.
47   Mr Wayne Berry MLA (ACT Legislative Assembly), *Transcript of Evidence*, 11 August 2006, p. 49.
48   ACT Legislative Assembly, *Submission no. 14*, p. 2.
49   ACT Legislative Assembly Secretariat, *Annual Report 2005-06*, p. 27.
50   Mr Wayne Berry (ACT Legislative Assembly), *Transcript of Evidence*, 11 August 2006, p. 52.

6.53   OMI referred to the *Beginning a Life in Australia* booklets produced by
         DIAC which welcome newly-arrived migrants to Australia. The booklets
         are translated into 24 community languages for each state and territory
         and provide information on the types of settlement services available and
         advice on where to go for assistance. OMI noted that nowhere in the
         booklets are new migrants informed about enrolling to vote. OMI's
         Executive Director stated:

> The words 'voting' and 'electoral' do not appear. This publication
> is given to new arrivals. I do not think that registering to vote does
> rank with the first seven things that they recommend that new
> arrivals do…But I would hope that it would be somewhere in the
> top 20, because I think that, in gaining an understanding of the
> way we provide information to new arrivals, it is just as critical to
> tell them how they can participate in our political culture as it is to
> tell them how to participate in our economy or in our society
> generally.[51]

6.54   DIAC suggested that the omission of this information is likely due to the
         fact that the booklets are provided very early in the arrival process, while
         attaining Australian citizenship is some way down the track.[52] However,
         the Southern Cross Group (SCG) also argued that electoral education for
         migrants could be expanded to target migrants 'at a far earlier stage than
         citizenship'. The SCG submitted:

> It would seem to the SCG that there is an opportunity here for the
> early education of prospective migrants in matters relating to civic
> life in Australia, Australian citizenship and the rights and
> responsibilities in electoral matters arising from that citizenship.
> Their inability to participate in Australian elections during the
> time they are permanent residents rather than citizens could be
> used as a positive force in encouraging the take up of Australian
> citizenship. …we suggest that the briefings to migrants at the time
> a migration visa is granted should include a brochure/booklet
> detailing the path from temporary residence status to citizenship
> and the electoral rights and responsibilities, or lack thereof,
> throughout that process.[53]

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51   Mr Ellis Griffiths (Office of Multicultural Interests, Department of the Premier and Cabinet,
     WA), *Transcript of Evidence*, 21 September 2006, pp.49-50.

52   Mr Peter Vardos (Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs), *Transcript of Evidence*,
     4 December 2006, p. 31.

53   Southern Cross Group, *Submission no. 85*, p. 71.

6.55   The Local Government Association of Queensland suggested that
        capturing the attention of migrants soon after arrival is difficult, but it is
        important for civics and electoral education purposes that migrants do not
        lose contact with their support networks. The Association stated:

> …many [culturally and linguistically diverse] community
> members are too busy dealing with the challenges of settlement to
> spend much time learning about these matters soon after their
> arrival. However, once they had settled and were ready to play a
> more significant role in the life of the community, many had lost
> contact with settlement and other support agencies that may act as
> conductors of civics and electoral education.[54]

Delivery of civics and electoral education

6.56   The Australian Catholic University argued that, in addition to an
        entitlement to English tuition, migrants should be entitled to education
        regarding Australian electoral practices, law, history and traditions.[55] The
        Multicultural Council of Tasmania added that election information should
        also be distributed through service providers such as migrant resource
        centres, volunteer groups and grassroots organisations. Furthermore, the
        Council stated:

> This information should include the date of the election, location
> and hours of polling booths, ID requirements, instructions on how
> to vote, including how to cast a vote and general information on
> voting rights, including instructions on how to contact the
> appropriate officials if these rights have been violated.[56]

6.57   The Auburn Migrant Resource Centre suggested a range of strategies be
        developed to encourage migrants, particularly from non-English speaking
        backgrounds, to participate in electoral processes, namely:

- Employ bilingual community educators to work in partnership
  with NGOs, (Migrant Resource Centres and Migrant Service
  Agencies);
- Use female educators where culturally appropriate;
- Provide funding to above mentioned organizations to conduct
  appropriate education programs/ workshops about living in
  democracy, including their rights and responsibilities;
- Advertise more in the ethnic media; and

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54   Local Government Association of Queensland, *Submission no. 67*, pp. 1-2.
55   Australian Catholic University, *Submission no. 90*, p. 4.
56   Multicultural Council of Tasmania, *Submission no. 33*, p. 2.

- Provide information in audio/visual form.[57]

6.58   The SA Electoral Office noted that the provision of translated material must be maintained, and ongoing funding provided for translators, in order to ensure information sessions are provided for migrant citizens.[58] Ms Jane Gray from the WA Parliamentary Education Office advocated the inclusion of compulsory civics and electoral education in migrant education courses.[59]

6.59   In its submission, the Multicultural Council of Wagga Wagga explained that the opportunities for electoral education in the region were presently very limited for some, and non-existent for others.[60] The Council acknowledged that for those who attend TAFE English classes, there is a component which introduces students to the Australian electoral system. However, both the Wagga Wagga and Tasmanian Multicultural Councils pointed out that many of these students are not necessarily eligible to become citizens for two years and are more concerned with other issues. This highlighted the need for ongoing education in this area. The Multicultural Council of Wagga Wagga further stated:

> …there could be Information Sessions conducted several times each year or at least once a year in areas where numbers are small. For those who do not have access to TAFE Education classes or who are not able to attend for other reasons, there needs to be Information Sessions or Short Courses available at convenient times for workers and free of charge. There may be need for the use of interpreters at some such information sessions, and we suggest this should be provided if necessary.[61]

6.60   The AEC submitted that it has translated material available online and is in the process of producing a series of DVDs which explain Australia's federal electoral system. Commission staff have conducted public awareness activities with adult education institutions that run citizenship courses and also with some English as a second language courses. The AEC further stated:

> The AEC is keen to see more information about Australia's electoral systems provided to people contemplating citizenship, and included as content in citizenship courses run by various

57   Auburn Migrant Resource Centre, *Submission no. 37*, p. 2.
58   South Australian Electoral Office, *Submission no. 84*, p. 7.
59   Ms Jane Gray, *Submission no. 68*, p. 7.
60   Multicultural Council of Wagga Wagga, *Submission no. 11*, p. 1.
61   Multicultural Council of Wagga Wagga, *Submission no. 11*, p. 1.

adult education institutions. The AEC will need to work with the Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs to progress this and will need to enhance links with adult education providers.[62]

Proposal for citizenship test

6.61   In evidence to the Committee's inquiry there was some comment made on the merits of the Australian Government's proposal to introduce a new Australian Citizenship test (announced in December 2006).[63]

6.62   Under the proposal, the new test would replace the need for an interview. All people who wished to apply for Australian Citizenship would first need to complete a computer-based test, designed to demonstrate their knowledge of the English language and their knowledge of Australia, including the responsibilities and privileges of Australian citizenship.

6.63   The Southern Cross Group stated that it would 'generally support' the introduction of such a test. The Group added that:

> There is a need to place before migrants carefully developed and specifically directed civics and electoral information which would better equip them for their future as Australian citizens.[64]

6.64   Mr Ezekiel Trumper, representing the Spanish speaking community's Radio Austral, was opposed to the proposal due to its potential impact on those not fluent in English:

> If there is a very good reason for people to become citizens, why are we going to put up another barrier for them to become so? What is going to happen in the Spanish-speaking community is that lot of people will feel embarrassed about going and sitting a test that they may fail—people who are 55, who are 50—because it is very difficult to learn a new language. I could teach you—I cannot, but somebody else could—to fly a Boeing 747 in less time than it would take to teach you to speak Spanish.[65]

6.65   While non-committal on the merit of the proposed test, Mr Ellis Griffiths from OMI also raised a concern about the impact of English-language requirements:

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62   Australian Electoral Commission, *Submission no. 72*, p. 16.

63   Robb, A. (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Immigration and Multicultural Affairs), *Australia to introduce citizenship test*, media release, 11 December 2006.

64   Southern Cross Group, *Submission no. 85*, p. 72.

65   Mr Ezequiel Trumper (Radio Austral), *Transcript of Evidence*, 13 October 2006, p. 34.

> What kind of test is needed, I am not really clear about at the
> moment because I feel a lot of people, especially older migrants,
> would baulk at high English-language requirements, especially if
> they are in family reunion type visa classes and the like. It is
> complex, but we will be considering the discussion paper…[66]

Committee's conclusions and recommendations

6.66   The Committee acknowledges that English language proficiency is the key
determinant of migrants' ability to participate in Australia's democratic
processes. While it is evident that Australia's migrants have, in the last
five to ten years, begun arriving from new countries (for example in Africa
and the Middle East), electoral translation and interpretation services have
not necessarily kept pace with this new market.

6.67   On the other hand, it is concerning that migrants do not generally
undertake the language training made available for the total number of
hours provided them. The Committee therefore believes that improving
English language proficiency requires a two-pronged approach; one which
involves the initiative of government, and the other the initiative of
migrants themselves.

Recommendation 12

6.68   **The Committee recommends that the Australian Electoral Commission
review the languages it currently translates its materials into and
consider introducing languages spoken by more recent migrant arrivals
to Australia.**

Recommendation 13

6.69   **The Committee recommends that the Australian Government urge
migrants and candidates for citizenship to undertake as much language
training as is currently made available to them by the Government.**

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66   Mr Ellis Griffiths (Office of Multicultural Interests, Department of the Premier and Cabinet,
WA), *Transcript of Evidence*, 21 September 2006, p. 58.

Recommendation 14

6.70   **The Committee recommends that the Australian Government amend the Australian Citizenship Ceremonies Code to include the additional mandatory requirement that during citizenship ceremonies there be a presentation regarding the notion of citizenship, voting rights and obligations in Australia, including the opportunity for enrolment at the ceremony.**

6.71   The Committee raised the issue of the lack of electoral information in the *Beginning a Life in Australia* booklets with DIAC during its final hearing to see whether this information could be incorporated into the publication. Pleasingly, shortly following this hearing, DIAC advised the Committee that it had consulted with the AEC on this issue, and produced a paragraph concerning enrolment which would be included in the next update in both the English language version and those in the 23 community languages.

6.72   The Committee appreciates the efforts made by the AEC in relation to migrants' propensity to vote informally but believes that a missing link has been the provision of adequate civics and electoral education. The Committee accepts the recommendations made by migrant resource centres that a programme be developed, specifically targeting the migrant population.

Recommendation 15

6.73   **The Committee recommends that the Department of Immigration and Citizenship, in consultation with the Australian Electoral Commission, develop a programme of electoral education, to be implemented through migrant resource centres.**

Recommendation 16

6.74   **The Committee recommends that the Australian Electoral Commission prepare a professional development seminar for migrant resource workers to enable them to deliver this programme of electoral education.**

Recommendation 17

6.75 **The Committee recommends that the Australian Electoral Commission provides a programme of electoral education in the lead up to federal elections which specifically targets areas of high informal voting including those with a high proportion of voters from non-English speaking backgrounds and those in areas where there are different voting systems in place for State elections.**

Sophie Mirabella MP
Chair
21 May 2007

A
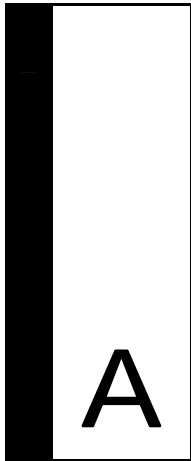
Appendix A

Submissions to the inquiry

No.	Individual / Organisation
1.	Mr Patrick Tacey, Creswick North Primary School
2.	Mr Glenn W. Marchant
3.	Name withheld
4.	Dr Bede Harris, University of Canberra
5.	Dr Sarah Barker
6.	Mr Brian Moore
7.	Mr Robert Smith
8.	Mr Ian Martin, Alfredton Primary School
9.	Mr David Westaway, Alfredton Primary School
10.	Australian College of Educators
11.	Multicultural Council of Wagga Wagga
12.	Western Australian Electoral Commission
13.	The Hon Alan Carpenter, Premier of Western Australia

14.   The Hon Wayne Berry, Speaker of the ACT Legislative Assembly

15.   Community Relations Commission

16.   Parliamentary Education and Community Relations Section, Parliament of
        NSW

17.   Local Government Association of South Australia

18.   Mr Robert Tuppini

19.   Australian Centre for Educational Studies, Macquarie University

20.   Political & Legal Educators of Western Australia

21.   Dr Norman Abjorensen et al., Australian National University

22.   Dr Harry Phillips, Parliamentary Fellow, Parliament of WA

23.   Ms Lucy van der Wall

24.   The Hon. Shelly Archer MLC, Member for Mining and Pastoral Region,
        WA

25.   Australian Federation of Societies for Studies of Society and Environment

26.   Ms Astrid Fauchon

27.   Ms Yvonne Goudie

28.   Department of the Senate

29.   Ms Nicola Roxon MP

30.   Australian Greens

31.   Ms Jacqueline Mowbray

32.   Mr Michael Doyle

33.   Multicultural Council of Tasmania

34.   Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission

35.   Ms Kelly Parker

36.   Victorian Electoral Commission

37.   Auburn Migrant Resource Centre

38.   Ms Janet Magnin

39.   Ms Alison Hogg

40.   Rosetta Primary School, Hobart

41.   Democratic Audit of Australia

42.   Dr David Lovell and Dr Linda Botteril, School of Humanities and Social Sciences, Australian Defence Force Academy

43.   The Students' Association of the University of Adelaide

44.   United Nations Youth Association of Tasmania

45.   National Union of Students

46.   Ms Robyn Stephenson

47.   Dr Lucas Walsh, Centre for Citizenship and Human Rights, Deakin University

48.   Australian Education Union

49.   ACT Minister's Youth Council

50.   Local Government Association of Queensland

51.   National Capital Educational Tourism Project

52.   Ms Jo Anne Rey

53.   Civil Liberties Australia ACT Branch

54.   Dr Murray Print and Dr Lawrence J. Saha, Youth Electoral Study

55.   Guides Australia

56.   Association of Independent Schools of Victoria

57.   Mr Richard Lenn

58.   Mr Andrew Wettern

59.   Hambledon State School, Cairns

60.   Proportional Representation Society of Australia (Vic-Tas)

61.   Mr Eric Brown

62.   Mr John R. Miller

63.   Mr Andrew Ambrosius

64.   Mr Peter Brent, Political Science, Australian National University

65.   Ruyton Girls' School, Victoria

66.   Queensland Council of Parents and Citizens Associations Inc.

67.   Local Government Association of Queensland (supplementary)

68.   Ms Jane Gray, Parliamentary Education Officer, Parliament of WA

69.   SBS Corporation

70.   Mr Edward Smith

71.   St Patrick's College, Ballarat

72.   Australian Electoral Commission

73.   Constitution Education Fund – Australia

74.   Commission for Children and Young People and Child Guardian,
         Queensland; New South Wales Commission for Children and Young
         People; and the Commissioner for Children, Tasmania

75.   Mr Duncan Sinclair

76.   Mr John Nugent

77.   Mr Toby Chambers

78.   Mr Roger Dine

79.   Mr Barry McGinley

80.   Cllr Peter Morris

81.   Mr Andrew J. Smith

82.   Australian Children's Television Foundation

83.   ACT Electoral Commission

84.   South Australian Electoral Office

85.   Southern Cross Group

86.   Queensland Department of Education and the Arts

87.   Australian Labor Party

88.   Victorian Department of Education and Training, Office of
            Learning and Teaching

89.   Independent Schools Council Australia

90.   Australian Catholic University, Faculty of Education

91.   Department of the House of Representatives

92.   Office of Multicultural Interests WA, Department of the Premier and
         Cabinet

93.   Mr Colin Robert Lawton

94.   Local Government Association of the Northern Territory

95.   The Hon. Teresa Gambaro MP

96.   Association of Independent Schools of South Australia

97.   Ms Amber Sierek

98.   Northern Territory Electoral Commission

99.   Mr Richard Lenn (supplementary)

100.   Department of Education, Science and Training

101.   Ms Kelly Parker (supplementary)

102.   New South Wales Government, Cabinet Office

103.   Proportional Representation Society of Australia

104.   Democratic Audit of Australia (supplementary)

105.   Tasmanian Youth Government Association

106.   Mrs Melissa Rasmussen

107.   Democratic Audit of Australia (supplementary)

108.   Department of the House of Representatives (supplementary)

109.   Mr Brian Moore (supplementary)

110.   Department of Education Science and Training (supplementary)

111.   Lions Australia

112.   Dr Harry Phillips (supplementary)

113.   Mr Don Perna, St Joseph's School, Albion Park

114.   Hambledon State School (supplementary)

115.   Australian Electoral Commission (supplementary)

116.   Australian Electoral Commission (supplementary)

117.   The Hon Teresa Gambaro MP (supplementary)

118.   Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs

Exhibits presented to the inquiry

No.   Organisation / Individual

1.   Mr Boyd Jorgensen, Principal of Beerwah State High School, *"Citizenship Curriculum"*

2.   Hobart City Council
      "Youth participation report"

3.   Mr Don Perna, St Joseph's High School,
      "The Parliamentary Club"

4.   Ms Louis Mackay Head of Department, Morayfield State High School,
      "Citizenship curriculum"

5.   Ngaanyatjarra Shire Council
      "Shared Responsibility Agreement Between Aboriginal Community of Warburton"

6.   Department of the Senate
      "Website Usage Analysis Report, October 2005-March 2006"

7.   Mr Brent Ritchie and Ms Sue Uzabeaga, *"Discover what it means to be Australian in your National Capital: Size and effect of school excursions to the National Capital"*, Centre for Tourism Research, University of Canberra

8.   Mr Tony Poynter, Advanced Skill Teacher, Rosetta Primary School,
      "Citizenship curriculum"

9.   Northern Territory Statehood Steering Committee

10.   Mr Peter Vardos
      Dept. of Immigration & Multicultural Affairs
      "Welcome to Canberra"

B

Appendix B

List of hearings and witnesses, including school visits

Friday, 28 July 2006 – Alice Springs (school visits)

Centralian Senior Secondary College and Anzac Hill School

Mr Eddie Fabijan, Assistant Principal, Centralian Senior Secondary College

Mr Ian Sharp, Teacher, Centralian Senior Secondary College

Ms Anne Channing, Teacher, Anzac Hill School

Royceton, Student	Gabi, Student	Jack, Student
Emil, Student	Daniel, Student	Declan, Student
Laura, Student	Emily, Student	Hannah, Student
Casey, Student	Ben, Student	Rachel, Student
Carli, Student	Nicki, Student	Candice, Student
Tara, Student	Sam, Student	*and other students*

Our Lady of the Sacred Heart College, Sadadeen Campus

Dr Tony Mordini, Head of Sadadeen Campus

Mr Bill Pendlebury, Senior Teacher, English and Humanities

Rainer, Student	Lauren, Student	Chris, Student
Matt, Student	Mark, Student	Lindsay, Student
Joy, Student	Emily, Student	Jeremy, Student
David, Student	Josh, Student	Nathan, Student
Renee, Student	Scott, Student	Angus, Student
Beth, Student	Fiona, Student	Megan, Student
Erin, Student	Brendan, Student	Ryan, Student
Andrew, Student		*and other students*

Monday, 7 August 2006 – Canberra

Department of Education, Science and Training

Mr Noel Simpson, Branch Manager, Quality Schooling Branch

Dr Declan O'Connell, A/g Director, Australian History, Quality Schooling Branch

Department of the Senate

Mr Harry Evans, Clerk of the Senate

Mr Cleaver Elliott, Clerk Assistant, Procedure

Mr Chris Reid, Director, Parliamentary Education Office

Department of the House of Representatives

Mr Ian Harris, Clerk of the House

Ms Robyn Webber, Clerk Assistant, Committees

Ms Claressa Surtees, Deputy Serjeant at Arms

Mr Andres Lomp, Director, Liaison and Projects

Australian Electoral Commission

> Mr Ian Campbell, Electoral Commissioner

> Mr Paul Dacey, Deputy Electoral Commissioner

> Mr Timothy Pickering, First Assistant Commissioner Electoral Operations

> Ms Barbara Davis, First Assistant Commissioner Business Support

> Mr Brien Hallett, Assistant Commissioner, Communications

> Ms Gail Urbanski, Assistant Commissioner, Strategic Policy

Youth Electoral Study

> Dr Murray Print, Centre for Research & Teaching in Civics, University of Sydney

> Dr Lawrence Saha, Reader in Sociology, Australian National University

Constitution Education Fund – Australia

> Mr Noel Hadjimichael, Deputy Executive Director

> Miss Mariam Hussein, Research Scholar

Friday, 11 August 2006 – Canberra

National Capital Educational Tourism Project

> Mr Garry Watson, Project Leader

Civil Liberties Australia

> Dr Kristine Klugman, President

> Mr Bill Rowlings, Chief Executive Officer and Secretary

> Mr John Harvey, Member

ACT Electoral Commission

> Mr Phil Green, ACT Electoral Commissioner

> Ms Alison Purvis, Deputy Electoral Commissioner

Dr Bede Harris, Senior Lecturer, School of Law, University of Canberra

Democratic Audit of Australia, Australian National University

Professor Marian Sawer, Leader

Mr Norm Kelly, Member

Mr Peter Brent, Member

ACT Legislative Assembly

The Hon Wayne Berry, Speaker

Mr Max Kiermaier, A/g Clerk

Ms Margaret Jones, A/g Manager, Strategy and Parliamentary Education Office

Monday, 21 August 2006 – Melbourne

Victorian Electoral Commission

Mr Steven Tully, Electoral Commissioner

Ms Elizabeth Williams, Deputy Electoral Commissioner

Ms Susan Lang, Manager, Communication, Education and Research

Department of Education and Training, Victoria

Ms Pat Hincks, Curriculum Manager, Humanities, Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority

Ms Karen Dowling, Senior Policy Officer, Office of Learning and Teaching

Australian Education Union

Mr Pat Byrne, Federal President

Mr Roy Martin, Federal Research Officer

National Union of Students

Ms Rose Jackson, National President

Dr Lucas Walsh, Research Fellow, Centre for Citizenship and Human Rights, Deakin University

Australian Children's Television Foundation

>Mr Tim Phillips, Legal and Business Affairs Manager

Proportional Representation Society of Australia (Victoria–Tasmania) Inc.

>Mr Geoffrey Goode, President

>Dr Lee Naish, Vice-President

>Mr Geoffrey Powell, Member and former President

Ms Yvonne Goudie, Civics and Citizenship Education and Electoral Education Consultant

Tuesday, 22 August 2006 – Melbourne (school visits)

Monbulk Primary School

>Mr Ray Yates, Principal

>Ms Gina Silis, Assistant Principal and Year 6 Teacher

>Mr Ray Martin, Year 4/5 Teacher

>Ms Sue Graham, Teacher and Librarian

Chloe, Student	Demi, Student	Cameron, Student
Dylan, Student	Bryce, Student	Justin, Student
Rachel, Student	Nathan, Student	Lachlan, Student
Hogan, Student	Sean, Student	Jessica, Student
Katelyn, Student	Darcy, Student	Alistair, Student
Danny, Student	Josham, Student	Lisa-Marie, Student
Ross, Student	Dylan, Student	Bryce, Student

and other students

Melbourne High School

> Mr Jeremy Ludowyke, Principal
>
> Dr Janet Prideaux, Assistant Principal and Director of Curriculum
>
> Mr David Smyth, Assistant Principal, with responsibility for resources and student leadership
>
> Mr Colin Axup, Registrar, with responsibility for student leadership
>
> Mr Todd Asensio, Teacher
>
> Mr George Maroutous, Teacher
>
> Mr Ray Pask, Teacher, with responsibility for political content of curriculum
>
> Ms Linda Wilson, Teacher, with responsibility for political content of curriculum

David, Student	Alex, Student	Sam, Student
Callum, Student	Nick, Student	Brad, Student
Blake, Student	Scott, Student	Andrew, Student
Jared, Student	Tom, Student	Tom, Student
		and other students

Thursday, 31 August 2006 – Hobart (including a school visit)

United Nations Youth Association of Tasmania

> Mr Patrick McConville, President
>
> Mr Michael Cordover, Education Officer

Tasmanian Youth Government Association

> Mr Stephen Monk, President
>
> Mr Michael Cordover, Treasurer

Multicultural Council of Tasmania

> Mr Albert Schluter, Chairperson
>
> Mrs Sajini Sumar, Vice Chair

Ms Elida Meadows, Office Administrator

Rosetta Primary School

Mr Bill Linton, Principal

Mr Tony Poynter, Advanced Skills Teacher

Ms Shelley Millhouse, Teacher

Brianna, Student	Zacharie, Student	Tim, Student
Thomas, Student	Romanie, Student	Nathan, Student
Georgia, Student	Brendan, Student	Ben, Student
Jacob, Student	Jenna, Student	*and other students*

Thursday, 21 September 2006 – Perth

Western Australian Electoral Commission

Mr Warwick Gately, Electoral Commissioner

Mr Brian Gordon, Policy and Strategy Coordinator

Ms Vanessa Beckingham, Policy Officer

Mr Brian Moore

The Hon Shelley Archer MLC, Member for Mining and Pastoral Region, Western Australia

Dr Harry Phillips, Parliamentary Fellow and Adjunct Professor, Edith Cowan University

Ms Jane Gray, parliamentary education officer

Office of Multicultural Interests, Department of the Premier and Cabinet, Western Australia

Mr Ellis Griffiths, A/g Executive Director

Mr Ben Harvey, Manager, Policy

Friday, 22 September 2006 – Adelaide

Association of Independent Schools of SA

Mr Garry Le Duff, Executive Director

Mrs Joan Worth, Director of Curriculum Development, Concordia College

Mr Lester Saegenschnitter, Principal, Concordia College

Mr Igor Plisko, Senior Secondary Teacher of Politics and History, University Senior College

Department of Education and Children's Services

Ms Maureen Cochram, Superintendent Middle Years and Learning Areas, Office of Primary, Middle and Senior Secondary Services

Mr David Butler, Policy and Program Officer Society and Environment, Office of Primary, Middle and Secondary Service

Local Government Association of South Australia

Ms Wendy Campana, Executive Director

Ms Jane Hyatt, Marketing and Communications Officer

Friday, 22 September 2006 – Adelaide school forum

Aberfoyle Park High School	Kim	Sean	Rishi	
Banksia Park International High School	Vanessa	Sarah	Peter	Brennan
Christies Beach High School	Shandelle	Jacqui	Andrew	Adam
Henley High School	Kimberley	Ruby		
Karoonda Area School	Calinda	Aleise		
Mitcham Girls High School	Ashlee	Alisha	Nikita	June
Reynella East High School	Emily	Alanna	Damian	Jamie
Seaton High School	Anne	Leesa		

Seymour College	Melissa	Jacqueline	Annie	Monica
	Hannah	Ellen	Galia	Emily
	Rebeckah	Lauren	Genavieve	Phobe
	Denise	Annabelle	Alana	Tiffany
Tabor Christian College	Jason	Larissa		
Torrens Valley Christian School	Matthew	Phillip	Kate	Rachel
University Senior College	Calum	Melanie	Ellie	Megan
	Ellen	Chanel	Lorena	Chloe
	Kailee	Connor	Bec	Alex
	Katina			

Friday, 29 September 2006 – Sydney (school visits)

Sir Joseph Banks High School

Ms Julie Parker, Deputy Principal

Ms Sarah Hawke, Teacher

Mr Keith Mealey, Teacher

Ms Cynthia Mikel, Teacher

Ms Michelle Rushton, Teacher

Ms Amarjit Walia, Teacher

Chris, Student	David, Student	Eric, Student
George, Student	Henry, Student	Jake, Student
James, Student	Krystal, Student	Kylie, Student
Kyriacos, Student	Luke, Student	Maha, Student
Michael, Student	Neil, Student	Paul, Student
Raman, Student	Ricky, Student	Robbie, Student

Shane, Student	Steven, Student	Talal, Student
Taneka, Student	Wilson, Student	*and other students*

Al Zahra College

Haj Ahmad Mokachar, Chairman

Ms Angela Iliadis, Teacher

Ms Sarah Jane Lynham, Teacher

Ms Lisa Sadruddin, Teacher

Akmar, Student	Ali, Student	Arhloo, Student
Asad, Student	Ayah, Student	Batoul, Student
Fati, Student	Fatima, Student	Fatima, Student
Izdehar, Student	Lasayna, Student	Mahmoud, Student
Manal, Student	Mohammed, Student	Mostafa, Student
Muqbil, Student	Ribit, Student	Rouba, Student
Salih, Student	Shardia, Student	Sukaina, Student
Sussan, Student	Tarbal, Student	Zahra, Student
Zayna, Student	Zeinab, Student	*and other students*

Friday, 13 October 2006 – Sydney

Parliamentary Education and Community Relations Section, Parliament of NSW

Mr Graham Spindler, Manager, Education and Community Relations

Ms Daniela Giorgi, Education Officer

The Australian Centre for Educational Studies, Macquarie University

Dr Davis Saltmarsh, Lecturer

Mr Rod Lane, Lecturer in Education HSIE

Roundtable of ethnic media

Australian Electoral Commission	Ms Shauna Williamson, Director, Public Awareness Programs Section
	Ms Marie Nelson, Deputy State Manager
	Ms Peita Mamo, Public Awareness Officer
	Mrs Ann Cass, Divisional Returning Officer for Cunningham
	Ms Rhonda Murphy, Divisional Returning Officer for Prospect
Australian Chinese Newspapers Pty	Mr Charles Ng, Advisor
Chieu Duong: The Sunrise Daily Newspaper	Mr David Giang, Managing Editor
F.L. Press Pty Ltd	Mr George Minas, In-House Counsel
Persian Herald	Mr Richard Mansouri, Editor
Radio Austral – Spanish Radio Network	Mr Ezequiel Trumper, National News Editor
Special Broadcasting Service	Mr Thang Ngo, Manager, National Sales
	Mr Grahame O'Leary, Manager Government Relations
Turkish News Weekly	Mrs Arzu Agacayak, Editor

Ms Amber Sierek

The Parliamentary Club

Mr Don Perna, Teacher, St Joseph's Schoo, Albion

Mr Euan Brown, Student, St Joseph's School, Albion

Mr James Arblaster, Student, St Joseph's School, Albion

Thursday, 19 October 2006 – Canberra school forum

Australian Capital Territory	Daniel	David	Sarah	Jacob
New South Wales	Liam	Amy	Bailey	Alice
Northern Territory	Tara	Kyle	Natasha	Tom
Queensland	Angel	Mark	Caitlin	James
South Australia	Tiffany	Craig	Chloe	Tim
Tasmania	Anika	Lawrence	Georgia	Rossina
Victoria	Muhammed	Emilia	Daniel	Natalie
Western Australia	Neeshima	John	Kelly	Jordan

Monday, 23 October 2006 – Brisbane

Queensland Teachers' Union

>   Ms Lesley McFarlane, Assistant Secretary, Research

Local Government Association of Queensland

>   Ms Lyndelle Drew, Community Relations Project Officer

>   Ms Rachael Uhr, Youth Policy Officer

Commission for Children and Young People and Child Guardian (and New South Wales Commission for Children and Young People and Commissioner for Children, Tasmania)

>   Dr Tim Reddel, Executive Director, Policy, Research and Employment Screening

>   Ms Lone Keast, Manager Policy, Strategic Policy and Research

>   Mrs Adrienne Schneider, Senior Policy Officer

Mrs Melissa Rasmussen

Mr Stephen Paul, Principal, John Paul College

Tuesday, 24 October 2006 – Cairns and Townsville (school visits)

Hambledon State School

Mrs Mali Te Loo, Year 7 Teacher

Ms Liz Jorgensen, Librarian

Mr Tony Anderson, Divisional Returning Officer for Leichhardt

Brendan, Student	Carl, Student	Daniel, Student
Drew, Student	Gavin, Student	Jacob, Student
James, Student	Jared, Student	Kenny, Student
Kirsten, Student	Mathew, Student	Megan, Student
Michael, Student	Patrick, Student	Rebecca, Student
Renee, Student	Rhanee, Student	Shannon, Student
Shaylie, Student		*and other students*

Heatley Secondary College

Mr Simon Boevink, Head of the Department of Health and Physical Education and Social Science

Mr Bill Sperring, Principal

Mr Craig Beinssen, Teacher

Mr Greg Boyd, Teacher

Ms Rebecca Brown, Teacher

Ms Tracy Camillieri, Teacher

Ms Janine Cooke, Teacher

Mr Jamie Gardner, Teacher

Ms Erica Gavan, Teacher

Ms Joan George, Teacher

Mr Chester Nathan, Teacher

Ms Jill Staunton, Teacher

Alexia, Student	Alisha, Student	Allanah, Student
Amanda, Student	Andrea, Student	Ben, Student
Caitlin, Student	Chris, Student	Eleanor, Student
Glen, Student	Hannah, Student	Jasmin, Student
Jason, Student	Jimmy, Student	Joelle, Student
Jordan, Student	Kalea, Student	Kristen, Student
Navdeen, Student	Rachel, Student	Sarah, Student
Sean, Student	Tamsin, Student	Teri, Student
		and other students

Monday, 20 November 2006 – Darwin

Northern Territory Electoral Commission

Mr William Shepheard, Electoral Commissioner

Local Government Association of the Northern Territory

Mr Tony Tapsell, Chief Executive Officer

Roundtable of civics and electoral educators

Northern Territory Legislative Assembly	Ms Loraine Caldwell, Education Coordinator, Parliamentary Liaison and Coordination Unit
Kormilda College	Mrs Julie Hearnden, Head of Humanities
Northern Territory Statehood Steering Committee	Mr Michael Tatham, Executive Officer
Northern Territory Department of Employment, Education and Training	Mrs Jeannie Bennett, Parliamentary Education Project Manager
	Ms Debra Liddiard-Taruminggi, Manager ESL Literacy and Numeracy
	Mrs Colleen Williams

Monday, 27 November 2006 – Canberra

Southern Cross Group (via teleconference to Brussels, Belgium)

Ms Anne MacGregor, Co-founder

Monday, 4 December 2006 – Canberra

Australian Electoral Commission

Mr Ian Campbell, Electoral Commissioner

Ms Barbara Davis, First Assistant Commissioner Business Support

Ms Gail Urbanski, Assistant Commissioner, Strategic Policy

Dr Chris Drury, Australian Electoral Officer, State Manager for SA

Department of Education Science and Training

Mr Noel Simpson, Branch Manager

Dr Declan O'Connell, A/g Director, Australian History, Quality Schooling Branch

Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs

Mr Peter Vardos, First Assistant Secretary, Citizenship, Settlement and Multicultural Affairs

Ms Mary-Anne Ellis, Assistant Secretary, Citizenship and Language Service Branch

Australian Federation of Societies for Studies of Society and Environment
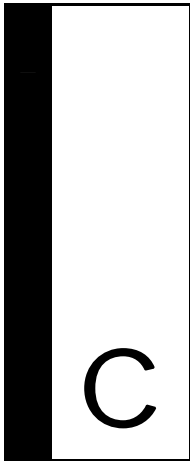
Ms Sandra Kenman, Executive Officer

Student Vote

Mr Taylor Gunn, Chief Election Officer

The Hon. Teresa Gambaro MP, Parliamentary Secretary for Foreign Affairs

C

Appendix C

Learning from initiatives overseas

The Committee's Terms of Reference for the inquiry required that it examine:

> …opportunities for introducing creative approaches to electoral education taking into account approaches used internationally and, in particular, in the United States, Canada, Germany, United Kingdom and New Zealand.[1]

In the absence of Australia's system of compulsory voting, many countries face the dual challenge of encouraging young people to enrol and also to vote. Fostering greater civic awareness is equally challenging. The following appendix outlines how this challenge has been met overseas. The appendix is divided into three sections:

- Encouraging greater civic awareness and engagement;

- Encouraging voter registration (or enrolment) and voting; and

- Civics education initiatives.

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1   Inquiry Terms of Reference.

Encouraging greater civic awareness and engagement

Canada

The decline in young people's civic engagement has been of major concern to Elections Canada. In response, the organisation has adopted a multi-pronged strategy, including:

- a 'young voters' web site, designed in consultation with young people that provides information on the electoral process and how young people can become more involved in their communities and the political process;

- a partnership with Cable in the Classroom to run a voter education program called 'Your Vote … Your Voice.' The program challenged students in Grades 10-12 across Canada to create public service announcements telling their peers why democracy is important and why it is important to vote;

- a partnership with Rush the Vote, an organisation that aims to increase voter turnout and political awareness through 'edutainment' – musical events at which performers encourage voting and democratic involvement. Concerts were held in Ottawa, Toronto and Edmonton; and

- partnerships with four student associations–the Canadian Federation of Students, the Fédération étudiante universitaire du Québec, the New Brunswick Student Alliance, and the Canadian Alliance of Student Associations–to develop a poster for display on campuses across Canada. A total of 3,200 posters were sent to these associations for distribution to their 119 member associations.

Student Vote has been a very successful initiative in Canada to provide students not yet of voting age with the opportunity to experience electoral processes through parallel elections in their schools.

The program was first trialled in 2003 during the provincial elections in Ontario. Over 825 schools participated from 103 ridings in the province, representing approximately 72 per cent of all Ontario secondary schools. Editorials and the results of the parallel elections were published in regional daily newsletters.

The program has now been replicated at the 2004 and 2006 federal elections, the Alberta 2004 provincial election and the 2005 provincial election of British Columbia.

Schools and students are essentially tasked with running the elections themselves. In summary, the program is as follows:

- Registered schools receive free learning materials and program outline to use during the federal election.
- The teacher who registers the school becomes the "Team Leader" and is responsible for implementing the program with a relative class or student committee.
- During the campaign period, students learn about the democratic process, party platforms, and local candidates, through in-class lessons and take home activities.
- Events are organized to engage the entire school and to help to build critical thinking and decision-making skills among students (e.g. all-candidate debates).
- On a day determined by each school, students take over the roles of Deputy Returning Officers and Poll Clerks, and conduct a school wide vote.
- Each school counts their ballots and calls in their results into the Student Vote Returning Office, before a specified date and time.
- The results are released to the public and shared with media across Canada.[2]

Mr Taylor Gunn, Chief Electoral Officer of Student Vote submitted that Student Vote's success lies in the strong partnerships built with a range of supporters including Elections Canada, thousands of teachers, and the local and national media outlets.[3]

United Kingdom

The Electoral Commission and the Hansard Society in the United Kingdom have now conducted three 'audits' of political engagement. Using the following 16 indicators, the latest poll (2006) involved interviews with a representative sample of 1,209 adults aged 18 and over across the UK:

Knowledge and interest

- Percentage of people who:
  - ⇒ feel they know about politics
  - ⇒ are interested in politics
  - ⇒ know their MP's name
  - ⇒ 'passed' a political knowledge quiz
  - ⇒ feel they know about the role of MPs

2   Student Vote, Program Summary, <http://www.studentvote.ca/federal/pages.php?id=7>. Accessed 24 November 2006.

3   Mr Taylor Gunn (Student Vote Canada), *Transcript of Evidence*, 4 December 2006, pp. 38-41.

Action and participation

- Percentage of people who:
  - ⇒ are 'absolutely certain' to vote at an immediate general election
  - ⇒ have discussed politics
  - ⇒ have contacted their MP or councillor
  - ⇒ are classified as electoral activists
  - ⇒ are classified as non-electoral activists
  - ⇒ paid money to or joined a political party

Efficacy and satisfaction

- Percentage of people who:
  - ⇒ believe that 'getting involved works'
  - ⇒ think that the present system of governing works well
  - ⇒ trust politicians generally
  - ⇒ are satisfied with Parliament
  - ⇒ are satisfied with their own MP

Findings from this latest audit suggest that:

> …part of the solution to political disengagement must be to begin to manage expectations of politics, how it is done and what it can deliver. If 'politics' is to be recast, it could usefully blend the best components of representative democracy with more direct, participatory mechanisms, provided that the direct forms of participation do not undermine or supplant established representative institutions. It is clear that more work still needs to be done in this area, and in the areas of political education, if we are to encourage not only increased political engagement, but also informed engagement.[4]

The aspiration to re-build the relevance of politics was at the heart of the UK Electoral Commission's recent public awareness campaign – 'If you don't do politics, there's not much you do.' The campaign combined:

- high-profile advertising with public relations;

- leaflet distribution via a variety of outlets;

- a national outreach tour specifically targeting young people; and

- a call centre and a new consumer-facing website (www.aboutmyvote.co.uk).

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4   UK Electoral Commission and the Hansard Society, 2006, *An audit of political engagement 3*, Executive Summary.

The campaign aimed to make politics personal by showing the multitude of areas of everyone's lives that 'politics' affects, as well as challenging the view that 'I don't do politics' and creating the right climate for politicians to 'get out the vote.'

The UK Electoral Commission, in partnership with MTV, have also run a 'Votes are Power' competition, challenging 14 to 24-year-olds to devise a creative idea that will engage young people to 'turn opinion into action'. Major prizes, including Apple Macs, are on offer and entrants can use any medium they choose to get their message across.[5]

Germany

Germany's political history has, in some respects, made democratic engagement an important element of civics education. In 1952, the Federal Agency for Civic Education (Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung/BPB) was established to promote democratic awareness and civic participation. Its main activities include the organisation of seminars, events, study excursions, exhibitions and competitions, and the distribution of a range of publications.

The BPB specifically caters to young people by producing multi-media kits and by providing training activities in sports clubs.

Encouraging voter registration (or enrolment) and voting

United States of America

Founded in 1990 by members of the United States recording industry, Rock the Vote is a non-partisan, non-profit organisation which aims to motivate young people to participate democratically by registering to vote, voting and speaking out. Rock the Vote has implemented a variety of strategies to encourage young people to register, including:

- lobbying the United States Congress in 1991 to pass the Motor Voter Bill to enable driver's licence offices and other public assistance agencies to offer voter registration as part of their services;

- registering young people at concerts and on college campuses;

- developing and airing public service announcements promoting youth participation on MTV. Rock the Vote and MTV's Choose or Loose

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5   See Australian College of Educators, *Submission no. 10*, p. 3.

projects combine news segments and specials mixed with contemporary music, quick cuts, and flashy graphics with the political reporting.[6]

Rock the Vote works primarily because of its website; it is a communication format that reaches out to young people on an ongoing basis. The website www.rockthevote.com includes features such as a regularly updated web log covering the big issues affecting young people each day, a comprehensive reading list, archives of Rock the Vote media, advertisements and campaigns, special features such as a calculation clock of student debt, 'how to' guides for getting involved in rock the vote and other community organisations and Rock the Vote merchandise.

In some US states, schools have become active vehicles for the promotion of voter registration:

- in New York City, public high school graduates get registration forms with their diplomas;

- Hawaii allows citizens to pre-register at 16, making it easier to achieve 100 percent student registration; and

- in Vermont, Secretary of State Deborah Markowitz designated a "high school voter registration week."[7]

In the recent mid-term Congressional elections, a $1.3 million lottery was used to entice voters in Arizona to vote. A series of television advertisements were also produced and publicly aired, with a number of Hollywood actresses encouraging young women in particular to vote for their first time.[8]

Canada

Elections Canada also made a concerted effort to increase young people's voter registration levels in the lead up to the 2004 federal election:

- in February 2004, the Chief Electoral Officer sent a personalised card to approximately 1.1 million Canadians who turned 18 since the 2000 election, telling them of their right to vote, and sent a personalised card once the 2004 election was called to the 250,000 who still had not registered to tell them how they could register;

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6   International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance, 1999, *Youth Voter Participation: Involving Today's Young in Tomorrow's Democracy*, Stockholm, pp. 45-6.

7   Anderson, J.B. and R. Martinez III, 2006, 'Voter's Ed', *The New York Times.*

8   Gold Coast Bulletin, 'Enticing Americans to vote', 30 October 2006, p. 39.

- before the election, returning officers were able to appoint 'community relations officers' to target areas that had large numbers of students for special registration drives';

- during the election, a widespread advertising campaign targeted young people and the electoral commission sponsored a 'road trip' contest, offering three prizes of a road trip for two anywhere in Canada; and

- after the election Elections Canada continued to work in partnership with the Historica Foundation to develop a new YouthLinks education module on citizenship and voting, titled 'Voices.' YouthLinks is a free, bilingual, online education program that links high schools across Canada.

New Zealand

In the lead up to the 2005 General Election, the New Zealand Electoral Enrolment Centre introduced a text messaging service whereby eligible enrolees could request an enrolment form via text message.

In the first two weeks of the campaign, the Centre received close to 18,000 text messages requesting enrolment forms. The initiative saw double the number of people wanting enrolment forms in the first fortnight of the Enrolment Update Campaign than in the 2002 election. The Manager of the Enrolment Centre remarked that 'The new technology seems to be making it easier for people to get an enrolment form' and noted the enthusiastic response from young people in particular.[9]

United Kingdom

The recently published Power: An Independent Inquiry into Britain's Democracy (http://www.powerinquiry.org/) has advocated extending the franchise to 16-year-old citizens.

Civics education initiatives

United States of America

The Centre for Civic Education

The Centre for Civic Education promotes understanding of the federal Constitution by constructing curricula for the teaching of civics education, and

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9   Elections NZ, 2005, 'Txts set enrolment request record'. Available online: <http://www.elections.org.nz/news/eec_media_txt_170505.html>. Accessed 29 January 2006.

through its publication of student texts explaining the functioning of the Constitution.[10]

The Centre runs the US Department of Education's "We the People" civics education program, among others. Mrs Melissa Rasmussen provided the Committee with extensive information on this program, having received a grant to attend the Summer Institute professional development program in July 2005. Mrs Rasmussen found:

- the program teaches the explicit learning of the American Constitution;
- substantial learning materials have been developed to assist both the teacher and the student in the conduct of the program. These materials are readily available and can be obtained in class sets free of charge to the school;
- a national drive exists to implement the program with funding provided by the US Department of Education and private donors. The donations from private individuals and public companies underlines the importance that American citizens place on civic education;
- national outcomes are in place that reflect the desired level of student achievement across the nation. This has ensured that all schools and educators are encouraged to strive to achieve the same outcomes;
- the national outcomes are explicit, written in clear and plain English and are directly relational to the lessons provided in the "We the People" teacher guide and student reader;
- teacher professional development is available during summer vacation that provides funding for travel, accommodation and meals. This PD involves a combination of actual teaching of the constitution to equip teachers with theoretical knowledge and the teaching of program implementation. The Institutes are generally 2 weeks in duration and equip educators not only with the tools required to implement the program but most importantly the inherit desire to foster civic appreciation amongst their students;
- significant evaluative materials designed to test student development in relation to National Standards are available. These evaluative tools include Multiple Choice questions, short answer tests and application activities; and
- there are national competitive programs that allow students of each state the opportunity to compete against one another. Thus students are able to apply and demonstrate the skills learnt.[11]

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10   The Center's site at <http://www.civiced.org/> outlines a curriculum for teaching civics at high schools.

11   Mrs Melissa Rasmussen, *Submission no. 106*, p. 9.

The National Constitution Centre, which consists of a museum and library opposite Independence Hall in Philadelphia, functions both as a monument to the Constitution and as the headquarters of an organisation which engages in broad public education programmes.[12]

Kids Voting USA

Kids Voting USA is an interactive civics curriculum taught during election campaigns. Studies of this program have found that students influence their parents to pay more attention to politics, and parents encourage students to participate more actively in civics activities at school. This process begins with Kids Voting's emphasis on peer-group conversation, through which students appear to acquire an interest in partisan debates. In these debates, students learn to appreciate the importance of strengthening their knowledge so as to back up their opinions. Students then initiate conversations with parents, and in doing so, gain confidence as young citizens who have the ability to influence others. Parents respond by paying more attention to news and by acquiring opinions they can use in subsequent conversations with their children.[13]

Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement (CIRCLE)

CIRCLE promotes research on the civic and political engagement of Americans between the ages of 15 and 25. Although CIRCLE conducts and funds research, not practice, the projects it supports have practical implications for those who work to increase young people's engagement in politics and civic life. CIRCLE is also a 'clearinghouse' for relevant information and scholarship. CIRCLE was founded in 2001 with a generous grant from the Pew Charitable Trusts and is now also funded by the Carnegie Corporation of New York. It is based in the University of Maryland's School of Public Policy.

American Democracy Project

The American Democracy Project (ADP) is a multi-campus initiative that seeks to create an intellectual and experiential understanding of civic engagement for undergraduates. The goal of the project is to produce graduates who understand and are committed to engaging in meaningful actions as citizens in a democracy.

The goals of the project are to:

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12   The Center's website is at <http://www.constitutioncenter.org/>.

13   McDevitt, Michael, Sprio Kiousis, Xu Wu, Mary Losch and Travis Ripley, 2003, 'The civic bonding of school and family: How Kids Voting students enliven the domestic sphere', CIRCLE Working Paper 07, Centre for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement, United States, p. 1.

- increase the number of undergraduate students who understand and are committed to engaging in meaningful civic actions by asking participating institutions to review and restructure academic programs and processes, extracurricular programs and activities, and the institutional culture; and

- focus the attention of policy makers and opinion leaders on the civic value of the college experience.

New Zealand

Australian College of Educators submitted that 'In New Zealand, the establishment of "Wallace" awards for good practice in civics education has engendered enthusiasm and provided a means to lift its profile.'[14]

Canada

The Department of the Senate referred to initiatives in of the Canadian Parliament where substantial investment in education programs, both on-site and in the Provinces, is made. One of its flagship programs is the *Teachers Institute on Canadian Parliamentary Democracy,* where each year, for one week, seventy teachers are competitively selected for an intensive professional development program in Ottawa, fully funded by the Canadian Parliament. The cost for the five day program in 2005 was $CAD213 867.79.[15]

Elections Canada also undertook several projects in partnership with non-governmental organisations interested in civic education.

Germany

Civics education in Germany has sought to build a strong democratic culture and support for the new democratic institutions created following the Second World War. Civics education essentially became not only a prominent educational subject but also a cornerstone of the new democracy.

Since that time, civics education has progressed along a distinct trajectory, from re-education programs implemented by the Allies and civics education based on the promotion of harmony in society, to the institutionalisation of civics as a subject of study in all universities. In 1976, the Beutelsbacher agreement saw tolerance as a key element of civics programs and the ideas that:

- students should not be the objects of teachers' judgement;

14 Australian College of Educators, *Submission no. 10*, p. 3.
15 Department of the Senate, *Submission no. 28*, p. 11.

- controversial issues in society have to be presented as controversial in the classroom;

- students should be enabled to recognize their own interest.[16]

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16 The Centre for Applied Policy Research, Civic Education in Germany. Available online: <http://www.tolerance-net.org/news/podium/podium084.html>. Accessed 6 February 2007.