



**THE SENATE**  
CANBERRA ACT 2600



8 June 2007

Mr Stephen Palethorpe  
Secretary  
Finance and Public Administration Committee  
Parliament House  
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Mr Palethorpe

**Response to DEST letter - PACER**

The Clerk of the Senate submitted letters to this committee on 29 May 2007 in relation to the Parliament and Civics Education Rebate (PACER). In his cover letter, the Clerk stated that I would provide further observations to the committee. These observations are attached.

Yours sincerely

Chris Reid  
Director  
Parliamentary Education office



## The CVP – PACER transition

### Background – Citizenship Visits Program (CVP)

The Parliamentary Education Office (PEO) provides parliamentary education services to schools, teachers and students. It performs this function on behalf of the national Parliament. The city in which the Parliament resides, and subsidising visits to it, is not a focus of the PEO.

*The Citizenship Visits Program (CVP)*, a scheme under the control of the Presiding Officers and administered jointly by the Departments of the Senate and of the House of Representatives, was designed to assist school students from remote areas (greater than 1000km) to travel to Parliament House, and was abolished on 30 June 2006 at the insistence of the Prime Minister. This abolition followed a repeated defence from the Presiding Officers for the retention of the *CVP* and the important principle of the Program of assisting school students from remote areas to visit their national Parliament.

### Background – Parliament and Civics Education Rebate (PACER)

In place of the *CVP*, the government established the *Parliament and Civics Education Rebate (PACER)*, a new scheme with different objectives, one that in practice is more broadly designed to have schools visit the city of Canberra and its institutions, including Parliament House. The *PACER* scheme, while having educational aspects, because it is subsidising the travel of students close to Canberra, brings more students to Canberra and therefore is much more in tune with the requirements of the ACT tourism industry.

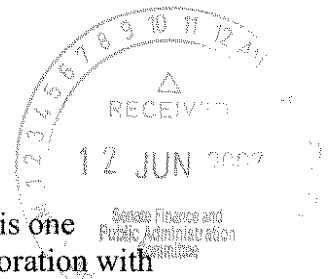
### Further observations on the letter of the Secretary of DEST – 29 May 2007-06-07

The letter of the Secretary of the Department of Education Science and Training (DEST) of 29 May 2007 was written in response to questions asked by the Clerk of the Senate in a letter of 22 May 2007. He asked these questions so that information could be provided to members of the committee who were interested in:

- the effect of PACER on the PEO education program and
- the effect of a subsidy scheme said to be about parliament (among other things) that does not require parliamentary education in its guidelines.

The committee was exploring the effect of the transition from the *CVP* to the *PACER* program and whether the original intent of assisting remote area students was being maintained. The Secretary did not answer the specific PEO-related part of the question asked. Her letter advised that DEST is collating this data.

Separation of Powers – The Government is **not** The Parliament



*PACER* is a government program and the *PACER* Advisory Committee is one established and administered by DEST. While the PEO works in collaboration with several partners, including DEST, on appropriate occasions, the PEO is not a government agency and should not involve itself in a government subsidy scheme that is designed to assist school students, now almost all school students, to visit the city of Canberra.

*PACER* funding, when compared to *CVP* funding, is enormous. Yet, the first 12 months of *PACER* has generated virtually the same volume of students from remote areas, or less in some cases, attending the PEO, as came under the *CVP*. A significant concern expressed by the Presiding Officers at the time the Prime Minister proposed the abolition of the *CVP*, that the replacement program would be a subsidy to Canberra tourism, has been proven to be correct.

The principal reason for the office of the Serjeant-at-Arms accepting an invitation to attend *PACER* Advisory Committee meetings on behalf of the Parliament lies in the fact that that office was responsible for the funding administration of the *CVP*, and therefore any necessary handover to DEST.

It is surprising that DEST believes that the *PACER* Advisory Committee is "monitoring concerns about capacity of the PEO to cope with increased interest in the programme", or indeed monitoring anything to do with the PEO. PEO will teach approximately 87,000 young Australians about the national Parliament this year at Parliament House, and will do so in the usual manner - "business as usual" at the Parliament was recorded in the committee minutes of 13 March 2007. At 29 May 2007 *PACER* payments were made to only 53,971 students. These "concerns" about capacity continue to emanate from the tourism industry's worry that a compulsory, rather than 'wherever possible', PEO program being a condition of *PACER* may impede tourism numbers.

The transition from *CVP* to *PACER* has reinforced the need for the preservation of the independence of the Parliament from the executive government, and the education of public officials about this.

Chris Reid  
Director  
Parliamentary Education office

8 June 2007