



Submission by

Constitution Education Fund – Australia

to

Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters

Inquiry into Civics and Electoral Education

June 2006

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INTRODUCTION

The Constitution Education Fund – Australia (CEF-A) welcomes the Joint Standing Committee’s Inquiry into Civics and Electoral Education. CEF-A is delighted to make a submission to the Inquiry as a key private provider of civics and electoral education in Australia. We would welcome any opportunity to expand on our submission or provide further information during the hearings phase of the Inquiry.

CEF-A believes that the terms of reference reflect long-standing community concerns regarding the level of knowledge possessed by citizens and permanent residents about our civil society and the electoral process. In addition, the Inquiry’s strong focus on youth, indigenous and migrant community needs respond to perceived shortfalls in current practices and outreach efforts.

The value of sound civics knowledge and an effective exercise of the franchise, given Australia’s internationally respected system of fair and free elections, are highlighted by the sense of urgency expressed by both expert bodies of the past and current Australians in high office:

“We are most concerned at the widespread ignorance of the Constitution and of the major impact it has on life in Australia. We believe there is a real need to educate people in at least its basic scheme and provision. Education in these matters will greatly assist in improving the general appreciation of how our system of democratic government operates.”

Constitution Commission, final report, 1988

“I have always said that, like life, one should feel encouraged to regularly examine the way we do things. And this holds true for the way we are governed. Our present system has worked very well for over 100 years giving us stability of government that is the envy of many other nations.

But having said that, if people want change, then it’s perfectly within their rights to explore that. But in doing so I think it would be wise to have a clear understanding as to why our present system has worked so well; and what have been the mechanisms, including the checks and balances, to ensure that.”

His Excellency Major-General Michael Jeffery, Governor-General of Australia 2005

“Part of preparing young Australians to be informed and active citizens is to teach them the central currents of our nation’s development. “

Prime Minister John Howard, Australia Day address to the National Press Club, January 2006

“At the end of the day, a nation may have endless resources, a brilliant people and splendid technology, but in the absence of a stable system of government, will fail utterly. The Constitution is the greatest asset we have. The more we engage in civilized conversation about it, the better.”

Professor Greg Craven, Professor of Government and Constitutional Law, Curtin University of Technology, CEF-A Foundation Councillor 2004

“Most Australians neither know of, nor respect, the achievement of Edmond Barton, Alfred Deakin and their colleagues who created a nation for a continent... The majority of Australians take our democracy for granted. Perhaps this explains the ignorance of the system of government the founding fathers gave us, demonstrated in a survey of young people reported in The Australian today.

Nearly half the 12 to 25 year olds surveyed either do not think Australia is a democratic country, or have no opinion on our system of government. This is an alarming situation. Australia’s social cohesion relies not on any shared ethnic heritage, but on our universal commitment to shared political and social values. And the most fundamental is that government is possible only with the consent of the people, granted and withdrawn at elections... And with almost half of those surveyed saying they did not study our system of government at school, it is hard to see how they are supposed to learn.

That is the bad news... Certainly the curriculum is crowded. But it is impossible to imagine any issue more important than explaining why we have elections and the political rights and responsibilities that belong to every Australian – which have made the nation Barton and Deakin worked to create one of the oldest, and most successful, democracies in the world”.

The Australian, Editorial, Friday 24 August 2004

“The more Australians who understand the important role played by our Constitution, the stronger we will be as a community.”

Steve Waugh AO, Australian of the Year 2004, CEF-A Supporter.

ABOUT CEF-A

CEF-A was established in the mid 1990s for the purpose of promoting education about and improving awareness of our constitutional heritage and our robust democratic traditions. Since 2004, the fund has conducted a growing number of direct activities in the area of civics and electoral education, research and promotion. CEF-A’s current education outreach involves partnerships with schools, universities, youth organisations and educators across all States and Territories. Our focus is civics and electoral education design, delivery and quality control.

CEF-A's RESEARCH into CIVICS and ELECTORAL EDUCATION in AUSTRALIA

CEF-A has undertaken considerable research since the late 1990s on the nature of civics education and its potential impact on civil society. The gains made by the *Discovering Democracy* initiatives, generously funded by Commonwealth government, will require on-going investment of resources to ensure that most schools utilise these materials and offer challenging contemporary teaching tools.

CEF-A is concerned that the momentum on civics has been lost since the Centenary of Federation period. CEF-A is also concerned that any access to appropriate electoral education occurs far too late for many marginalised Australians – often after citizens have failed to exercise their voting rights for a decade or more.

CEF-A argues that some common themes emerge from both academic research and stakeholder feedback:

- civics is a desirable and topical issue for parents, educators and policy makers
- civics can encompass a very broad range of subject matter from knowledge of governance models to actual skills in the area of human rights protection
- civics is not automatically tied to citizenship education
- civics awareness is not the same as demonstrated abilities to exercise the franchise and associated democratic rights
- there is no agreed community expectation or bureaucratic requirement demanded of young citizens prior to formal enrolment to vote
- comprehensive and effective electoral skills are neither a guaranteed right nor a school system mandated outcome
- innovative and worthwhile initiatives are undertaken by both public and private institutions, organisations and individual contributors
- no easily recognisable national information portal exists to refer educators, parents, youth and the general community to the diversity of existing best practice programs.

JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE ON ELECTORAL MATTERS: INQUIRY INTO CIVICS AND ELECTORAL EDUCATION

CEF-A is pleased to address each of the terms of reference of the inquiry in the order that they appear.

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

There can be little doubt many Australians of all ages are complacently ignorant of the Constitutional arrangements that have influenced the rights and responsibilities that our modern society offers. In particular, the current status of young peoples' knowledge is incredibly poor, as demonstrated in a variety of reports undertaken by current and previous governments over the past 20 years. In addition, CEF-A has conducted its own internal reviews as to the state of Civics Education in Australia.

- In 1998, the Hawke Government's **Constitutional Commission** stated: *"We are most concerned at the wide-spread ignorance of the Constitutional and of the major impact it has on life in Australia. We believe there is a real need to educate people in at least its basic scheme and provision."*
- In June 1994, then Prime Minister Paul Keating appointed the **Civics Expert Group** to conduct a major national survey on the position of Australian government, citizenship and the Constitution in public education. The December 1994 report stated *"...that a major survey conducted on its behalf had revealed widespread ignorance about many aspects of Government and the Constitution. Most Australians, it appears, are not aware that the Parliaments of Australia have a legislative role, nor do they understand the federal system and its history."*
- In January 1995, the **Western Australian Constitutional Committee**, established by then Premier Richard Court, delivered a report on a range of issues relating to the WA State Constitution. The report emphasised that political and civics education is even more important in Australian than in most other countries, because of the highly democratic nature of the Australian Constitution. Subsequently, in October 1997, The Constitutional Centre of WA was established to encourage people to learn about how the Australian political system works and how to participate in it more fully through a regular program of exhibitions, seminars and other events. By 2003-04, annual visitors had exceeded 100,000.
- In 1997 in response to the Civics Expert Group report, the Federal Government initiated the ***Discovering Democracy*** program, which was developed conjointly with State Departments of Education through a body called the Curriculum Corporation, under the auspices of the Federal Government appointed Civics Education Group. Since then, more than \$32 million has been spent on civics material in schools and other activities, including the National Schools Constitutional Convention and the *Discovering Democracy* week.

- The **1998 Constitutional Convention**, under the Howard Government, resulted in vastly increased discussion and interest in Australia's constitutional arrangements, probably more than any time since federation. The process culminated in the 1999 referendum, at which time Australians were asked to decide between retaining the status quo and the alternative republican model of government, as determined at the Constitutional Convention. There was, at this time, universal agreement by all interest groups that Australians needed further education and information on the history and operation of our constitutional arrangements.
- The **Centenary of Federation in 2001** provided some constitutional education and information through programs such as those run by the Constitutional Centenary Foundation. However, many saw the programs provided as not enduring and too specific to interest group agendas, so the Foundation has since closed.
- In 2003, a Commonwealth government sponsored **school survey** found that fewer than 55 percent of young Australians agreed with the statement that "Australia is a democratic country". More than 91 percent of respondents felt they should be taught more about Australia's legal and political system. At one Sydney school, Year 10 students did not know what democracy meant.
- In May 2004, Dr Brendan Nelson, Commonwealth Minister for Education, Science and Training, announced that the ***Discovering Democracy* program would conclude** in June, but \$4.9 million would be available for a further 4 years to maintain the website and other activities. The Federal Government would contribute an additional \$29.7 million in funding over 4 years (2004-08) for a values education program.
- The August 2004 Senate Committee Report of the Legal and Constitutional References Committee highlighted the need for enhanced civics education, having received a "...considerable amount of evidence of a **general lack of understanding in the Australian community of our Constitution and the system of government**". On the subject of future proposed constitutional reform..."*the Committee recognises that, in order for the process to be fully democratic, **informed participation** is required. The Committee considers that constitutional awareness and education is the key to effective participation in any proposed constitutional reform.*"
- Most recently, in December 2004, the **Australian Electoral Commission's Youth Electoral Study** report was released – part one of a four year nationwide program investigating young people's voting behaviour. The survey of more than 4,600 secondary students found large numbers of non-participating youth, which has obvious implications on the effectiveness and representativeness of our political system. The report states that the continuation of this trend is problematic for the future viability of the Australian democratic political system. The challenge emerged to find meaningful ways to engage young Australians more constructively to instil in them a desire to participate in the political system. Again, education was identified as a key solution..."*schools and the media have the opportunity to perform a more prominent role in preparing Australia's youth to be engaged citizens.*"

Young Australians have been failed by their political leaders and educators for several decades in the area of civics education, preparation for citizenship responsibilities and their awareness of the mechanics of the electoral system. This is neither a reflection of their ignorance regarding the workings of power or their awareness of global issues such as poverty, economics or the environment.

However, CEF-A has noted that the level of confidence, skill and passion exhibited by young people (broadly speaking those currently aged below 30 and most importantly those in the first ten years of their formal voting life) towards the Australian political process has diminished over the past two decades. This has been evident in terms of voter enrolment, voter participation, assessed rates of informal voting and levels of direct formal engagement in party political life.

Important recent events in young Australians' civil society experience (i.e. the 1999 referenda votes and the comprehensive Centenary of Federation celebrations of 2001) appear to have provoked minimal if any response from this cohort of voters.

The divisive debates in the lead up to the 1999 republic referendum and preamble appear to have registered little with what might have been seen as a most impressionable generation of young adults.

Similarly, the muted response from youth over federalism, in contrast to strong youth respect for and interest in the complex myths of ANZAC, suggest a generation that has failed to grasp the worth of a century of consistent democratic success and reformist electoral policies.

2. The nature of civics education and its links with electoral education;

CEF-A notes that the core elements of most civics education curricula is an understanding of how we are governed and what processes underpin both leadership selection and accountability in our civil society.

The global perspective offered by many educators, with a focus on issues that transcend national barriers such as human rights and the role of bodies such as the United Nations, is a relevant preparation for economic and social life after school.

However, the less fashionable but equally important study of national institutions, national political leaderships, existing constitutional arrangements, law making procedures and Australia's proud heritage in electoral reform appear to have been given less prominence than what they deserve.

Preparing young Australians to first understand and subsequently participate effectively in the political process is a policy priority. An awareness of those pillars of democracy which underpin our national civic culture such as the rule of law, our long-standing parliamentary heritage, our civil liberties and the ways in which they are protected all have an important role in any format of electoral education.

All activities of a civics education nature should address the fundamental skills requirement asked of participants in the democratic process. Knowledge of and debate as to the way decisions are taken in civil society, with the accompanying issues of special interest group influence, are valid civics education objectives. Similarly, strong and integrated links to formal electoral education and associated skills development should be a natural ingredient of any national civics commitment.

3. *The content and adequacy of electoral education in government and non-government school programs of study, as well as in TAFE colleges and universities;*

CEF-A's general preference is for the content of electoral education to be far more skills-based to encourage a real and effective engagement with current electoral practices. We note that there are a number of leading expert commentators on civics and values based education. One leading commentator, Kevin Donnelly, has identified a number of potential deficiencies with current education approaches to values-based education. One leading institution, the Constitutional Centre of Western Australia, superbly addresses some of the skills-based concerns we have with prevailing civics and electoral education.

Via our involvement with the Governor-General's Award Program, a national essay competition dealing with constitutional and public policy issues, we are aware that many students exhibit a guarded disinterest in the democratic process.

CEF-A endorses a compulsory national school-conducted testing and assessment regime for civics and electoral knowledge and skills. Greater attention to the skills required to effectively participate in the political process, as a voter, candidate or member of an interest group is warranted. Completing more than ten years of compulsory school education without attaining the minimum threshold of civics knowledge or effective skills to exercise the franchise is an unacceptable outcome.

The very citizens and communities with the most to achieve through the successful Australian mechanisms of free and fair elections are often those with the least effective levels of knowledge, confidence or skills in political participation.

We seek to prepare our young adults for intimate adult relationships, working life and the demands of a multiracial and culturally diverse society. At the same time, we as a society appear to have made limited efforts to prepare those same young adults for their electoral responsibilities.

Gaining a driver's licence is a right of passage for so many young Australians in the age group 17-19. Gaining the skills to effectively play a role in our democracy is not regarded as an equally important social, cultural or economic achievement. If we give the political franchise low status – it will remain an afterthought or poorly regarded civil right. Australian citizenship, by birth or by direct application, should confer a powerful raft of privileges associated with equally valued responsibilities.

If you need to attend drivers' education classes to operate a motor vehicle, you equally require skill-based tuition to operate effectively in a democracy.

4. *The school age at which electoral education should begin;*

CEF-A believes that electoral education should begin as early as the age of eight, as we believe a Year 5 student is capable of handling the complex materials associated with carefully prepared civics and electoral education.

CEF-A has demonstrated some experience in this area through its *Democracy in Schools Program* in 2005 where it was able to successfully support learning outcomes with 350 students aged 8-10, of mixed demography and competencies, on relatively advanced civics and electoral materials.

CEF-A's experience in school-based projects and the general professional literature suggest that many students as young as eight are capable of beginning a sound journey of skills development in these areas.

Class, group and individual tuition approaches should be implemented to bring all (or at the very least 85%), of the national cohort students to a level of accomplishment in those identified skills necessary to underpin further studies.

Electoral education is more than just names of eminent persons or dates of importance. The civil society that we seek, at present, to protect from unwanted influences of bigotry, racism, politically inspired violence or fundamental intolerance requires strong foundations in civics. Electoral participation warrants better introduction to the electoral processes at an early age.

Civics education exposure to electoral/democratic practice tuition or role-plays is just one simple but practical responsibility of government. Models of both consensus and competitive decision making must be experienced, examined and evaluated if today's eight year old is to successfully evolve into a confident eighteen year old, first time voter.

5. The potential to increase electoral knowledge through outside school programs;

CEF-A is 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.

CEF-A also supports a number of organisations that provide extremely good school related civics initiatives, including the YMCA in the various States running Youth Parliament programmes, and Don Perna from St Joseph's High School in Albion Park who has successfully launched a *Parliamentary Club* within his school, and now hopes to extend the movement to other school communities. Both of these initiatives engage young people in the concepts surrounding elections, voting, representation and the essence of democracy.

CEF-A is adamant that out-of-school activity, in addition to specific school-organised extra curricula activities, is a sound response to the desirability of enhanced electoral knowledge. Educators would be the first to suggest that you cannot put even more into the crowded curriculum without compensatory adjustments. CEF-A would support more involvement, with commensurate resource assistance from government, by non-partisan private education organisations to meet the out-of-school policy objectives.

The advent of emerging technology whereby the majority of young Australians have school, home or community access to web-based information should be seen as a great bonus. The value of non-electronic delivery of civics and electoral education, often associated with leadership or personal development programs, should not be discounted.

However, an interactive non-partisan and community respected portal, supported by the public purse but not seen as beholden to any or all governments, is a first step towards making electoral information accessible, equitable and user friendly.

6. *The adequacy of electoral education in indigenous communities;*

CEF-A believes that greater steps should be taken to provide indigenous communities with better civics and electoral education, and that the way is to teach it in a manner which reflects the nature of the indigenous community, while using a model they can educationally support and resource. CEF-A achieved this in 2005 by bringing indigenous school students from Yirrara College in Kintore, a remote locality of Central Australia, to Canberra as part of our *Democracy in Schools* program. 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.

The experience of other nations with similar histories of settlement and colonisation, such as New Zealand and Canada, should be looked at for potential models of electoral and civics education.

The work of the Dominion Institute, based in Ontario Canada, is worthy of detailed analysis. The ability of many Canadians to cherish a strong pride in indigenous governance traditions is well documented. However, this is not at the expense of the respect for, analysis and assessment of, prevailing constitutional traditions both British and French in origin. CEF-A would welcome addressing the Inquiry on aspects of our interface with indigenous communities.

7. *The adequacy of electoral education of migrant citizens;*

CEF-A notes the significant national interest implications arising from poorly targeted or inadequately resourced civics and electoral education aimed at new arrivals, new citizens or permanent residents. CEF-A, in our own projects to date, has incorporated a strong commitment to developing civics and electoral curricula relevant to migrant citizens.

Any civics and electoral education outreach should make particular allowance for the diversity of country of origin, previous exposure to political institutions and general level of disengagement expressed by many migrant citizens. New arrivals often exhibit a marked preference towards skills attainment, housing stability and economic advancement in preference to political activism or electoral participation.

CEF-A's current programs involve students and youth drawn from diverse socio-economic demographics, with varying levels of English language fluency. CEF-A also notes the importance of addressing questions of cultural, social and religious traditions towards governance in any analysis of contemporary Australia.

CEF-A has experienced solid evidence that young Australians, regardless of ethnic, cultural or religious diversity, overwhelmingly identify as Australians and exhibit a strong commitment to the liberal democratic virtues of contemporary political values.

8. The Role of the Australian Electoral Commission and State and Territory Electoral Commissions in promoting electoral education;

CEF-A recognises the AEC as having the role of running federal elections and having the primary responsibility of educating all Australians on the nature of the Australian electoral process. We see the Commission and its State and Territory counterparts as vital and well resourced participants in any national commitment towards improved community education.

CEF-A and other private and public bodies have a role, in partnership with the AEC, to supplement current outreach programs run by the Commission. We would envisage that private bodies such as ours have a role to play in reaching the more marginalised elements within the youth, migrant and indigenous sectors.

9. The Role of Federal, State and Local Governments in promoting electoral education;

CEF-A is of the view that Governments at all levels have a large and prominent role to play in providing funding to resource Democracy and Constitution Centres in their own jurisdictions. This would play a vital role in providing access to quality civics education to every Australian citizen – with particular value to those residing in regional, remote and rural localities.

CEF-A fully supports the Commonwealth Government's recent initiative to establish a Gallery of Australian Democracy at Old Parliament House, Canberra.

10. The access to, and adequacy of funding for, school visits to the Federal Parliament;

CEF-A recognises the importance of providing parliamentary education, and strongly values the work done by Parliamentary education offices associated with the various State, Territory and Federal legislatures.

CEF-A's own most satisfactory experience with the relevant units in Queensland, the Northern Territory and New South Wales is testament to the excellence and non-partisan approach achieved by these organisations.

CEF-A sees significant benefit from increased private and public interface regarding future civics and electoral education. Governments would be short-sighted to restrict resource commitments to purely public entities involved in education outreach. Many innovative programs such as the YMCA Youth Parliaments owe greatly to their community and grass-roots links.

11. 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.

CEF-A believes Australia can learn a lot from some of the private sector organisations of a number of named countries, some of which receive their own government's support and funding.

CEF-A is particularly interested in some of Canada's private sector approaches, including the Dominion Institute. CEF-A believes that Canada is a country with a very similar democratic tradition to our own, yet it seems to provide better measures for the education of its citizens.

CONCLUSION

The gap in community education in Australia about our Constitution and democracy is a concern for many. The Constitution Education Fund – Australia (CEF-A) is actively working toward filling this gap with its outreach programmes. CEF-A would also advocate greater Australian involvement in promoting international democracy.

In addition, the civics education enhancement programs already being conducted by CEF-A would complement other civics education initiatives already occurring across Australia, including CEF-A's existing Governor-General's Awards Program. Other worthy outreach activities include the various YMCA Youth Parliaments, State and National Constitutional Law Moots, community leadership development projects, the various Commonwealth Government Values and Civics Education projects and State/Territory based civic education efforts and competitions.

CEF-A would be grateful for the opportunity to appear before the Joint Standing Committee in order to elaborate on its programs, current and future, and to discuss the possibilities for other improvements in Australian and international civic and electoral education not otherwise stated here.

APPENDIX A: CEF-A BACKGROUND INFORMATION

WHO IS BEHIND THE FUND

CEF-A, established in October 1995, is an education trust aimed at strengthening the understanding by all Australians of the history and operation of the Australian Constitution and the Constitutions of the States of Australia.

The Australian Constitution is the foundation of our system of government. It enshrines our freedoms and is central to our national unity. It is a highly democratic people's constitution. It belongs to all Australians and only the people can change it. It is a proud document that reflects our nation's commitment to democracy, universal suffrage and equality.

In the 1990s, Australians undertook a significant debate about our constitutional arrangements. While the debate focused on whether Australia should remain a constitutional monarchy or become a republic, the fundamental question asked was 'what is the nature of our present system of government?'

Both sides publicly acknowledged that there was a profound lack of understanding of our Constitution among Australians from all regions and backgrounds. Fundamental to this was the need to strengthen our national education on constitutional matters.

CEF-A is committed to developing educational initiatives to meet recognised civics and electoral education needs. Our work in recent years has included the Governor-General's Award Program with a diverse set of education outreach projects. CEF-A has also advocated for the establishment of an interactive Gallery of Australian Democracy which will in turn develop programmes and materials to promote knowledge and understanding of the Constitution.

CEF-A enjoys the patronage and endorsement of the Governor-General in its national activities. State activities, for example our various New South Wales based projects, enjoy the patronage and support of the relevant State Governor.

Our work is supported by a Foundation Council comprised of notable Australians, many of whom were prominent on both sides of the 1990s constitutional debate.

Foundation Council:

- Emeritus Professor Geoffrey **Blainey** AC
- Emeritus Professor Geoffrey **Bolton** AO
- Dr Kym **Bonython** AC DFC AFC
- Professor Greg **Craven**
- Dr John **Hirst**
- Major General Digger **James** AC MBE MC (Rtd)
- Associate Professor Gregory **Melleuish**
- Mr Hugh **Morgan** AC
- Dame Elisabeth **Murdoch** AC DBE
- Lady Primrose **Potter** AC
- Sir David **Smith** KCVO AO

The Hon. Sir Laurence **Street** AC KCMG QC

The Hon. Lloyd **Waddy** RFD

Professor George **Williams**

CEF-A is governed by a Board of Trustees. The Board of Trustees is responsible for the overall direction and performance of CEF-A.

Trustees:

Mrs Joy **Chambers-Grundy**

Professor David **Flint** AM

The Hon Sir Guy **Green** AC KBE CVO

Dame Leonie **Kramer** AC DBE

The Hon. Barry **O’Keefe** AM QC

Lady Primrose **Potter** AC

Professor George **Winterton**

The CEF-A Board of Trustees has principal responsibility for fundraising, strategic direction and oversight regarding the Governor General’s Awards Program. Under the chairmanship of the Honourable Barry O’Keefe, CEF-A meets all governance and compliance requirements commensurate with its statutory obligations as a tax deductible trust. CEF-A was awarded tax deductibility status on June 29th, 2003.

Executive Director, Mrs Kerry Jones BMus Dip Ed MEdAdmin has an extensive executive and management background in education, political science, the arts and health and community services. In the 1999 Referendum she chaired the Federal Government’s ‘No Case’ Committee.

Deputy Executive Director, Mr Noel Hadjimichael BEc, MPP, LLB (Hons) has an extensive project management and teaching background in education, curricula design, corporate government relations and law. He currently teaches law at the University of Western Sydney.

**Governor-General’s
Awards Programme
Launch 2004**

Chief Justice Murray **Gleeson** AC

**Award Judges
2004/2007:**

The Hon Sir Guy **Green** AC KBE CVO

The Hon Justice J D **Heydon** AC

Professor George **Winterton**

The Hon Justice Ian **Callinan** AC

Dr John **Hirst**

The Hon Justice Susan **Crennan** and

The Hon Justice Michael **Kirby** AC CMG

The national secretariat is located in Sydney.

CEF-A PROGRAMMES 2006

To encourage young Australians and our future leaders to better understand Australia's Constitution, the Constitution Education Fund – Australia (CEF-A), under the patronage of the Governor General, His Excellency Major General Michael Jeffery, AC CVO MC, established an annual competition appropriately named the Governor General's Award Program.

Launched in 2004, the Program is designed to challenge young Australians to explore and better understand the way we are governed and in doing so, gain a better appreciation of the value of democracy and the rule of law in Australia.

When fully funded, the Program will consist of competitions for different age groups, ranging from primary school to tertiary level, requiring students to demonstrate their knowledge of various aspects of the Australian system of government and of constitutional history.

In the future, competitions will take different forms, appropriate to the age level, including public speaking, role play, web page design, essay writing and script writing or other innovative ways that capture the imagination and interest of entrants. Awards will include individual and school scholarships and research honoraria.

The initial Undergraduate Award of \$33,000 was launched by Chief Justice Murray Gleeson on 20 August 2004 and culminated in a reception for award winners hosted by the Governor-General and Mrs Jeffery at Government House, Canberra, on 28 January 2005. The demanding topics tackled for the 2004 awards included:

- codification of responsible government
- federalism in Australia and Canada
- terrorism and preventative detention
- history of constitutional reform
- resolving constitutional crises

The Gold Medal scholarship (worth \$20,000) for 2004 was won by a Monash University student with an essay entitled "Appointment of a Prime Minister in a Hung Parliament". Judges considered his understanding of the Governor-General's reserve powers in a constitutional crisis a "thoughtful and clear analysis".

Funding has allowed a pilot programme for primary schools to be concluded. More than 350 students from 13 schools, drawn from all states and territories were involved. Students in our pilot come from culturally diverse backgrounds ranging from traditional indigenous communities in the Northern Territory to Sydney's established Islamic communities.

Further awards will be developed as funds are raised. Ideas include scholarships for indigenous and Pacific rim future leaders, citizenship awards and first voter encouragement projects, as well as fellowships on constitutional matters.

CEF-A, as at May 2006, has developed six separate programs designed to engage young Australians with their democratic heritage. Designed to promote both educational and personal development objectives, these programs offer six distinct opportunities between the ages of eight and eighteen. They are also designed to complement existing school, community and not-for-profit sector activities in the areas of civics education, public speaking, technology and decision-making skills.

Democracy In Schools

In its second year, this programme seeks to engage students in upper primary cohorts (Years 5 to 7 depending on the State) to discover the challenges of the five pillars of Australian Democracy (rule of law, parliamentary sovereignty, federal power sharing, rights and responsibilities, democratic traditions).

Elected Life

Designed to build a close relationship between participating school communities and elected representatives, this program offers a fresh approach to the teaching of civics with maximum use of web-based tools, fact sheets and in-class role plays.

Governor's Civic and Citizenship Challenge

Commenced in NSW in 2006, with the other States to follow, this program entices leading public speaking students to grapple with exciting themes relating to civics, citizenship and leadership. With both a research and presentation perspective, this outreach project offers a comprehensive intellectual challenge.

Young Parliamentarians

Set to launch in various regions across Australia in late 2006 and early 2007, this project promotes student decision-making and teamwork skills. Inspired by successful grass-roots models, developed by school communities and other organisations, this program seeks to build a culture of democratic practice amongst senior high school students.

First Voter

Commenced in Queensland in 2006, with other States to follow, this program brings together young adults from the ages of 16 – 19 (with potential expansion to those aged in their mid 20s) from all walks of life. Each participant is challenged to discover and test their knowledge regarding Australian history, society and politics. This project is designed to bolster awareness of the Australian electoral system and generate interest in youth exercising the vote.

Governor General's Award Program

CEF-A's inaugural project, the national essay competition offers students who excel in law, political science or the humanities an opportunity to write an essay on constitutional questions relevant to Australian democracy. With national finalists required to pass an interview by an eminent panel, inclusive of a Justice of the High Court, the winners share in over \$20,000 in prizes. A network of more than 150 academics and educators across more than 30 University campuses serve as CEF-A's promotional partners in this prestigious program.