



Government Response

to the

Report of the Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters

Civics and Electoral Education

August 2011

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*Report on Civics and Electoral Education***

Recommendation 1

The Committee recommends that in the lead up to the expected 2007 federal election, the Australian Electoral Commission (AEC) 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.

Response:

Supported. The AEC provided the JSCEM with enrolment numbers under the birthday card program for the 2007 federal election.

The AEC has advised it will include reporting on the birthday card program as part of its submission to the JSCEM inquiry into the 2010 federal election.

Recommendation 2

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.

Response:

Noted. The availability of information from trusted sources helps the AEC to update and maintain the electoral roll.

The AEC has advised that it has access to schools data from all States other than Victoria (the Victorian Electoral Commission processes Victorian education data). This data is currently used for the birthday card program. The AEC is also undertaking consultations to extend coverage to TAFE and university data and make data supply more consistent.

Recommendation 3

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

- (i) emailing all Year 12 students an electoral enrolment form at a school email address;
- (ii) sending out enrolment forms with tertiary institution (including university and TAFE college) application forms; and
- (iii) establishing an SMS service by which young people can ask the AEC for an enrolment form.

Response:

Partly supported. The Government is committed to increasing youth electoral participation. The AEC has considered the feasibility and costing of the three recommended initiatives.

Initiative (i): Not supported. The AEC conducts other programs targeting 17 and 18 year old school students, for example, the existing birthday card and 'Enrol to Vote' week programs.

Initiative (ii): Not supported. The AEC identified several limitations and possible impediments with this initiative, including issues with extracting eligible students only from university/TAFE data (for example, TAFE college information in NSW does not distinguish international students from Australian citizens).

Initiative (iii): Partly Supported. The AEC commenced a new SMS message trial during the period 24 May to 10 June 2010. Approximately 55,000 persons who had not responded to AEC mail asking them to update their enrolment details received a reminder SMS suggesting they contact the AEC or go to the AEC website. The AEC is considering the possible future use of SMS in light of the trial.

More broadly, the AEC is implementing the 'Mobilise the Franchise' strategy which adopts mechanisms to, amongst other things, simplify processes related to participation, minimise accidental non-participation and provide information on all aspects of electoral participation to people in a manner that is relevant to them.

Recommendation 4

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.

Response:

Supported in principle. The Government supports the inclusion of electoral education in all secondary schools.

The Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) is responsible for development of the Foundation to Year 12 Australian Curriculum. In June 2009, ACARA outlined a process for the development of an Australian Curriculum in phases. On 8 December 2010, all education ministers endorsed Australia's first national curriculum from Foundation to Year 10 in the Phase 1 learning areas of English, mathematics, science and history. The learning areas of the Australian Curriculum that are most relevant to civics and electoral education are history (Phase 1), geography (Phase 2) and civics and citizenship (Phase 3).

ACARA's development of the Australian Curriculum involves a curriculum shaping stage followed by a curriculum writing stage. Writers are guided by key framework documents and refer to existing Australian and international curricula, as well as other relevant curriculum research. The curriculum writers are also supported by advisory panels with expertise in subject matter, stages of schooling, and equity and diversity. Broad consultation is an integral feature of ACARA's development of the Australian

Curriculum. To date, ACARA's consultation activities have included meetings with key stakeholders, national, state and territory forums and workshops, public information sessions, the release of draft documents for public comment, and curriculum trialling activities in schools. The AEC is establishing memoranda of understanding with each state and territory electoral authority regarding the delivery of electoral education.

Recommendation 5

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.

Response:

Noted. The Government supports the inclusion of electoral education in the Australian Curriculum.

The precise role of the AEC in delivering electoral education will depend on how electoral education is included in the Australian Curriculum (see Government response to recommendation 4). In the short term, the AEC will continue to deliver the School and Community Visits Program through staff in its divisional office network although, in light of work undertaken under the umbrella of the AEC 'Mobilise the Franchise' strategy, the AEC may move to having a greater focus on conducting authentic elections in the schools as part of this engagement program.

Recommendation 6

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.

Response:

Not supported. The existing national school assessment in civics and citizenship that is conducted every three years is an effective way to measure the success of civics education. The Government does not consider that requiring the AEC to collect further statistics will enhance this process.

National assessment in civics and citizenship commenced in 2004 as part of a rolling three-yearly cycle of sample assessments. Every three years samples of year 6 and year 10 students from across Australia are tested on their civic knowledge and understanding and the skills and values needed for active citizenship. The most recent national assessment in civics and citizenship was undertaken by samples of year 6 and year 10 students in October 2010. The 2007 National Civics and Citizenship Sample Assessment report can be viewed at:

www.mceecdya.edu.au/mceecdya/nap_civics_and_citizenship_2007_yrs6_and_10_report_26602.html

Recommendation 7

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.

Response:

Supported. An internal Government review of the Parliament and Civics Education Rebate (PACER) program is being undertaken, including consideration of financial support for students from schools in remote areas.

The institutions which schools must visit in order to obtain PACER (i.e. Parliament House, the National Electoral Education Centre, the Museum of Australian Democracy and the Australian War Memorial), have worked with the Government to ensure quality education materials are available for both onsite and online audiences.

Recommendation 8

The Committee recommends that the Australian Government provide additional support to both the Parliamentary Education Office (PEO) 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.

Response:

Supported in principle. While the Government considers that providing experiential learning programs at the AEC and PEO education centres is an effective way to deliver civics and electoral education, the Government considers that class room education is often a more efficient way to reach a large number of students.

As set out in the Government response to recommendation 4 above, the Government considers that the inclusion of civics and electoral education in the Australian Curriculum will reach a great number of students and schools.

The AEC and the PEO produce outreach programs and electronic materials available on their websites that can be used in the classrooms and to train teachers.

The Government intends to retain the national electoral education centre in Canberra. The AEC is considering ways to update the national electoral education centre programs and, if possible, increase the capacity of that centre.

Recommendation 9

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.

Response:

Supported in principle. The Government supports the need for appropriately trained and qualified teachers to deliver education, including civics and electoral education to Indigenous Australians.

The Government is working with states and territories to improve the quality of the Australian teaching workforce through the \$550 million over 5 years (2008-09 to 2012-13) *Smarter Schools – Improving Teacher Quality National Partnership* (TQNP)

agreement. Under the TQNP, Australian governments are implementing a range of nationally significant and sustainable reforms targeting critical points in the teacher 'lifecycle' to attract, train, place, develop and retain quality teachers and leaders in our schools and classrooms. Further information on the TQNP agreement can be found at www.deewr.gov.au/smarterschools.

A key reform under the TQNP is the National Professional Standards for Teachers (the Standards), which will promote excellence in the profession. Development and implementation of the Standards is being led by the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) in collaboration with the teaching profession and key stakeholders. The Standards represent an analysis of effective contemporary practice by teaching throughout Australia and are a public statement of what constitutes teacher quality and what teachers need to know and be able to do at different stages across their careers (graduate, proficient, highly accomplished and lead teachers). The Standards include references to 'strategies for teaching Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students' (Standard 1.4) and 'understand and respect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to promote reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians' (Standard 2.4).

The Standards underpin other significant national reforms including nationally consistent teacher registration; accreditation of initial teacher education courses; and certification of highly accomplished and lead teachers. The accreditation of initial teacher education programs, under which all courses will be assessed against national standards, is intended to ensure that graduates are appropriately trained and well prepared to begin their career in the classroom. All graduates must demonstrate that they meet the Graduate level as outlined in the Standards, in order to obtain provisional registration. More information about the Standards and the accreditation proposal can be found at www.aitsl.edu.au.

The Government has also committed an extra \$44.3 million over three years (2009–2010 to 2011–2012) to the Northern Territory to help principals and teachers working in remote schools develop career pathways for Indigenous staff, and significantly improve Indigenous literacy and numeracy outcomes through the Quality Teaching and Enhancing Literacy element of the Closing the Gap National Partnership.

Recommendation 10

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.

Response:

Supported in principle. The Government supports the availability of civics education materials in a range of formats, accessible to audiences of different cultural backgrounds, including Indigenous Australians.

In 2009, the Government provided \$13 million over four years to the AEC to establish the Indigenous Electoral Participation Program (IEPP). The IEPP establishes an internet presence on the AEC's website and has expanded on the material previously available for Indigenous electors: www.aec.gov.au/Voting/indigenous_vote/index.htm. The IEPP website also provides links to other relevant resources and sites as well as access to civics

and education resources developed through the fieldwork program of the IEPP (for example, education and outreach materials designed and used by field officers, multimedia resources).

Recommendation 11

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

Response:

Supported. The AEC reviewed its training packages for polling officials prior to the 2010 federal election. This included a review of training packages for remote mobile polling staff. The training for remote mobile training staff encourages the use of Indigenous interpreters, where appropriate.

In addition, the IEPP will provide cultural awareness training for all AEC staff over the next few years. Some pilot training has already been provided for IEPP field officers and staff in some states.

Recommendation 12

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.

Response:

Supported. The AEC currently translates its communication materials into 31 languages, including 7 Indigenous languages. The AEC is in discussions with the Department of Immigration and Citizenship (DIAC) about these languages and is also in the process of procuring a culturally and linguistically diverse communications consultant to provide advice on the need to alter or expand the mix of languages in which communication materials are provided. Languages for translation, including for advertising, will be considered once this advice has been received, within available resources.

Recommendation 13

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.

Response:

Supported. Following the independent review of the Australian citizenship test, the Government remains committed to the requirement for prospective citizens to possess a basic knowledge of the English language. This is one of the eligibility criteria for the acquisition of Australian citizenship and for the majority of applicants is determined by sitting the citizenship test.

The Department of Immigration and Citizenship (DIAC) encourages new arrivals to participate in the Adult Migrant English Program (AMEP) by the provision of pre-embarkation advice through the Australian Cultural Orientation Program, contact on

arrival by settlement support services funded through the Integrated Humanitarian Settlement Strategy (IHSS) and the Settlement Grants Program (SGP) and the distribution of AMEP promotional materials.

Recommendation 14

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.

Response:

Supported in principle. The Government supports the enrolment of new Australian citizens.

For some years now the Government has produced partially completed enrolment forms with each citizen's certificate which the AEC either collects at the time of the ceremony or follows up to obtain as soon as possible after the ceremony.

The Government response to recommendation 11 of the *JSCEM Report on the conduct of the 2007 federal election and matters related thereto* supported the automatic enrolment of new Australian citizens. The AEC will work with DIAC to implement that recommendation once the necessary legislation is passed

The Australian Citizenship Ceremonies Code provides guidance for ceremony organisers in the formulation of official speeches to express the importance and value of Australian citizenship including voting rights and obligations. The message from the Minister for Immigration and Citizenship, which must be read out at all ceremonies, also includes notions of citizenship.

Recommendation 15

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.

Response:

Supported in principle. DIAC and the AEC have commenced collaboration through the development of the Australian citizenship test resource material and will continue to liaise and identify appropriate and effective means of providing electoral education to new citizens.

Recommendation 16

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.

Response:

Supported in principle. The AEC has commenced discussions with DIAC on collaborating on the development of appropriate resource materials.

The AEC and DIAC are also working together to develop strategies to provide electoral education to migrants through government networks such as Community Liaison Officers who regularly interact with migrant communities.

The AEC School and Community Visits Program (SCVP) already targets the presentation of electoral education sessions by AEC staff directly to Cultural and Linguistic Diverse (CALD) electors. Also, as part of its informality strategy, the AEC piloted a program of training CALD educators to deliver education sessions to CALD electors ahead of the 2010 federal election.

Recommendation 17

The Committee recommends that the Australian Electoral Commission provides a program 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.

Response:

Supported. The AEC has prepared a communication strategy that outlines a range of activities to address formality at the national level (similar to those activities provided for the 2007 federal election at which, for the first time since 1993, there was a decrease in informality). One aspect of the strategy will target electors in high risk areas (for example, voters from non-English speaking backgrounds and those in areas where there are different voting systems in place for State elections). This strategy adopts an educative approach and will be implemented within available resources. It focuses on working with communities to enable the AEC to communicate in a manner relevant to the particular community.

Further, in the lead up to the 2010 federal election, the IEPP employed a number of staff who focused on improving the electoral knowledge and participation of Indigenous electors with the aim of increasing the level of formal voting, enrolment levels and vote turn-out in Indigenous communities. This program aimed to increase the level of formal voting, enrolment levels and voter turn-out in Indigenous communities at the 2010 federal election.