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JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE ON

ELECTORAL MATTERS

Monday, 7 August 2006

Members: Mr Lindsay *(Chair)*, Mr Danby *(Deputy Chair)*, Senators Brandis, Carr, Hogg, Mason and Murray and Mr Ciobo, Mr Griffin and Mrs Mirabella

Members in attendance: Senators Carr, Hogg and Mason and Mr Ciobo, Mr Danby, Mr Lindsay and Mrs Mirabella

Terms of reference for the inquiry:

To inquire into and report on:

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.

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Committee met at 8.48 am

CHAIR (Mr Lindsay)—I declare open this public hearing of the Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters inquiry into civics and electoral education. The inquiry was referred by the Special Minister of State, Gary Nairn, on 24 March. To date we have received over 100 submissions from various parts of Australia and from a broad range of groups and individuals, including teachers and schools; federal, state and territory parliaments; electoral commissions; academics; and governments. Copies of the submissions are available on the committee's website.

We are looking forward to today's hearings. We are certainly interested in finding better ways of inspiring and engaging young people in Australia's electoral process. Today we are hearing from the Department of Education, Science and Training, the Department of the Senate, the Department of the House of Representatives, the Australian Electoral Commission, Dr Murray Print and Dr Lawrence Saha from the Youth Electoral Study, and the Constitution Education Fund Australia.

I remind witnesses that, although the committee does not require you to give evidence under oath, this hearing is a legal proceeding of the parliament and warrants the same respect as the proceedings of the respective houses. The giving of false or misleading evidence is a serious matter and may be regarded as contempt of parliament. The evidence given today will be recorded by Hansard and will attract parliamentary privilege.

[8.50 am]

O'CONNELL, Dr Declan Patrick, Acting Director, Australian History, Quality Schooling Branch, Department of Education, Science and Training

SIMPSON, Mr Noel Robert, Branch Manager, Quality Schooling Branch, Department of Education, Science and Training

CHAIR—I welcome Mr Noel Simpson and Dr Declan O'Connell, representatives of the Department of Education, Science and Training. It is customary for witnesses to make a short opening statement if they wish before the committee proceeds to questions. Would you like that opportunity?

Mr Simpson—I would just like to give an update on our submission. We made reference in that submission to the new development of what are called statements of learning, which are really consistent curricula for Australian schools. We said that they were draft. As of the end of last week, those statements of learning have been signed off by all ministers of education, so they are now formally approved. One of those statements of learning is in civics and citizenship education, which encompasses electoral education. They are statements of learning at the end of years 3, 5, 7 and 9. They outline the challenging opportunities to learn in those areas that all students in Australia should have access to. They must be implemented in all states and territories from the end of next year, so from the beginning of 2008 they will be implemented for all states and territories.

Dr O'Connell—In relation to what Mr Simpson just said, a summary of the drafts was provided on pages 10 to 12 of our submission. We will be able to provide the full statements now that they have been signed off by all ministers.

CHAIR—You put in a great submission. Mind you, you are the key department in relation to this. We will move to questions.

Senator CARR—Could the officers tell me about the Citizenship Visits Program and the reasons for the decision to transfer the Citizenship Visits Program to DEST.

Mr Simpson—The Citizenship Visits Program in this year's budget was amalgamated with a program that DEST was already running, the education travel rebate program. As I understand it, representations were made to government, from schools in particular, that there was some confusion because there were two travel rebate schemes. The CVP focused on students travelling long distances and the ETR focused on students coming from closer. That was one issue.

The other issue was that, as I mentioned at the beginning, civics and citizenship education has now become a major national priority for Australian schooling. It is one of only five areas that have been considered for these national statements of learning and also for national assessment. In recognition of the priority that is now to be given to civics and citizenship education, it was felt that it was important to extend the opportunities to students to visit the national capital, in particular to come to Parliament House, to come to Old Parliament House and to come to the War Memorial, so the funding that previously existed for the ETR and the CVP combined has been doubled and guaranteed for the next four years. There is now funding of $16.3 million over the next four years for this parliament and civics education rebate program, the PACER program.

The rebates that are available for students to come to the national capital have been increased by an average of about 15 per cent. There is more opportunity for students to participate in this form of civics and citizenship education by visiting the national capital.

Senator CARR—Who made the decision to amalgamate these programs?

Mr Simpson—It was a government decision in the budget.

Senator CARR—It was made by the Prime Minister's office, wasn't it?

Mr Simpson—It was a decision announced by the government in the budget.

Senator CARR—I have here a letter from the Prime Minister to the President of the Senate dated 24 February. It is budget in confidence. He says:

My view remains that there this is a strong argument to combine the CVP and the Civics Education Travel Rebate programme administered by the Department of Education, Science and Training. I have therefore asked the Minister for Education, Science and Training, the Hon Julie Bishop MP, to work with you to develop an outline of a joint proposal for my consideration before proceeding to the Expenditure Review Committee.

It seems to me that this was a program that had two parts. It was administered by the departments of the parliament, in part.

Mr Simpson—The CVP.

Senator CARR—And partly by the department of education. Was there any consultation with DEST about this matter before that letter was sent on 24 February?

Mr Simpson—The issue has been around for the last couple of years, so there has certainly been quite wide-ranging consultation over the last couple of years. As I say, there were two drivers: first, that civics and citizenship education has been assuming a greater national priority, and therefore measures were looked at to support that—

Senator CARR—I do understand that. I am not unfamiliar with these questions. I just ask the question again. First of all, were you consulted about the change or was it an edict from the Prime Minister's office? I will go to the second question—about who you consulted—in a moment, but if I could get an answer to the first question I would appreciate it.

Mr Simpson—There have been discussions over quite a lengthy period of time.

Senator CARR—Who did you specifically speak to about the amalgamation of these programs, and on what dates did you do that?

Mr Simpson—I do not have that level of detail.

Senator CARR—When I say 'you', I mean the department, of course.

Mr Simpson—Yes. I do not have the level of detail about the dates, but certainly there was consultation, again over quite a lengthy period of time, with the offices of the President of the Senate and the Speaker of the House of Representatives in looking at possible proposals for amalgamation.

Senator CARR—Can I have the dates for those consultations?

Mr Simpson—I do not have those. Is that a question on notice?

Senator CARR—I guess that is how it works if you cannot answer the question now.

CHAIR—Yes. Senator Hogg and Senator Mason indicate agreement.

Senator CARR—Were there any evaluations of the effectiveness of the parliamentary departments' administration of the subsidy program?

Mr Simpson—I am not aware of any formal evaluation of that, no.

Senator CARR—Were there any evaluations of the nature of the parliamentary departments' administration of the program?

Mr Simpson—Not formal evaluations, no.

Senator CARR—So it was effectively a decision taken outside the parliamentary departments.

Mr Simpson—It was a decision taken by government, yes.

Senator CARR—Have any concerns been raised with the department of education about the appropriateness of a civics education program being administered by a department of state as distinct from the departments of the parliament in terms of the operations of the parliament itself?

Mr Simpson—Not at all. As you know, DEST has been running the civics and citizenship education program since 1997, so it is a longstanding program.

Senator CARR—That is true, and of course the departments of the parliament have been operating a program for a very long period of time too—a program about the operations of the parliament. Have there been any discussions or has there been any liaison with the offices of the Serjeant-at-Arms or the Black Rod about the practical detail of the PACER program?

Mr Simpson—Yes, considerable liaison about that—and continuing liaison.

Senator CARR—Is it true that under the new program school groups can attract a subsidy even if they do not visit Parliament House?

Mr Simpson—No, that is not correct. Under the guidelines for the PACER program, students must make three visits in order for the schools to be eligible for the rebate. They are to Parliament House, Old Parliament House and the War Memorial.

Senator CARR—Is it true that the ETR program is a payment to visit Canberra as a tourist?

Mr Simpson—No, that is certainly not correct. The education travel rebate program, as it says, was for education purposes, and in particular for civics and citizenship education purposes. There were quite stringent conditions attached to that in terms of schools preparing civics and citizenship education activities and also the visits that they needed to make in order to receive that rebate.

Senator CARR—That is the view of the President of the Senate and the Speaker of the House of Representatives in a letter to you of 9 March. Is that right? Is that the view they put to you—that the ETR program is a payment to visit Canberra as a tourist?

Mr Simpson—I did see that, yes.

Senator CARR—Did you write back to them and tell them they were wrong?

Mr Simpson—I believe that did occur, yes.

Senator CARR—Is it your view now that it is appropriate—I suppose that is difficult for an officer to answer. At what point was there discussion about appropriateness for party political neutrality of the CVP to be protected?

Mr Simpson—All I can say is that there were considerable discussions in the lead-up to the budget about the nature of the proposal to establish PACER.

Senator CARR—It has been put to me that there are some concerns that, if we have a department of state such as yours running a program of this nature, the party political neutrality of this program at some point could be brought into question. Has that ever been raised with you before?

Mr Simpson—No. I suppose I have heard some comments like that raised. They were some of the comments that were raised when the civics and citizenship education program began back in the mid-1990s. You might recall that it was initially to be begun under the Labor government in 1995. Then, when government changed in 1996, the program continued. I believe it has been a very successful program. It has been one that has been scrutinised from all quarters. It is certainly not seen to be partisan at all. It is seen to be a high-quality program.

CHAIR—Can I just point out that we have a little less than half an hour left, and other members want to ask questions.

Senator CARR—I understand that. I have two questions on this matter. Can I ask you about the adequacy of the rebate. I have the list from your submission—the schedule that you are operating on—so you do not need to go through that again. Have you received comment about the adequacy of the rebate, particularly for school groups from rural and remote areas?

Mr Simpson—Schools will say that the rebate is never high enough. They would always appreciate more. But what happened in the last budget was an increase in every category of the rebate—and, most of all, in the ones for schools from rural and remote areas. As you say, it now goes up to $260 per student.

Senator CARR—So you have had no comment about the adequacy of the—

Mr Simpson—In fact, we have had appreciation of the increase in the rebate.

Senator CARR—So only congratulations.

Mr Simpson—Well, no. As I said at the beginning, schools will always say that they would like much more.

Senator CARR—Can you give me an indication of the comments you have received about the program. Are you able to give me any evaluation?

Mr Simpson—There is nothing formal. Those are just comments we would hear in passing from the organisers.

Senator CARR—What is the situation—

CHAIR—Senator Carr, you have had three questions more; you said there were only two more. This is your last question.

Senator CARR—with the funding for special needs students?

Mr Simpson—The funding is available for all students.

Senator CARR—Yes, I understand that—but the adequacy of the funding for special needs students?

Mr Simpson—The funding is set out simply on a per capita basis.

Senator HOGG—Just following on from there: what sort of funding would exist for places such as Warburton? We—the committee—visited Warburton as part of this inquiry. It seemed to me that the students in Warburton have absolutely no hope whatsoever of accessing this program.

Mr Simpson—They are certainly eligible to use it, but, as you say—

Senator HOGG—They might be eligible, but there is a difference between being eligible and turning the eligibility into a reality when one deals with remote communities such as Warburton. Is there no funding available on a special needs basis to cater for communities such as that? I can think of other communities as remote as Warburton in Western Australia and in other parts of Australia as well.

Mr Simpson—This is the funding that government has made available. As I said, it was a doubling of the funding that was previously available, so it has certainly been a significant increase.

Senator HOGG—Whilst there has been a significant increase, has there been any request for special funding to be quarantined for those schools, those students, who are in not just rural areas but quite remote areas where, whilst accessing the funding is theoretically possible, the practicalities are just not there? Have there been requests for that? If so—

Mr Simpson—I do not believe so. The number of categories was also expanded to eight in order to try and reflect the increasing costs with increasing distance. That was another feature of the changes that occurred in this year's budget.

Senator HOGG—Has any analysis been done in the past of those remote areas such as Warburton and how often they access the program, or can you give us some idea of how often?

Mr Simpson—I have not seen that data. It probably would be available, I imagine, if we requested it. I have not seen it.

Senator HOGG—Could you therefore take on notice from me some sort of analysis of the accessing by remote communities of the program in the last 12 months. Also, could you take on notice as well any submissions that may have been made by state or territory ministers for accessing the program for their remote communities.

Mr Simpson—I shall do that.

CHAIR—Gentlemen, further to Senator Hogg's points: last week the committee conducted forums in Central Australia. We found that students who had been to Canberra said that, universally, it improved their knowledge of civics and electoral matters, it gave them an increasing awareness, and it was an experience which they thought that every Australian student should have the opportunity to have. You have given evidence today that there is an opportunity, but Senator Hogg's point is that people from very remote parts of Australia really do not have a lot of hope of getting here. The way you can measure that is by the number of school visits that this place gets from close-in schools compared to the pro rata number from more distant areas. Have you taken that into account in determining what the subsidies would be? Does it concern you that not enough students come here to Canberra from the remote parts of Australia?

Mr Simpson—I believe that was taken into account in the new budget measure, as I said, and I am sure that is what lay behind the doubling of the expenditure on this area.

CHAIR—Do you agree that every student would benefit by coming to Canberra, if that were possible?

Mr Simpson—There is no doubt that students benefit from coming. This is simply a rebate to assist schools and students to visit. It never set out to say that it would cover the full costs of that. I guess it is a decision for government how much of a rebate it offers.

CHAIR—Let me declare my conflict of interest: I come from a place that is over 2,000 kilometres from Canberra. I might see three schools a year from my electorate; whereas somebody from Sydney might see 30 schools a year from their electorate. Does that concern the department?

Mr Simpson—That figured very much in the discussions about the preparation of this budget measure. To increase the funding available was very much a live issue. That certainly lay behind the increasing of the number of categories and the increase in the subsidies available for students coming longer distances.

CHAIR—Would your advice to the committee be that further work needs to be done to improve the number of students who come from the more remote areas of Australia?

Mr Simpson—I think there is no doubt whatsoever that as much assistance as government can provide is useful in that respect.

CHAIR—Thank you.

Senator MASON—Mr Simpson, I think you said before by way of background that the department has developed a national curriculum in civics and citizenship. Indeed, I think you mentioned that it was one of five priority areas that the government had nominated. Is that right?

Mr Simpson—Not quite. I must choose my words very carefully here, given the constitutional responsibility of the states in matters of school education. Those statements of learning have been developed jointly through MCEETYA by the states and territories and the Australian government. They are certainly not developed by the Australian government; they are developed jointly through the ministerial council. That is one point. The other point is that—

Senator MASON—Is it a uniform curriculum?

Mr Simpson—Yes, these statements of learning are to be implemented across the country. Let me go a little further and say that what they represent is the core curriculum opportunities that all students are to be given. They do not represent the totality of the curriculum. So states and territories certainly have the option of adding their own items around that core.

Senator MASON—So the outlying states can remain slightly provincial?

Mr Simpson—States may well want to add their own take on any of these areas, including civics and citizenship education. The other aspect of the implementation is that it is a requirement of Australian government funding to state and territory education authorities that these statements of learning are implemented from the end of next year. Again, states and territories may well do that in different ways. The requirement from the Australian government will be that they either take the statements of learning as they are written and put them into their own curriculum documents or take them and provide a map to show exactly how the statements of learning fit into their existing curriculum documents, and they will provide that map to the Australian minister for approval at the beginning of 2008.

Senator MASON—But, largely, it is fair to say that there is a common core component throughout the Federation with room for manoeuvrability for different cultural predilections?

Mr Simpson—Yes. This is the first time that there has actually been a common curriculum language across the states that will be implemented in these five key areas. They are English, maths, science, civics and citizenship and ICT.

Senator MASON—What was the last one?

Mr Simpson—ICT—information and communication technologies.

Senator MASON—It was not around when I was at school!

CHAIR—It wasn't that long ago.

Senator MASON—It was a long time ago. Chair, do we have copies of all those common statements?

CHAIR—No.

Mr Simpson—As I said, they were approved last week.

Dr O'Connell—There are extracts from it in the submission we have just copied.

Senator MASON—These are the extracts.

Dr O'Connell—Yes, it has only just been approved.

Senator MASON—I have a couple of questions about particular aspects relating to the curriculum. Page 4 of your submission says, 'The nature of civics education and its links with electoral education.' That sounds to me like a functional or institutional description. It is about how elections work, how Federation works and so forth, and that is terrific. Do you try to celebrate democracy or simply explain how it works?

Mr Simpson—That is interesting. In 2004 the Australian government's funding contribution to a civics and citizenship education program was reduced. That was done on the basis that, once there was national agreement with the states and territories to take this on as a priority, it was seen as an achievement of a policy objective in a sense, because if you track back the history of civics and citizenship education you will find that it practically disappeared in Australian schools in about the 1970s and that it did not really start to reappear until the mid-1990s. But once the states and territories agreed to make this a priority the Australian government, which had been running a fairly considerable program since the mid-1990s of producing curriculum resources and providing professional development for teachers, backed off a bit, but it continues to run a program at about $1 million a year.

One of the key aspects of that is to have each year a Celebrating Democracy Week. So it is exactly what you are saying: it is not just to explain but also to celebrate. That week occurs in about October of each year—I do not have the exact dates for this year; I do not know whether Dr O'Connell does—and it is an opportunity for schools to showcase to their local communities what they are doing in democracy education and in civics and citizenship education. We provide small grants to schools to enable them to do that. We also fund a national forum for year 9 and 10 students to come to Canberra and participate in a national 'Every voice counts' student forum. So that aspect of celebrating democracy is very much built in.

Senator MASON—Let me explain why I ask, because there is a philosophical reason here. My colleagues will know why I am asking this. We celebrate, for example, gender equity, human rights and multiculturalism, but for a while in this country there was a certain ambivalence towards celebrating democracy. I am really asking whether in fact this is a value-neutral curriculum. I do not necessarily think it should be; I think we should celebrate democracy. People here know my views on that.

Senator CARR—What about social democracy? Should we celebrate social democracy?

Senator MASON—How shall I put this? We should celebrate the one that has emerged victorious, Senator Carr—that is, liberal democracy.

Senator CARR—So you are saying that we should celebrate capitalism. Is that your point?

Senator MASON—Absolutely.

Senator CARR—That marks your view of 'value neutral'?

Senator MASON—Yes, absolutely.

Mr CIOBO—No, he specifically said that it is not value neutral.

Senator CARR—That is the point that I want to get across: I want to be clear about what Senator Mason is saying.

Senator MASON—I am saying it is not value neutral.

Senator CARR—I just want to help the officers in their understanding of the question.

Mr CIOBO—I just do not believe in the relevance of it.

Senator MASON—Let me be explicit. On page 12 of your submission under 'Year 7 Statements of Learning—Civics and Citizenship', on the last line of the top paragraph, 'Year 7 Government and Law', you say that, as part of the curriculum, 'They compare non-democratic systems of government with democracies such as Australia.' Now that is a good thing. But we are not in the situation we were in when I was at school, are we, where democracies and nondemocracies are considered to be simply different ways of doing the same thing? Is it value neutral, or do we actually take a value and say, 'A democracy is a better system than non-democratic systems'?

Mr Simpson—I refer you to page 8 of our submission. The other national document that exists is called the assessment domain for the testing of civics and citizenship. You will see at about the fourth paragraph down on page 8, at 'KPM2: Citizenship', that it says:

> Understandings related to the attitudes, values, dispositions, beliefs and actions that underpin active democratic citizenship.

I think that is a fairly positive approach.

Senator MASON—I do not think it is quite positive enough. You see, we went through a period where democracies and nondemocracies were considered in a sense value equal: they were simply different forms of government. I was at school during that period, the seventies—not a joyous period. I would not want to see that replicated again. I would not want to go to a class where, for example—my friends have heard me say this in parliament and the party room—you walk in and you see pictures of Mao Zedong and George Washington, both described as 'freedom fighters'. I think you see the problem. I do not want to see that again.

Mr Simpson—I understand what you are saying. As I said to you at the beginning, these national documents are agreements between the state and territory governments and the Australian government, so they are not simply Australian government documents. The other aspect I would mention is that the Australian government now runs, subsequent to this civics and citizenship education program, a values education program. As part of that values education program, there are nine values set for Australian schooling. While they were initiated by the Australian government, they have subsequently been endorsed by all the state and territory governments, so in fact you have nine very definite, specific values which now apply. They are certainly not values neutral—that is the point I am making.

Senator MASON—Good. During the course of this inquiry, I will certainly be following this up, because it is probably the most important cultural point, probably the greatest cultural change

in civics and education over the last 30 years, and I am very interested to see how the government is handling it.

Mr Simpson—You would certainly say that the centrepiece of the current Australian government program for civics and citizenship education is Celebrating Democracy Week.

Mr CIOBO—I would like to follow up on two issues, one of which I guess attaches itself tangentially to some of the points that Senator Mason raised. You said that one of the key performance measures was looking at underpinning active democratic citizenship. In terms of a KPI or a KPM, that is something that is absolutely to be applauded. I am just wondering, though: given that politics by its very nature is really a debate in certain respects about philosophies and approaches and that there are so many examples around the world of different approaches that countries and people have taken, as part of the development of this national framework is regard paid to saying, 'This is how Australia's gone down that path; this is how other countries have gone down this path,' and then a value judgement being formed at the end of that? It is different to say, 'On the one hand, this is an example and, on the other hand, this is an example,' and leave it at that. It is then another step to actually say, 'If you believe in human rights, if you believe in these inalienable rights that we all share, this is a better form of government than, for example, an authoritarian regime,' or something like that. Does it go to that level?

Mr Simpson—This is quite a difficult question educationally, I believe. There is certainly affirmation in these documents—again, I am looking back on page 8, for instance, where we were just talking about the two KPMs. Essentially, the first KPM is knowledge stuff about civics and the second one, which talks about citizenship, is getting at the values questions and so on, certainly the values involved in active democratic citizenship, as it says. Then, if you look a little bit further down on that page, it says, under KPM2:

... students are expected to be able to "recognise that citizens require certain skills and dispositions to participate effectively in democratic decision-making" ...

So all of those things are to be worked through with students. When you are studying various forms of government, normally you would still allow people to look at the evidence and draw some conclusions for themselves. But within that framework there is a fairly positive affirmation of the values of democratic citizenship.

Mr CIOBO—I recognise that this is a double-edged sword. On numerous occasions I have been to schools in my electorate and spoken to predominantly year 7s, who seem to be the focus of civics education. It has been a fascinating exercise for me to test the reaction of the students in the classroom to points that I make. This is a bit of an anecdote, but I am always very careful not to push one party doctrine over another party doctrine; rather, I say that this is our form of government. However, the reaction of students varies significantly.

This leads into my next question. It is clear that in some classrooms I go into students are unflavoured by their teacher—on party politics, for example—and are interested in democracy and our form of government, but other classrooms reek of the introduction of party politics by the teacher. I can observe it. Some may say I am not being objective, but even doing my very philosophical best to be objective in a classroom I can see a smattering of different party politics coming out in students' voices. That is where that double-edged sword comes in.

All of that is a preface to the question of who assesses the performance of a teacher in terms of the rollout of civics education. Is there any scope to build that? Do you think it is possible to build some form of objectivity into civics education? I would be interested in your feedback and comments on that point. It is pretty crucial.

Mr Simpson—It is a very interesting question. Let me say this first of all. If you go through these curriculum documents you certainly will not see anything of a party political nature—nothing of a partisan nature at all. Therefore I think it is reasonable to draw the conclusion that, if teachers are dealing with this and presenting this work to students, they should not be presenting anything in a partisan way.

The assessment of students is certainly now taking place, but you have raised the question of the assessment of teachers. That is a topic in Australian schooling that is just starting to receive some attention. It is a relatively new area of focus. You might be aware that practically all the states and territories have in recent years established teacher registration bodies. These registration bodies are looking at the qualities that teachers need to have in order to first of all gain their registration and, second, continue their registration. It is becoming a live issue. Some work is being done through the ministerial council, through MCEETYA, to look at the question of national standards as well as state based standards for registration of teachers to try to get some consistency across the country in the standards that are required for teachers—just as we have done in the curriculum now for students.

Mr CIOBO—This is being done in a broad context, though, not—

Mr Simpson—In a generic way.

Mr CIOBO—Not specific to civics education.

Mr Simpson—That is true, but MCEETYA has already developed a very broad framework for professional standards for teachers. That framework has about three or four elements. One is that teachers know their subject matter. Another is that they actually know how to teach—how to organise learning activities with students. Another goes to the relationships that they develop within school communities and so on. And the fourth goes to the values that teachers demonstrate in their teaching. If you track that through, you would probably come to the issue that you are raising.

Mr CIOBO—My final question is with respect to age. Again my observation is that it is predominantly year 7s. I invite your comments on whether we should be looking at either having a second tasting of civics education closer to the senior years, years 11 and 12. It seems to me that there is a latent demand there which is not being met.

Mr Simpson—As I said, the statements of learning go to the end of years 3, 5, 7 and 9. The national assessment that has been done and that will occur on a regular three-year basis is for year 6 and year 10. Essentially that is covering the compulsory years of schooling. In the compulsory years of schooling you actually can mandate some things that need to be covered in the curriculum. The problem with years 11 and 12, as you know, is that students then make very specific and very different choices and in some states and territories it is not compulsory even to do English in years 11 and 12.

CHAIR—Senator Hogg may have a comment on that.

Senator HOGG—During the inquiry in Alice Springs the issue was raised with us. We had a forum where we had a number of students from two high schools. I could not attend the third high school meeting. It seemed to me—and I think my colleagues share the view—that there is a gap in addressing 3, 5, 7 and 9. Whilst there is nothing specifically there in the 11 and 12 area, more children now are proceeding on to that level of education, but nothing is being done in this area at a time when probably the most critical decision that they will take and could take—getting themselves on the electoral roll—comes before them. It seems to me that that is the greatest way in which they can participate actively in the democratic processes of this country, yet nothing is being done. There is a real void there. Can you comment on that for us, please?

Mr Simpson—Most states and territories will offer some subjects in years 11 and 12 that would encompass these sorts of areas.

Senator HOGG—But there is nothing generic unless they are doing something such as legal studies. With the group we saw in the Centralian Senior Secondary College, I think it was, we basically confronted the legal studies students. They were quite au fait with the general argy-bargy of democracy, politics and so on, but they were a skewed group that we saw: they were not representative of the student population. It seems to me that their knowledge was not that of their colleagues. That seems to be a real gap. It seems that there is a certain degree of unawareness in the rest of the student population. I can only say this from a very small sample, but this is their evidence to us of the need to get onto the electoral roll, how to get onto the electoral roll and how to participate in our democratic processes in that way. That seems to me to be a gap. That is the gap that I am talking about. I accept that there are all those other problems, but there is nothing in the broader syllabus that will address that issue.

Mr Simpson—That will require it. That is correct.

Senator HOGG—It would not need to be something that would be extensive. It would need to be something that was short, sharp and to the point, to draw the focus of attention. Most of these people are at an age when they can register at 17 to go onto the electoral roll when they are 18.

Mr Simpson—Certainly at the moment the Australian government does not have any role in that area of years 11 and 12. As you know, those decisions are made by state and territory governments.

Senator HOGG—Has that been discussed at MCEETYA?

Mr Simpson—The only issue that has been raised through MCEETYA is the possible development of comparable standards across the country in years 11 and 12. In May the Australian government released a report on a possible Australian certificate of education for year 12 which could see the development of consistent standards across the states and territories. But the status of that consultant's report at the moment is that it was simply issued by the government for consultation purposes. I think the initial consultation period finished last Friday. That is as far as it has gone.

CHAIR—I apologise to the Department of the Senate for holding them up, but just before we wrap up can I ask this. We also received the distinct impression from teachers that they felt that their fellow teachers were not equipped to teach civics and electoral education.

Mr Simpson—I think that is a really good point. If you look back to the gap from the 1970s through to the 1990s in terms of students in schools and then ask about the teachers who are currently there, you will see that there was some attention paid to teacher professional development during the late 1990s and in recent years. It is a real issue. Teachers need the skills to be able to teach this.

CHAIR—What is the best way to do professional development in this field?

Mr Simpson—A range of ways, including some direct experience. Speaking of visits to Canberra, teachers benefit from visits to Canberra too, just as they benefit from benefits to their democratic institutions in their state context.

CHAIR—What about in-service training?

Mr Simpson—Certainly in-service training is essential. I think it would now be a fair expectation that, if state governments have all agreed that civics and citizenship are a priority—in fact, one of the top five priorities for schooling—they should be training their teachers appropriately.

CHAIR—Thanks for your attendance here today.

Senator CARR—Clearly I had very limited time here today. Given that this is the department that actually delivers the civics program, I think it is appropriate that additional questions be put on notice.

Senator HOGG—I have no objection to that.

CHAIR—Okay.

[9.37 am]

ELLIOTT, Mr Cleaver, Clerk Assistant, Procedure, Department of the Senate

EVANS, Mr Harry, Clerk of the Senate, Department of the Senate

REID, Mr Chris, Director, Parliamentary Education Office, Department of the Senate

CHAIR—Gentlemen, welcome to this place we all work in. I think you are aware of the status of any evidence that you give, so I will not go through that. We have received a written submission from you. Do you want to present any additional information for that submission or make an opening statement to the committee?

Mr Evans—We do not really need to make an opening statement. We are happy to run with the written submission we have presented, which is basically an account of what the Senate department and the Parliamentary Education Office—which, of course, is a joint office—do.

I will make a few comments about civics education. I am not sure how widely the committee is interpreting that term, but we have always followed the philosophy that you cannot sell the system of government to the public by some sort of advertising campaign. You can put out information but, basically, it has to sell itself by its performance. Secondly, there is a danger in this area of civics education of trying to sell a view that the system of government is perfect—that everything is rosy in the garden of Australian democracy and we have this perfect system, if only people would understand it. You certainly cannot sell that sort of view, and it would be undesirable to do so. Thirdly, people generally are going to get their civics education in the broadest sense from multiple sources. It is no use expecting that you will have some sort of grand coordination or central source of civics education. Inevitably, people will get it from multiple sources. And, inevitably, there is going to be contentious material. There will be disputes about how the system works and how it should work and so on. I do not think there is any point in trying to avoid contentious material.

The comments I have made relate to civics education in the broadest sense; I am not sure whether the committee is interested in that or whether it wants to focus on civics education in schools, about which Mr Reid is the expert in the Parliamentary Education Office.

CHAIR—Thanks, Mr Evans—insightful as always. You said that the system has to sell itself. When we visited schools last week we found little interest in our processes.

Senator HOGG—There was interest.

CHAIR—There was interest among a small group, but little general interest. How does the system sell itself if the students have no interest?

Mr Evans—As I have said, I do not believe we, in the broad sense, can sell the system; I think the system has to sell itself by engaging the public, by creating interest amongst the public, particularly amongst young people. They have to see what is happening in the political system

and they have to be stimulated by it and get an interest in it. That is the only way in which it will sell itself. It could be seeing something in the newspaper that excites their interest, engages them and leads them to want to find out more about it. That is the only way in which it can sell itself.

Senator MASON—I think you may have missed the discussion we were having before with the previous witnesses about celebrating democracy. I am a great advocate for celebrating democracy, but you seem to take a more sceptical view, Mr Evans. You said: the system has to sell itself. You do not think that the performances of Australian democracy over the last 100 years have been noteworthy?

Mr Evans—I think over the last 100 years it has been uneven, perhaps I could say.

Senator MASON—You do not think we are one of the more successful democracies on earth?

Mr Evans—I could nominate a few. I think, first of all, there is a central problem with democracy. What we are trying to engage people in, get their interest in and get them to perform in is not solely a system of democracy. I think there has got to be a greater emphasis on constitutional government—in other words, government which is subject to limitations, which is the outstanding feature of Australia's system of government and other like systems in the world: that the state is not all powerful, that we have a system of government according to rules and constitutional restraints. Not enough is done to convey that.

Senator MASON—For what it is worth, I agree with you. That is closer, in a sense, to what I see as outcomes. If we were simply talking about GNP per capita or the UN's Human Development Index, Australia has done exceptionally well. But your point is: we are not just talking about living standards, we are not just talking about Australia being—what are we?—third in the United Nations Human Development Index out of 177 nations on earth. We have done rather well in that sense. But you are saying that is not the point. The point is not so much the social or the economic outcomes that government has achieved; rather, it is the importance of process.

Mr Evans—The outcomes that government achieves are important, but I think—

Senator MASON—But it is not everything.

Mr Evans—We need to look at outcomes over the broadest sense and not just concentrate on economic growth and that sort of economic criterion. We need to look over the whole range of outputs of the system of government. Talking about democracy is a trap because if you are trying to tell students, for example, that there is some sense in this great fight which is going on between two houses of parliament or the federal government and the states, it is difficult to persuade them that that is significant in terms of democracy as such. But if you look at it more in terms of constitutional government imposing restraints on government, imposing safeguards against misuse of powers of government, you can make much more sense of the sorts of things that you want to tell people about.

Senator MASON—Do you think your job would be easier if this country had been founded on revolution?

Senator HOGG—Not Chairman Mao!

Senator MASON—I say that seriously. Mrs Mirabella understands where I am going. If you were the clerk in the United States Senate, your words would have far greater resonance.

Mr Evans—The task would be much easier. I think one of the problems with Australia is that its founding and it founding principles do not resonate, as people say, because its founding was not terribly dramatic. It was conducted by a group of rather dull-looking bewhiskered gentlemen in top hats and frockcoats, with lengthy debates about technical matters. It does not have that engaging quality. The founding and the founding principles are very important to get people engaged in the political processes of their country. That is a burden that we have to bear, but I think we can—

Senator MASON—We can overcome it.

Mr Evans—Yes.

Senator MASON—I will go straight to the heart of a point that I raised with the previous witnesses; they answered my questions rather well, I thought, although I am still not entirely comfortable. I understand you saying that we should celebrate democracy in a reasoned way and in a way that means something to our citizens—I agree with that. But what I was adverting to with the previous witnesses, Mr Evans, was that when I was brought up and at school in the seventies—I always recount these stories—all political systems were considered to be equal. Democracy was just one form of government and totalitarianism—you would have heard me speak on this in the Senate on many occasions—was just another form of government which reflected adequately, or perhaps less adequately, the particular culture from which it was formed. In other words, democracy was inherently no better a political system than authoritarian or totalitarian governance. As you know, Mr Evans, I have fought against that view; indeed, that is the reason I went into politics. I loathe that morally relative point of view. How do we overcome that in the education system? On the one hand, we have people say, 'We should not say that democracy is all wonderful or flawless, because it is not'; yet, on the other hand, we do not want to go back to the way of the seventies and say, 'All political systems are equal and it is all okay,' which is the position, of course, that I eschew entirely. How do we overcome that tension?

Mr Evans—I think the way to do that is to get back to trying to convey to people that the really superior system of government is constitutional government; in other words, government conducted according to constitutional rules and restraints. That has a far longer history than democracy, which is, after all, only 100 or more years old. By getting back to that message you could make far more sense of what actually goes on in the political system. Politics is full of conflict and people say: 'What does this have to do with democracy? What do these fights between houses of parliament or federal and state governments have to do with democracy?' You can make sense of it and you can engage people in it by showing them that conflict is part of constitutional government and that, in any case, it is unavoidable, can be productive and can be a sign that a constitutional system of government is working as it should—that power is challenged and that there are people who have the capacity and the constitutional role of challenging the exercise of power in various ways. By laying off the word 'democracy' a bit and getting back to constitutional government I think you can make more sense of what goes on in the political system today and engage people with it more.

Senator MASON—In a sense, when you talk about division of power, the separation of powers or people being subject to a constitution or the rule of law, that would apply across all systems of government. If you do not use the word 'democracy', you are simply talking about restraints on power, and that would relate to authoritarian, totalitarian and democratic systems. I am saying it is a standard that you could apply across all systems.

Mr Evans—Absolutely. And I maintain that constitutional government is a stream in human history. You can identify it with particular civilisations and states over time. It is a superior form of civilisation, there is no doubt about that.

Senator MASON—Hear, hear!

Mr Evans—And that is, I think, the message that has to underlie civics education.

CHAIR—Gentlemen, you will be aware that only a small number of Australian students ever come to Parliament House. You may also be aware that, pro rata, the number of students who come from further away, in comparison to those who come from near, is out of kilter. Does that concern you? What can we do about it?

Mr Evans—Yes, it does. Basically, we try to meet that by what is broadly called 'outreach'. We had something called the CVP, which was an attempt to overcome regional disparity as well. Let me allow Chris Reid, as the head of the education office, to answer that.

Mr Reid—We have all of those geographic and statistical anomalies in mind, particularly in terms of the size of the country and our general demography. The outreach to which the Clerk refers has a great deal to do with an examination of who is where and the power of technology to deliver to the people the work of the parliament, what parliament does and the parliament's law-making, scrutiny and representation focus.

I have a presentation that I can go through very quickly that answers those questions, should the committee like. The presentation says that the record numbers—about 80,000 students per year—that are being taught through learning by experiencing role play at the parliament represents only about two per cent of the entire school population. So the focus of our office is in sustaining those record numbers and in having a greater diversity of schools and regions visiting the parliament. We focus a great deal of our attention on any multiplier effect that we can generate outside of the parliament and away from Canberra. We do that by working with teachers, mainly.

I say that because there are approximately 230,000 teachers in this country and there are about 3.3 million students. So we are looking to get to the 3.2 million students who cannot otherwise come here to be educated specifically and only about the parliament. The parliament has invested in the office that I run and has cleverly done so for 20 years now. It does so with parliamentary education Australia-wide in mind. So we work with the teachers extensively. We have a range of programs that involves teachers, and we teach teachers to teach other teachers about what the parliament does and how the Parliamentary Education Office does it. You would have noticed that in our submission.

The other thing that we do is invest heavily in in-house web publishing, and that includes a range of resource based initiatives for students and teachers. As a by-product, anyone can access that free information through the internet. We are mindful that not everyone has that sort of technology but we also take a forward-thinking, strategic point of view that technology is not going to go backwards. So with that in mind we also invest in the possibilities that we think are available to us, and that includes things such as face-to-face webcam education.

One of the ideas that we have is to broadcast excerpts of parliament, a role play or any type of activity—working with a member or senator in the building. Schools, individual students or teachers would dial into the parliament and we would be live, face-to-face, with any form of education that was tailored to their needs, within or outside the curriculum that they were currently undertaking.

CHAIR—Committee, bearing in mind that the PEO stuff is probably complementary to the House of Representatives submission, do you want to see this presentation at this time? Mr Reid, is this quick?

Mr Reid—I can make it as quick as you like.

CHAIR—Okay, why don't we just go through this, please.

A PowerPoint presentation was then given—

Mr Reid—This is the statement that was offered to me when I started in this job. It is very simple; it has tremendous depth. We provide parliamentary education services to schools, teachers and students and we provide nothing else. We do not deviate from that, such is its depth. I suggest that I would have a quarter of a century of work in front of me.

The way we do this is through 'teach and reach' as I described earlier, the role play at Parliament House and everything else. The number you see on the slide is incorrect; we will be taking up to 18 or 20 classes per day between now and about September in this building.

This growth chart shows where we are up to. It stops at 82,000 to 81,000, certainly over the last two years. This year there were 81,000. Since numbers have been introduced, 600,000 young Australians have come through. We estimate that, in the 2004 election, 100,000 voted. We expect to see our one-millionth student learning about the parliament in Parliament House by 2010. These are the figures that I quoted earlier. As I mentioned, teaching at Parliament House is simply not enough. The priority is clearly the other 98 per cent, which I think is what the committee was alluding to earlier.

The website goes to teaching teachers and matching resources to the PEO market. When you have different curricula—eight, in fact, across this country—it is almost impossible to plug in parliament to any of those curricula, because they are not called 'parliament'. It is often the subset of something else.

Partners in education and parliament are, of course, state parliaments working with education officials and teachers in schools. Of course, one of the very important things is to keep these things free, which is exactly what they should be. We are taxpayer funded.

Our current website is generating a lot of traffic. It has evolved basically through an old copper telephone wire. It is now moving towards something that will look like this, which will be released in the next few months. It deals exclusively with what I have just mentioned: it focuses on students and teachers. Video excerpts, which I mentioned earlier, are right around the corner. Live, face-to-face online talkback or something similar is a priority, particularly for regional and rural areas.

Regarding the challenges for us, I think everyone in the room would be aware that teachers find it very scary. Obviously a challenge is to beat disinterest. 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.

There are two very important points for us. One is underestimating the power of the web. That is absolutely a focus. In reverse, the other one is overestimating people's knowledge of parliament. This is my estimate. I simply make the point—I am not attaching any evidence to it; it is anecdotal feedback that we get—that, when we are talking about parliament, it quickly and usually drifts into a conversation about politics, quite distinct from the law-making capacity of this institution.

We are based on only the parliament. We have a constitutional basis in the charter and we do not deviate from that. We operate on a moderate budget. It is one of the smallest budgets that I have ever seen, but it is by far one of the most significant areas, with the highest impact. The reason for that is that we have the autonomy. We are jointly funded and work with the support of the parliament itself. There is no ambiguity in what we do and there is no ambiguity in the funding. We do not need much money, but, as I noted, there is not that much. This slide shows the structure of the office. If you have any questions, I would be happy to answer them.

Mrs MIRABELLA—Regarding the horizontal graph that you showed, obtained from anecdotal evidence relating to the knowledge of parliament, did you actually take a reading for politicians' knowledge?

Mr Reid—I have not.

Mrs MIRABELLA—That would be interesting to see!

Mr Reid—Anecdotally, we have, in the role play, I would have to say. We work with approximately 22 to 25 per cent of the 226 MPs in the parliament. That is to say, we work with that number either in Parliament House or in the schools, or possibly by attending a conference together—those types of things. I have found that the knowledge has been at least very competent—

Mrs MIRABELLA—That is encouraging.

Mr Reid—and the interest has been outstanding, I would have to say.

Senator HOGG—What level is your website pitched at?

Mr Reid—It is pitched at a school audience, but of course that has a range that includes any student of school age and any teacher, including principals of vast experience, particularly government principals. It really could be pitched at any level, but at the same time the evolution of the office has meant that it is pitched to the upper primary level, because that has been the most receptive age that we have identified over some years. It can range over many decades.

Senator HOGG—The other week in Warburton we were talking with students in year 10 and, predominantly, year 11. The issue of enrolment came up—their right to vote, how to register and so on. But there is very little being done. We spoke to a very skewed group, who were in legal studies, but there is no education for these people on a fundamental issue such as how to go about enrolling—how to effect your voice in the democratic process. Do you address that issue at all?

Mr Reid—The parliament and the Parliamentary Education Office focus only on the parliament—the law making, scrutiny and representation part. I say that because my understanding is that the education arm of the Electoral Commission looks after the other components of the electoral system. I do not know much about its education component.

Senator HOGG—It does raise the issue of who really does look after what, and we will pursue that as the inquiry goes on. On the CVP, can you give us any sort of analysis as to where the students have been coming from for the program over a period of time? It seems to us, from evidence during the earlier stages of our inquiry when we went to places like Alice Springs and Warburton, that the chances of those students ever coming here are fairly remote indeed, although that is one of the goals and the aims of the funding. It also raises the issue that my colleague raised with the previous witnesses about the merger of the CVP with the education travel rebate scheme and the operation of that scheme as it is currently constituted.

Mr Reid—The answer to that question can only be, for me, retrospective, of course, because the Citizenship Visits Program is now the PACER program.

Senator HOGG—I accept that.

Mr Reid—Three-quarters of the students came from Queensland, South Australia and Western Australia. As part of a submission in answers to questions on notice at the last estimates hearings we provided a breakdown by electorate of the students who were coming and receiving CVP for the previous financial year. The table I submitted that I have in front of me tells us that half of the students were from Queensland, and South Australia and Western Australia make up the rest—14 per cent and 11 per cent respectively. Western Australia and Queensland together absorbed three-quarters of the funding, however.

Senator HOGG—But what about remote communities as opposed to some of the rural communities? Do you have an analysis there?

Mr Reid—I would have to take that component in its detail on notice.

Senator HOGG—Could you take that on notice and give us some sort of understanding as to what happened?

Mr Reid—Yes.

Senator HOGG—Also, what has happened since the change with the merger of CVP and the educational travel rebate to the new PACER program?

Mr Reid—In terms of what particularly, Senator?

Senator HOGG—The operation of it.

Mr Reid—The operation of it is completely separate from the operation of the Parliamentary Education Office, so I suggest it is probably best to ask the House of Representatives that question in terms of bookings, perhaps, since the PACER has been introduced. My experience in education has been that it takes at least 18 months for the effects of a substantial policy decision to be fed through into the marketplace. The question to ask more appropriately would be: how have the numbers of those that were previously not funded to visit either Canberra or parliament, depending on how the question is phrased, been affected in the subsequent two or three years since PACER has been introduced?

Senator HOGG—There are other questions in that area that we will put on notice.

Mr CIOBO—Mindful of the time, I will be quick. Mr Reid, this is just some gratuitous feedback: my experiences with the PEO have all been very positive. Also for my electorate the experience has been beneficial. With respect to the role of educating young Australians about parliament—and this ties in with Mr Evans's comments as well, about constitutional governance and so on and so forth—how closely do you work with the various education authorities in the state parliaments? I am mindful of the fact that whilst only two per cent of schools may visit Canberra I suspect a much large number would visit their local capitals to visit parliament and there is a lot of crossover in terms of governance principles between them, although perhaps not in Queensland with the unicameral system. Nonetheless, I am interested in your experiences in that regard.

Mr Reid—The answer is in two parts. Firstly, we work mostly with state parliaments rather than the state educational authorities, but we attend state educational authorities' information sessions. We have a range of contact officers that we liaise with regularly, particularly as there have been changes in the ACT and in Victoria, and in Tasmania before that, with different types of learning outcomes and those parameters that have been set down for the schools, so we stay in touch with the changes in the various curriculums. Last week we attended a feedback session provided by the Victorian educational authorities to one of their representatives in a group of interested Canberrans, if you like, that would give us that type of feedback. Therefore we have the template of the various state education curriculums to give us a good idea where parliament would fit, if at all. Other than that, there are also a number of state based conferences that we need to attend. We attended one last week on decision making in sustainable schools, for example, in Melbourne. So we stay in touch with all the trends and the different curriculum developments.

Mr CIOBO—Specifically what I am asking, though, is whether there is a PEO equivalent in each of the state parliaments. You may have your website on which you roll out certain principles but, when it comes to physically viewing parliament, do you liaise or work with or coordinate with the PEO equivalent in the various state parliaments?

Mr Reid—We do. We have the opportunity of trialling a lot of our work through those state parliaments because they have it both in context and in proximity to a different group of students and teachers. So we work very closely together. We attend a national conference for parliamentary educators. I believe it will be in Darwin this year, and last year it was held here in Canberra. So we do work together. We also keep in mind that many parliamentary educators are former teachers so they themselves have got their own links from the parliament to the schools and interstate.

Mr CIOBO—With respect to the rollout of the parliamentary channel on Sky TV—this may not be your area and perhaps Mr Evans may care to comment—as part of the broad education of the Australian public has there been any feedback or any comments or any exposure or analysis as to whether that recent move is doing anything?

Mr Reid—Are you talking about the House?

Mr CIOBO—No, I am talking about the parliamentary channel on Sky News. This hearing itself is probably being broadcast today.

Mr Reid—No, it is not something that we have received direct feedback on. We would have direct feedback from 2½ thousand or more teachers that come from all of the different schools and states each year. They provide us with that sort of feedback. The greatest influence—possibly even an impediment at times—is the snapshot of the news. That forms opinions.

Mrs MIRABELLA—We have seen that teachers find it scary to talk about parliament and there is a certain degree of apathy—for whatever reason, historic or otherwise—that does have an impact on the engagement that adults, let alone children, have with the political process and the parliament. There are many education programs and government departments here in Parliament House, and there are other not-for-profit organisations, but there is surely a role that senators and members can play in trying to make parliament and politics less scary and more accessible. That surely is the first hurdle even before education. In your opinion what can members and senators do to assist this broader accessibility and education about parliament?

Mr Reid—I think that is a very important question to have asked. There is a stigma that accompanies being a parliamentarian but I can assure you that when any parliamentarian works with the PEO and school students and their teachers, the response is overwhelmingly positive because it adds the human dimension and it takes out any media interpretation, if you like. That has been an enormous factor in this. If I could cite one example: last month there was a conference of primary principals in Alice Springs where the welcoming address to the 500 principals was provided by David Hawker MP. The important thing about that was that David Hawker MP was not known to the 500 principals, but every one of them knew who 'Mr Speaker' was. For us, that had an enormous impact. Often there are accompanying titles that are either influential or well known, despite the fact that there is some anonymity behind the face. I find that particularly with senators. Senators and the Senate are not nearly as well known in the

schools and therefore to students as well. Referring back to one of the slides that I put up, if 100,000 were voting in the last election that number would be closer to 300,000 in 2007. These things become significant because they are the future leaders of this country and what they do and how they do it is extremely important to the parliament.

CHAIR—Can you just tell me how you test the adequacy of your website in reaching its target audience?

Mr Reid—The PEO is an in-house funded operation and one of its tasks is to measure, as much as it can, both the traffic and, wherever it can, the source of the traffic, the times of the day, the days of the week and the things that are hit on the site. That gives me a very good idea of what it is we are doing and where it is happening. An example of that would be the things that kids are using the most. They are using between 9 am and 3 pm Monday to Friday, with not nearly as many hits on the weekend. That tells me that the schools are using the ITC capacities that they have, which are only going to grow, to access the PEO website. One thing we cannot do is isolate exactly where they are from. Increasingly, I would like to be doing that. It is tremendously important. You cannot measure people's subjective views but, according to sales, various hits on our resources, and the feedback both from the role play of the 2,500 teachers and from our own statistical analysis, they are excellent.

CHAIR—This is my final question. Knowing that schools from more remote parts of Australia are often here on the weekends and knowing your capacity constraints in this place, have you thought about running PEO programs on the weekend?

Mr Reid—We have run them on the weekend at different times and for varied reasons. As part of general operating constraints, including budgeting and getting qualified educators, we have not considered that as part of an immediate strategy. That does not mean that it is out of the question but there would be a lot of things to consider, including industrial issues.

Senator HOGG—Can we get that statistical analysis of the hits on your website?

Mr Reid—By all means. I will give it to you by page, if you like.

Senator HOGG—No, just by most frequent areas that are hit. Also, can you give us some sort of understanding as to why you think they are hit and why other areas are ignored?

CHAIR—To the representatives of the Senate, thank you for your attendance.

Mr Evans—I want to go back to that question about the involvement of members of parliament. We try to encourage members to talk to people as much as possible about what they do and why they do it. I think the key to success is in speaking very frankly about what they do and why they do it and in telling people about the reality of how the political system works rather than the rhetoric. I would certainly encourage members to do that because it adds to people's understanding and it gets a favourable response. If a member of parliament says: 'I voted for that even though I had serious doubts about it. My colleagues took a different view and I thought I ought to support them. It's a choice of evils and we're not quite certain which path we're going down, but I voted for it by balancing all those factors,' that gives people a mature

understanding of how our constitutional system of government works rather than the rhetoric. I certainly encourage all members to engage in that process as much as possible.

CHAIR—Thank you, Mr Evans

[10.16 am]

HARRIS, Mr Ian, Clerk of the House of Representatives, Department of the House of Representatives

LOMP, Mr Andres Alan, Director, Liaison and Projects, Department of the House of Representatives

SURTEES, Ms Claressa, Acting Serjeant-at-Arms, Department of the House of Representatives

WEBBER, Ms Robyn, Clerk Assistant (Committees), Department of the House of Representatives

CHAIR—I now welcome the representatives of the Department of the House of Representatives. Thank you for your attendance. Some of the material that you might have wanted to comment on has been dealt with in an extended Senate representatives hearing. That may reduce the amount of time that you have, but we will not limit that time if there is good evidence that you have available. We have received a written submission from you. Do you wish to present any other submissions or make an opening statement?

Mr Harris—I would like to begin by welcoming the inquiry that the committee has undertaken. We are very grateful to have the opportunity to advance some viewpoints in connection to it. I understand your point; we certainly would not want to go over the same ground again. Following on from some of the evidence I just heard, I think I should begin by commending the work of the Parliamentary Education Office. That is not to say that things cannot be rectified or improved, of course, but half of the funding for the Parliamentary Education Office comes from the House of Representatives. We have input into the content of the Parliamentary Education Office and we think it is doing a good job in the way it is going about that.

I have given presentations internationally on the Parliament of Birds. I am not sure whether the Parliamentary Education Office mentioned that to you in the course of their presentation. It is quite a magnificent concept which I have let international jurisdictions know about and they have all lapped it up. It was meant to talk about how parliament works—birds are non-threatening and they can be identified to the species in any country. It has now been transmuted to carry the message about AIDS and things like that. So it is an excellent tool developed by the Parliamentary Education Office. I can certainly forward to the committee the PowerPoint slides that I used in giving the presentation in overseas jurisdictions. If we ever do establish for the second chamber of the House of Representatives a dedicated new meeting place, committee room 2R3 currently used by the Main Committee would be a very good mini-chamber to be used by all occupants.

When I first came into this job over nine years ago, I was very concerned that for many years we had been putting a lot of money and effort into recording the decisions of the House and processing the legislation and I thought a lot of what we were doing was being targeted at a

highly literate, highly educated Anglo-Saxon group of people. I was very concerned in two respects. I was concerned that the House of Representatives was not getting its message out, and the parliament was not getting its total message out, and I was concerned about the image of the highly worthy calling of member of parliament. I discovered in a lot of ways that most people—backing up comments made by the Senate—who came into contact with a member parliament thought that he or she was a pretty good person who was doing a pretty good job. It was the profession that was the problem. I can assure you that I have done international surveys over all countries, and it is a widespread problem. The individual is respected but the profession is not.

I started to see if we could launch a series. We called them external focus programs where, instead of looking within ourselves, we were starting to look out to the people that we were supposed to be serving. I have been worried for a long time about the relevance of parliament to the population that we serve—the relevance is obviously there but it is making it known to people. I thought that if young people, for example, do not see the relevance of parliament, we have a real problem.

Finally, last week I was asked to give a paper at a professional development seminar in Canada. En route to that, I went to the parliament of Quebec, the National Assembly of Quebec, in connection with some work I had been doing for the UNDP in Canada. Being a French-speaking jurisdiction, Quebec is a province, of course, but it has a national outlook. I brought back copies, which I will make available to the committee, of the public community master plan and strategies they have for connecting with the rest of the population of Quebec. They have a real problem because they said that more than 30 per cent of the population had never heard of the National Assembly. This is a concern, of course—

Senator MASON—This is a provincial parliament.

Mr Harris—Yes. They call themselves the National Assembly. They have a Minister of Foreign Affairs. They are a bilingual province but, of course, the bilingualism is highly weighted in favour of French. Some of these documents are only in French, but I see that the committee has the assistance of Dr Palmieri, who I think can take care of any problems in that regard.

The individual submission outlined the various initiatives that we did for our external focus program. We started by establishing an office. I had hoped that over time that office would be unnecessary in that external focus would seep through every office that the House of Representatives staffs. We still have the office. It is combined with the Parliamentary Relations Office at the moment, but it might be appropriate, if it suits the committee, to ask Andres to run through some of the major points of the submission on our outreach initiatives.

CHAIR—Mr Clerk, thank you for those documents. We will receive those.

Mrs MIRABELLA—If the situation is so poor in Canada, are you passing those documents on for us to learn something from them? Perhaps they could get some information and documents on the programs we run.

Mr Harris—It is a good question and, to the extent that my limited French allows, whenever I give presentations, I say I could give it in French but people who have heard me use it have asked me not to. The reason I am referring it to the committee is that they diagnosed that they

had a real problem. We still have communication with them, and I have left information with them on parliamentary education et cetera. But they have done a number of diagnoses and recognised there is a real problem, and these are their community plans to respond to those problems.

Mr Lomp—Very quickly, over the past eight years the Liaison and Projects Office in the House of Representatives has been developing a number of initiatives to try and better connect the parliament with the general public. Included in that are, obviously, teachers and students but we understand that the Parliamentary Education Office takes the leading role in relation to education.

Those initiatives are outlined in our submission, but they have been extremely successful. We have grown quite an audience for our products and our services, which shows that there is an interest among the public about the work of parliament. It just needs to be presented in an interesting, accessible way, and I would be very happy to take any questions on that. It has been a successful program to date, and we are looking to continue it.

CHAIR—Mr Harris, I will ask about your comment on 2R3. The PEO gave as evidence that for 50 per cent of the time they have difficulty finding a location to run their programs. That astounds me. What is your advice to the committee in relation to additional space or what we the parliament might do to provide that additional resource?

Mr Harris—That is a good question. I did not have the opportunity of listening to all the evidence of the previous witnesses, so please forgive me if I am going over the same ground. They do have a problem, I know, in finding a location. People visiting the parliament love that part of the actual visit, so it is very important to them. Various options in the past have been to establish a location in the provisional Parliament House—I am not sure whether they mentioned that. To me, that is a less desirable solution, because I think we should be getting into the current Parliament House and giving them the educational experience here. Whenever we have been thinking about the cost of providing another location for the Main Committee to meet, I have always sought to add in the cost of an additional committee room, because I think that is a legitimate consideration. Of course, if 2R3 were made available as the first port of call for the Parliamentary Education Office, it would be available for other uses during council of government meetings and things like that. It would provide us with another facility. It is perfectly set up in the U-shape as a chamber, and it would be the perfect location for the PEO to carry out its very important educational work.

Senator HOGG—Because of the short time available to the previous witnesses, these questions will go on notice to them. In respect of your knowledge of the transfer of the CVP to DEST, were you consulted? If so, when?

Mr Harris—Yes, we were consulted. It has been an issue that has been coming and going—the Acting Serjeant has been more involved—for about two years. We were consulted and so were the President and the Speaker. Our advice to the Presiding Officers was that, while the proposals that were coming forward might seem fairly commendable from some aspects, we thought the system was working fairly well as it was at the moment, although I did hear that some of the more remote communities do not get access, and I know what a challenge that is.

Senator HOGG—I might stop you there for a moment. Are you saying to the committee that the underlying reason for the transfer was to give more remote communities greater access to Parliament House itself?

Mr Harris—Not being one of those who inspired the shift and one who would probably not have been all that unhappy had it not happened, I cannot really comment on what the motives were. I did have a passing thought from time to time that the shift might have been from an angle to showcase the national capital, rather than the national parliamentary institution. I do not know whether Ms Surtees, who is more involved in the process, would like to add anything in relation to that.

Ms Surtees—I think that that probably answers the question—that we are not exactly able to say what the driving reason was behind the amalgamation. It was not initiated from within the parliament.

Senator HOGG—It was not as if the system was broken, was it? You felt the system was working quite reasonably?

Mr Harris—Yes. To the extent that we were linked into a proposal to have visiting students become aware of our electoral system through the Electoral Commission and the parliamentary system through the parliament, it was working fairly well, I believe. I anguished from time to time for the small amount that was able to be disbursed to people coming from a long way away and having to pay a lot of money to get here. I know from coming from a disadvantaged family myself and being unable to afford the trip to the Snowy, which was a big deal for students, that every little bit that can go to that helps. So from my point of view, the system of showcasing the Senate, the House of Representatives and the national parliament was working.

Senator HOGG—Do you believe that, as a result of the change, you have been removed from the process and that the process has now become more remote? Are you now more remote from the process, not as much in control?

Mr Harris—We certainly do not have the control. We do have the visits to the galleries and we have still continued the hospitality visits on behalf of individual electorates. I cannot talk for the House of Representatives, but for electorate visits we put on a small hospitality display. But I think I would have to say it may be too soon for me to comment on whether we have been removed from the process. I am not sure if we have been monitoring figures since the change began, which was only very recently, of course.

Ms Surtees—The way that these arrangements work in the building is that the Serjeant-at-Arms Office has been responsible under the CVP for making all the bookings. So any schools visiting would get in touch with the Serjeant-at-Arms Office and they would book them into the PEO program, book them a guided tour, arrange for hospitality to be available to them for morning tea and notify members. When schools came from particular electorates, we would notify the relevant members that the schools would be arriving and then, if the members were able to, they might meet up with them.

All those administrative arrangements were made in the Serjeant-at-Arms office. That is still done. What is no longer done is the processing of the claims for rebates to be paid to the

individual students and also, because we no longer have the funds, we no longer have the requirement to make sure that the financial arrangements are complied with. We no longer have responsibility for that part of the administration.

Senator HOGG—Under the original program, the CVP, where you were in charge, do you believe that you were reaching students, in particular those from remote communities? The reason I ask this question—it is not a trick question—is that the committee went to Alice Springs, and we also went to Warburton in Western Australia—and I think as remote a place as that one could not hope to find in too many parts of Australia. It seemed to us that those students had very little hope of accessing Parliament House here, and it seemed to us from that small part of the inquiry that, whilst it might not be typical, it nonetheless probably reflects what happens in more remote areas. So did you achieve your aims under the CVP and, if you did not, why didn't you?

Mr Harris—The scheme provided $230 for the most remote student to come to Canberra. You probably know there was a sliding scale depending on distance, and it was $230 for the most remote. I know that students coming from some of those areas were paying a huge amount of money. We knew that we were put under the most demand when there was snow in the mountains, and that makes sense, of course, because school groups would want to come to get the maximum out of the whole thing. I was thinking it would be nice—probably the people in Thredbo would not be all that happy—if we could have snow 12 months of the year! We probably could have evened the flow.

Senator HOGG—They do not have any now.

Mr Harris—That was one thing I thought was a little bit unfortunate. But that was very understandable; you could understand schools and students wanting to maximise the visit. But I thought that, to the extent that one of the criteria for obtaining the amount was a visit to Parliament House, it was working well. We were planting that first thought, I think.

Senator HOGG—But you were not getting the remote areas, were you? I would be quite happy for you to take this on notice and look back at some of your statistics. It seems to me, from my limited involvement with this committee, that you have not been tapping into those remote areas in Australia—it has been the more populated areas. That would be a fair comment, wouldn't it?

Mr Harris—I think that would be a fair comment. When you think of it, the cost of coming down to Canberra from Geraldton or Nhulunbuy—or somewhere like that—must be huge, and $230 might make it possible. So we will, if it is okay, give the committee a breakdown on where the visitors were coming from. One of the initiatives we tried to counter with that was to have a virtual visit to the House of Representatives chamber, through a CD-ROM that we have produced. It is available and widely used throughout a number of schools. Students with their mouse can go onto the floor of the House of Representatives and they can tour around this building and the old building; they have a little written blurb as it comes up. They can get a lot of parliamentary history on there—for example, Dame Enid Lyons' speeches. The 1972 'It's time' commercial is on the CD-ROM. In the interests of balance we have the 'Memories' commercial, which was used some time shortly after that. It is not as good as a visit here, but I guess it is the best that we could do to try and overcome that problem.

Senator HOGG—Whilst the new system has only been in operation for a short period of time, have you experienced any problems with the new program?

Mr Harris—For specifics, I will pass to the Acting Sergeant-at-Arms. I should say that, of course, while it was not for me to do, I fully endorsed the decision of the Presiding Officers to pass over the administration—because, to be quite honest, from reading the papers it seemed to me to be an inevitable conclusion and that trying to effect or to have any say in the change was not going to be very productive. So I was very happy to see the Presiding Officers say, 'If you want it, you can have it.' I should pass over to Claressa.

Ms Surtees—I am not sure that I can help you very much, Senator. That is because we do not actually have anything to do with the program that is administered by DEST.

Senator HOGG—Does it impact, though, on the way in which you operate? Have there been any difficulties with the transfer?

Ms Surtees—Nothing that has come to my attention.

Senator HOGG—Right.

CHAIR—Mr Harris, all of us have wrestled with the pro rata small attendance from people from remote areas of Australia compared with the areas surrounding here. Would you support a principle that said the net cost of a family to send a student to Canberra, no matter where they might live in Australia, should be the same? Would that be equitable?

Mr Harris—I can see no in-principle objection. After all, we are fortunate with the House of Representatives in that we have the name in there: it is the House of Representatives of Australia, not the House of Representatives of south-western New South Wales.

CHAIR—Thank you.

Mr CIOBO—You may have heard me pose the question to the previous witnesses with respect to the Sky News channel. I notice you have tasted some considerable success with the *About the House* magazine and the *About the House* program. I am wondering whether there has been any analysis done since broadcasting started—you have obviously done it with the *About the House* program, but I mean with respect to the Sky News channel—as to whether there is a latent demand for that kind of programming. Do you have any general comments on the success or otherwise of it?

Mr Harris—Again, it is a good question. For the specifics, I might ask Mr Lomp to answer. But could I take the opportunity first of all to say that I personally am delighted with the work that Andres and the production team are doing with putting out this 20-minute summary of events in the House on a sitting week. I always say to people who might want to watch it that, when it is coming over on Sky Channel in the pub at about the same time as the football, I would not suggest that you go and switch over to *About the House*.

Mr CIOBO—It is only a matter of time.

Mr Harris—I think it is getting a good reception. I know people in the Pacific and they tell me it goes out to the Pacific. So it has an internal impact and an external impact. On the internal impact, it tends to pick up on committee inquiries, House of Representatives standing, select and joint committees. I know of one instance where the magazine and the television program concentrated on bees and honey production. When that went out over the Sky Channel airwaves, it was picked up by the *7.30 Report*, so it had an engendering effect. That is an anecdotal impact. We got to that wider audience through the ABC.

Mr DANBY—Is it shown at a regular time on *Sky News*?

Mr Lomp—At 3.15 pm on the Fridays of sitting weeks. Occasionally they do repeat it if it is a popular program. In terms of the question about whether we have had any analysis done, I think there are two aspects: there is the *Sky News*, the additional parliamentary broadcast, which is something we really have not been able to do an analysis on.

Mr CIOBO—So you have not had any feedback in terms of viewer take-up or otherwise?

Mr DANBY—Not on Sky showing parliament on its channel. In terms of our program that we screened at 3.15, interestingly, every time it screens we get calls to our office ordering our magazine—because that is one of the things we offer in the program. We also get anecdotal feedback from Sky. People ring in and ask how long the program has been going and say that it is very interesting and that they like it. That is all. We have not had any detailed analysis. Sky indicated to us that perhaps they could provide some to us down the road, once it has been going for a while.

Mr CIOBO—Do you have to pay to broadcast that on Sky?

Mr Lomp—No. We produce it here, but Sky—

Mr CIOBO—The production costs are absorbed.

Mr Lomp—Yes.

Mr CIOBO—The actual distribution?

Mr Lomp—No. We provide that to them free of charge and they put it to air because they like the quality of it.

Mr Harris—In relation to that, the acting Serjeant has said to me that the Department of Parliamentary Services has a memorandum of understanding with *Sky News* and that we might be able to get statistics on that. I should also say that we are very happy in the Reps to have the services of someone like Andres Lomp, who is a good ideas man. He tells me that we are now looking to move to podcasting of our parliamentary program. That will reach those young people we want to be in touch with.

Mr Lomp—A number of the stories that we run in our magazine are also similar to the stories that are run on the television program. The idea, in the perhaps not too distant future, is to have the small clips of the television program available for podcasting so that, if teachers and students

want to download that, they can use both the resource of the magazine and the television show to talk about issues. A recent example is a teacher who rang us about the cover story that we had used on our previous magazine, which was on the superannuation inquiry by the Standing Committee on Economics, Finance and Public Administration. They found the article so interesting that they were going to use the article in their budgeting class for school. It shows that, even though the magazine is not produced purely for school, there is a side benefit. In our submission we refer to the fact that we had just recently done a mail-out of the magazine to all high schools throughout Australia. In the short month since we have done that, more than 420 schools have already asked for copies of the magazine on a regular basis.

Senator MASON—Mr Ciobo mentioned *Sky News*. People watch that to see parliamentary proceedings. But, of course, you can also watch the web. Indeed, I have a friend in Ireland who tells me that he regularly watches Australian Senate committees sitting in Dublin. Why he would want to do that, I do not know. Is there any record kept of hits of people who are silly enough—

Mr DANBY—On your Senate hearings?

Senator MASON—Senate committees or Joint committees or House of Representatives committees?

Mr Harris—I think we could provide statistics on the hits. It is to be kept in mind that you can come into the Senate chamber, the Reps chamber, a number of committees and the Main Committee. We might be able to see if we can get more sophisticated statistics. One thing I have become aware of in the last few days is that the House of Commons in London has a very good web service. They have one facility that I do not think ours has—but I have not checked yet—where you can go in and get real-time broadcasts but also press a button which says, 'Show me from the beginning'. I cannot see why you could not have a digital chapter arrangement whereby you could go in and listen to the urgency motion or matter of public importance, even though it had passed.

Senator MASON—Senate committees, from the beginning, Mr Chairman.

Senator HOGG—What a wonderful way to go.

Mr DANBY—Mr Harris, I want to congratulate you on *About the House* and the TV program. I think they perform an excellent service. Unfortunately, they perform a service that newspapers which used to seriously report parliament used to perform in the past. But they are more into sensationalist things now. Is the demographic composition of your readership mainly younger or older? Is it aimed at school kids? I find the ads in the *Australian* very useful, even for myself, just reminding me what is going on in areas that perhaps I am not even thinking about. Who are your demographics?

Mr Harris—Thanks Mr Danby, and thank you for the complimentary comments. When we started, this was one of those things that was mainly due to Andres' inspiration, I did not want to keep on producing dusty old books that nobody would touch. We more or less went for the sort of weekly magazine that people more readily absorb. It does get to the people whose attention span might be shorter or who would not ever dream of looking up an act of parliament. So it is not specifically aimed at any one group. I suppose it is like a combination of the group of

Women's Weekly and *Men's Health* combined. It is meant to go to men, women and children who might come across it. It performs a wonderful service in members' electorate offices in that people can read it like in a waiting room. Andres has just completed an exercise with school groups, whom we specifically targeted. We sent them out to the school groups and got a wonderful response.

Mr Lomp—We generally aim it at the general public. I suppose the educational level we aim it at is year 10 and above in terms of the language of the magazine. We distribute it quite widely—Australia's top 500 companies, local government, state government departments, Commonwealth government departments. We have quite an extensive individual mailing list. When we advertise the magazine in the *Bulletin* and the *Australian* we get a number of people joining our mailing list as a result of seeing those advertisements. We do hear a lot of older voices, so it is reaching an older population. We don't have specific demographics that we are targeting—it is more the general population. It is perhaps aimed more at people who are either informed about political issues or who want to be informed about the issues that parliament is dealing with.

Mr DANBY—I have a specific reason for asking this. Do you know how many university students who are studying modern democratic Australian politics receive it? Do you have any interest from the courses that teach that all over Australia? You should, but I am wondering whether you do.

Mr Lomp—Yes, we send out the magazine to a number of universities. I would have to take it on notice in terms of how many and provide you with the figures.

Mr DANBY—I would like to see that.

Mr Lomp—So we do that. There are other ways in which we get involved with universities. We have what we call a 'House calls' program, where we do lectures at universities, where we, in cooperation with the lecturer, the Speaker and the Clerk—and sometimes other members—we visit the university to give a one- to two-hour lecture on the realities of working in today's House of Representatives followed by a question and answer session.

Mr DANBY—Not only do you do it, but someone from the Parliamentary Education Office asked me to do one last Thursday at Swinburne, and I was astonished—I am not being rude to the university students—that the level of knowledge of how parliament worked and that kind of stuff was less than that of some high school students whom I have spoken to who had studied things. It is a very useful idea to have members of parliament out there. Do you have a program where the education office has members of parliament—like our illustrious senator over here from Queensland—speaking to university students about how parliament works?

Mr Lomp—We do have a program through our office, the Liaison and Projects Office, where we approach universities that are interested. About eight or nine universities have joined the program. We advertise that through our magazine through other advertising. We also have the history project that we did for the Centenary of the House, which has been an ongoing project, and which comprises a CD-ROM encyclopaedia, a four-episode documentary and a study guide, which was just completed last year. A number of universities have adopted that as a learning resource about parliament. It is not necessarily part of their curriculum as such, but they have

said to students that if they buy a particular book on politics they get the CD-ROM with it. So a number of universities have taken that up.

Mr DANBY—But you do not have an audit of all the university courses that teach about parliamentary politics and you do not have requests, as far as you know, from students in those universities to receive *About the House* on a regular basis? At the University of Western Australia the entire second year in modern democratic Australian politics get *About the House* as part of their program.

Mr Lomp—No. It tends to be generated by the lecturer. If the lecturer gets *About the House* and they like it then they often order multiple copies for their classes.

Mr DANBY—With respect to the history project, there is great interest all around Australia in the increase in the study of Australian history. In New South Wales particularly the government has been talking about this. Has there been any liaison between you and the New South Wales government over your history project and the attempt to teach more Australian history in high schools in particular?

Mr Lomp—No, not the New South Wales government. We have been liaising with schools that have expressed an interest. We have attended a conference in Victoria—the Victorian social sciences teachers conference. We were invited to that conference to present the product to the teachers that were there. But it has generally been at the individual teacher and lecturer level. The study guide linked the product to the various school curricula. A number of teachers, having seen that, have taken up the product and are using it in their classrooms.

Mr DANBY—It is no criticism of you, but I find it disappointing that university courses do not make more use of Parliament House and excellent products like *About the House*. I think they should be encouraged to.

Mr Lomp—One of the difficulties I find is that it is very hard sometimes to break into the market. We have found that with TV programs and with products like this where sometimes, because of artistic or other judgments, people decide not to take up the programs when in fact individual people at the coalface want to use them. We have that difficulty with our documentary. The ABC decided not to take up the documentary, yet Sky News showed it. There was no particular reason why the ABC made that decision. It was a good quality documentary and we were extremely disappointed that the ABC did not take it up. They did not give us a reason why they did not take it up but Sky News showed it and got a very good response to it. It is sometimes disappointing when the parliament does products like this—

Mr DANBY—Had they encouraged you to do this history project?

Mr Lomp—No. When the Centenary came around the department was looking for ideas as to how we would best celebrate the Centenary. Our feeling was that it was best to have a product that could have a legacy over many years and so we decided to do a product that was about 100 years of the House of Representatives. One television station liked it; others chose not to show it. So it was a bit disappointing for us.

Mr DANBY—Your problem might have been the same one that leads to *Order in the House* being broadcast at two o'clock in the morning.

CHAIR—Thank you to the representatives of the Department of the House of Representatives.

[11.02 am]

CAMPBELL, Mr Ian, Electoral Commissioner, Australian Electoral Commission

DACEY, Mr Paul, Deputy Electoral Commissioner, Australian Electoral Commission

DAVIS, Ms Barbara, Assistant Commissioner Business Support, Australian Electoral Commission

HALLET, Mr Brien, Assistant Commissioner, Communications, Australian Electoral Commission

PICKERING, Mr Tim, First Assistant Commissioner, Electoral Operations, Australian Electoral Commission

URBANSKI, Ms Gail, Assistant Commissioner, Strategic Policy, Australian Electoral Commission

CHAIR—Welcome. It is important that I advise you that, although the committee does not require you to give evidence on oath, these hearings are legal proceedings of the parliament and have the same standing as proceedings of the respective houses. We have received your written submission to this inquiry. Do you wish to make any additional submissions or make an opening statement to the committee?

Mr Campbell—No, our submission stands. We can go to questions. That would probably be the best way to use our time.

Senator HOGG—I want to raise an issue we came across during the first committee hearing in Alice Springs. We met with officers of the AEC there. The issue is how to educate high school students in years 11 and 12 of their rights to enrol and to participate in the electoral process. We spoke with a group of students who were skewed in terms of their knowledge of politics and so on. They were from a legal studies class. I think it would be fair to say that they did not necessarily reflect the broader view of students in years 11 and 12. What suggestions do have in that respect that the committee might look at in terms of engaging those students, particularly in the necessity to enrol?

Mr Hallett—The first thing I should say is that there is no simple answer to this question.

Senator HOGG—We accept that.

Mr Hallett—It is certainly something that the that Election Commission has been grappling with for as long as I have been here. This is one of the reasons we have participated in the *Youth electoral study* and have been instrumental in getting that study started. Certainly over the last decade we have known that, as a general principle, the younger you are the less likely you are to be correctly enrolled, despite overall relatively high levels of enrolment. What we have not known is the reasons young people in particular are not engaging and participating. We have

only had the numbers not the information. There are two reports from the *Youth electoral study* currently on our website and a range of further materials are being planned. Basically, it is a four-year longitudinal study across 16 divisions in Australia which involves fieldwork and interviews with young people by researchers. It also involves two paper based surveys of approximately 5,000 year 12 students right across Australia and across systems—across government schools, Catholic schools and so on.

In one sense the preliminary information that we are finding does not surprise us. It also matches some of the things that have been found by electoral commissions overseas, such as the United Kingdom Electoral Commission, which has done a lot of work on this as well. I know that following us are Dr Saha and Dr Print, and they will be able to give you more detail, but the first thing is—and this is what is of most concern to us in the challenge as an electoral commission to meet what you are talking about—the fact that young people do seem to care very deeply about issues but they are not making the connection between issues and the political process that we are all part of, either as public servants or as members and senators. I suppose in one sense a gratifying thing for us is that the second paper shows that where young people have had the chance to be visited by Electoral Commission staff or to undertake actual electoral experiences, such as an election for a school council or some other form of electoral event, they seem to be more engaged.

At the moment we have a very large data archive. The challenge for both the researchers in the academic world and also for the Electoral Commission over the next couple of years is to mine that data and to work out, particularly for the AEC, what the impact for it is as it would affect our School and Community Visits Program, where our staff in the field go out to school and community groups and also where we have an electoral education centre.

In the last 12 months, since the 2004 election, we have been looking at both the resources and training that we give our staff to undertake this exercise. Bearing in mind we have three outcomes—we keep the roll, conduct elections and undertake public awareness—I think it is reasonable to say that the focus traditionally has been on the first two outcomes in things like a federal election or a high-profile event, for example. Certainly in Mr Campbell's time we have been looking at a multifaceted approach. We need to revise some of the materials that our people are using in the field, some of which have not really been looked at since the 1990s.

We need to look at their professional development. We hire people who are very good at the administration of elections—obviously, that is quite understandable—but perhaps we need to give them some more skills, not just doing presentations but how to access groups, because while a lot of our clients are in senior secondary schools some of our clients, particularly those who are not participating, are not in those groups. They might have finished formal schooling, already be in the workforce, be homeless or in a remote community, such as the one you have just visited. We need to provide more resources to our staff and to skill them about accessing those groups.

The final thing is that we are giving a lot of thought to the development of strategic partnerships. For example, in the Northern Territory at the last Legislative Assembly election, we had a formal memorandum of understanding with the Northern Territory Electoral Commission. We seconded an officer to work with that commission. Our own staff in Darwin worked very closely. We have also had memorandums of understanding in some other state areas that have

worked very successfully. We have also worked with other agencies. As I said, there is not a simple answer, but we are exploring a range of things.

Senator HOGG—When you talk about resources, do resources equate to funding?

Mr Hallett—I did not mentioning funding.

Senator HOGG—What I am asking you is: does it equate to funding? Is there sufficient funding to enable you to do what you are trying to outline to us?

Mr Hallett—Probably the best way to answer that is to say that it depends on what is expected. We are provided with funding to undertake electoral education centres for the School and Community Visits Program. We have sought some additional funding as part of the legislative changes that were passed by parliament in June, and that was granted. In one sense, we will watch with great interest the deliberations of this committee. If this committee were to recommend to government further and extra things, there may naturally be some resource implications. I was thinking more of resources in the sense of what we equip our people to go out with, such as presentation kits, training and helping them to access groups. That is what I meant by resources.

Senator HOGG—That has a direct link to funding. You cannot separate one from the other. If you are going to provide them with better facilities, better equipment and better training, to me that automatically implies that there is a funding need and that a case needs to be made as to what additional funding needs to be put. Is that something that you have done?

Mr Hallett—Probably the way to answer you is to say that the issues I have just discussed would be met within our existing funding allocation, within our existing budget.

Mr Campbell—I was going to make another point, but I might build on this one first. One of the issues that we have with our own resources—and it is not a question of the quantum, which is where your question was coming from—is the question of the skills base. First and foremost, our divisional returning officers are usually employed because of their skills in running a very big event—an exercise, an election—maintaining a role and managing a small office. The skills base required for that is very different to the skills base required to do public awareness work and to get into the schools—convincing the teachers that they should actually bring you in and allow the students to interact with you—because we are not trained as teachers. Even though we are, if you like, changing our focus and lifting our focus on it, we our conscious that the skills base of a lot of our divisional returning officers, even if they are enthusiastic—and they themselves would admit to this—may not be appropriately linked to presenting, and some of them might be very fearful of that. So we have to work on that as well.

The point I was going to make—and Mr Hallett touched on it—is that the retention rate in years 11 and 12 is just under 80 per cent. Your question goes to those in years 11 and 12. Twenty per cent of Australian youth leave school before them, so we have to find ways of getting to them. Another observation I would make—and this moves beyond our responsibility—is that we see quite a varied reaction from schools when we ask whether we can come and do a presentation. Some schools—and they are the ones that have probably been doing it for quite a while, historically—build us into their timetable. We go to them and present, and it is a valued

part of what the school is doing. Other schools might use us—and this is a very unfortunate term—as a bit of a time filler. Indeed, it is very hard for us to get through the doors of a lot of schools.

Senator HOGG—Why is that? Why are you used as a time filler and why is it difficult to—

Mr Campbell—I am not an educationalist and I am not being critical of schools, but the observation that has been put to me is that, in years 11 and 12, the programs for the students in schools is so full anyway. In effect, they are in their last two years of school, a lot of them are doing work experience, which has to fit into their curriculum, and their curricula are very full. We are trying to get to more schools, but the other side of the coin is that there has to be some interaction with the education authorities in order to have the door a little more open for us or anybody else who might be doing that sort of activity in schools.

Mr Hallett—There is a common phrase known as the 'crowded curriculum', whereby a whole range of social marketing issues, if you like—driver education, drug education, sex education and citizenship—are all competing for space in the curriculum, whether it is as a visit such as the Australian Electoral Commission might make or whether it is actually a full-scale program. It is very competitive.

Ms Davis—I think the first question you posed to us was about the conundrum of how we educate people about their right to enrol and to vote. We tend to talk about the Australian context of the responsibility to enrol and vote. That is something that has come through the YES as well. Often it is not so much the issue of political engagement, which is obviously a key concern for nations around the world. The very nature of Australia's compulsory voting system helps us in that regard. But certainly a lot of the international community regard what Australian electoral authorities are doing as best practice.

What we have been doing over the years is a variety of different strategies, none of which probably have the outcomes that we would all like to see in terms of lifting the profile of youth enrolment. So again we come back to the same conclusions, in civics education and that general area, about the need to engage. The best location to do that, obviously, is while people are trapped, so to speak, in institutions like schools and TAFEs and perhaps universities.

Also, it is the very nature of being able to engage in student councils. A lot of NGO organisations around the world are talking about involving students in community events to teach them that they can make a difference in whatever their communities might be, whether that is their school community or their particular interest group.

CHAIR—Last week we received some evidence that indicated that teachers themselves felt that they were not well equipped to teach electoral matters and electoral education. Is the AEC aware of this? Does it have any plans to engage teachers or provide resources in the courses that teachers do to fully equip them in relation to electoral education?

Mr Hallett—We have a program called 'Your Vote Counts', which is a teacher professional development program. That program is principally conducted by one officer who is based here in Canberra, although we have looked at increasing the skills base in recent years so that people in other parts of Australia can undertake it.

CHAIR—So it is not within the university degree that teachers do?

Mr Hallett—I will give you a little bit of context. A long time ago we used to pay for teacher release so that teachers could leave their classroom for the day, the school would have funds for a relief teacher and then we would conduct this program. That was reviewed in about 2001 and primarily now that program reaches preservice teachers—teachers in training—because obviously we do not have the issues of relief.

Just to give you some figures, during 2005-06—the year just ended 30 June—1,390 education students participated in 50 sessions of the 'Your Vote Counts' program. We also conducted nine workshops for 245 educators. That program is reasonably successful and it is certainly well received from the feedback we have. But we are well aware that it is by no means reaching as many people as we would like in the profession.

Work is currently under way for a kit that will go to every school in Australia. We are aiming to have it available by the end of this year, with a rollout in early 2007, bearing in mind that 2007 is an expected election year. We hope that we will get some interest and engagement in it because of the timing. Just to give you some brief details, for that kit we are looking at basically a 100- or 120-page book, a CD or DVD containing interactive activities and a resource for classroom use. It will provide materials for four levels of schooling—upper primary, lower secondary, middle secondary and upper secondary, and it will contain both teaching and learning strategies.

You are probably aware from our submission and other submissions that, right around Australia, most students do some form of civics, or whatever term we want to use, in the upper primary and mid-secondary years. There will be one kit and it will have various components and modules. A tender for that has been completed. The Curriculum Corporation in Victoria were successful and they have commenced work on that. That work is under way at the moment.

CHAIR—Do you have any idea of the value of a kit that goes to schools compared to spending perhaps one hour, face to face, with a teacher to go through the issues?

Mr Hallett—One of the things that is foremost in our minds is that sending out 3,000 of those kits to every school is a very quick way to make sure that they land on library shelves and gather dust. So, while we have not finalised a distribution strategy at this stage, it is certainly in our minds that we will need to do a range of activities both to market it, quite literally, to the stakeholders, who are teachers—a very diverse group—and to influencers and opinion makers in the educational world, through things such as teachers associations, curriculum organisations, state education departments and other influencers in the world of education. As far as providing the face-to-face training is concerned, I agree with you that that is probably the best method of all, but there are practical limitations to what we can do, bearing in mind the spread of schools right across Australia.

CHAIR—How closely would you say that you work with DEST in relation to the national priorities of the government in the area of electoral and civics education?

Mr Hallett—As mentioned in the submission, an AEC officer has attended various meetings that they have held. It is probably fair to say that they have a wide range of responsibilities, but certainly, at an officer level, there has been both formal and informal cooperation.

CHAIR—In April this year, I was in Sweden and talked to the electoral commission there. They were extraordinarily proud of a program that they run in classrooms. They get the students to conduct an election and they use real Swedish ballot papers. Do you have any objection to using real Australian ballot papers in this process?

Mr Hallett—Apart from the limitations on the use of ballot papers under the Electoral Act—and, as we all understand, the Electoral Act is fairly careful about the way live ballot papers are treated—it is something that we could look at. In our own activities, we tend to use ballot papers that contain pop groups, favourite foods, for younger students, and so on. That is based on feedback from teachers through our electoral education centres. As part of making it more realistic, which is where I presume the Swedes are coming from, that is something we could look at.

Mr Campbell—Is your question about using an actual sample—say, taking the ballot paper for a random seat, for example, the seat of Herbert, at the last election and using the real ones or were you suggesting that we use one that looks like a House of Representatives ballot paper but with fictitious names?

CHAIR—No—they used actual ballot papers. They made a big point of using actual ballot papers.

Ms Davis—Similarly in Canada, Senator, but I am not quite sure whether they—

CHAIR—Thank you for promoting me, but I am a member of the House of Representatives!

Ms Davis—My apologies. Similarly in Canada, on the actual day of the federal election, schools across the provinces in Canada run a live ballot, with real candidates. I am not quite sure about the ballot papers, but that has certainly been one of their main strategies to engage youth, both in 2004 and in the election prior to that.

CHAIR—I would like your comment on this. Senator Hogg and I took evidence in Warburton, which is a pretty remote Aboriginal community, and youngsters there had a pretty good idea about the local government elections. They knew all about them. They said that it happened on the same date—every four years or whatever it was—and mentioned local personalities and so on, but their knowledge of state and federal operations was exceedingly limited. The other thing that was confusing was the difference between compulsory and non-compulsory voting. What observations do you have to offer the committee in relation to the difficulties of trying to get a message across to young people about what voting is all about?

Mr Hallett—A place to start might be an issue that we have at every federal election—and this will obviously be of interest to you, Mr Lindsay, coming from Queensland—of explaining to people how to fill out a ballot paper. When you have preferential voting systems in two states—one of them being Queensland—it is an issue for us. Another issue for us is the fact that elections come around once every so often and federal elections come around every three years.

People are possibly engaged in a lot of issues outside of election time. It is one of the reasons that we look at using schools and getting into the curriculum. That enables us to mainstream, if you like, and make these issues important. It is an issue, and it varies across Australia depending on what the local conditions are—for example, informal voting in Queensland.

Mr Campbell—Perhaps if I could make two observations. One of them comes out in our submission and the other is probably not quite as explicit. It is interesting that you say that people in Warburton have a very good understanding of local government but less so of territory, state and federal government. That probably reflects the fact that, per head of population, there are more representatives for local government than there are for state government. In other words, there is an issue about what role other organisations—be they state governments, parties or, indeed, members and candidates et cetera—can take. That is one issue that needs to be thought through.

The second issue, which has not been mentioned yet but is mentioned towards the end of our submission—and I want to make sure that it is on the table today—is that young people communicate differently from the way older people do. For young people today, communication is electronic, internet, SMS—all sorts of things. Very rarely do they fill in forms or lodge forms with post offices et cetera.

While it may vary between communities—and it may not apply as much to more remote communities as it does to urban communities—one of the things that we have to think about in this country is: do we continue to operate in the very paper based way that we do now where every time you change address you have to re-enrol? That is what the act says. The act says that, when you move from one address to another, even if you stay in the same House of Representatives division and therefore the same state, you have to re-enrol. For a lot of our young people, and indeed for people of all ages, that is counter-intuitive. When you add to that that almost everything else that young people do in Australia does not require paper forms sent through the mail, we are really in a situation where an activity that we do on an irregular basis is not something that this generation is used to. The situation in Warburton may not be as relevant as it might be in the cities or in more densely populated rural areas, but I think there are some big issues there that we raised towards the end of our submission and that are worthwhile considering.

Mr DANBY—It is good to see the AEC here as usual. Your submission begins with the caution:

> ... the existence of different electoral arrangements for different levels of government significantly complicates the task of conducting effective electoral education and information programs.

How do you handle this, particularly in Queensland and New South Wales? Do you have any programs with those governments to explain the electoral system when it is slightly different in both state and federal systems?

Mr Dacey—I am happy to take that. For the last election, in 2004, we put in place special internal programs in both New South Wales and Queensland. We gave additional training and instructions to polling staff in each of those states to remind people that they had to mark every

box for the House of Representatives and that there were differences. When you look at the informality rates coming from those states, it was not that effective.

We also had a program of putting up posters in polling places. But we suspect that it probably was not that effective because, as you would know, people do not really look around when they go in to vote. They want to get in and out as fast as they can, and they do not want to read posters. So we are looking at that this time. We have not yet finalised a strategy, but it will be part of a campaign that we are certainly aware that we have to put in place.

It is not just a matter of making the electors aware that they need to number every ballot paper but also a matter of making electors aware of the differences—particularly the differences in the federal system, between the Senate and the House of Representatives. I think we have addressed that in other forums, in relation to informality. We are certainly aware that it is a growing issue. The informality reports that came out following the 2004 election and the research papers that we have done show that it is certainly one of the many factors in New South Wales and Queensland that affect informality and that we have to look at particular strategies. We have some ideas, but we are also talking more widely in the electoral community. We certainly need to develop strategies and we are happy to keep the committee informed as we proceed.

Mr DANBY—It is a very good idea that you are looking forward in order to handle that problem. You will all think that I am a broken record, but I want to come back to the issue of youth enrolments. The AEC's report said that, as at June 2004, 81.4 per cent of eligible 18- to 25-year-olds were enrolled. What is the approximate raw number of voters in this age group who are currently not enrolled? What percentage of the Australian population do they form?

Mr Campbell—I will ask Mr Pickering to answer that. When he is doing that, he will point out that we think that the figures from 2004 have deteriorated a little since 2004.

Mr Pickering—That is right. I have the 2006 youth participation rate here. The way in which we have identified the process of working out that participation rate is to look at the ABS estimates and then add and subtract a number of factors that relate to enrolment—for example, British subject status; overseas electors; state only enrolments. Unsound minds come off, for example; prisoners come off; new citizens come on; et cetera. That particular methodology has identified that there has been a drop in the total enrolment, for example, of 18-year-olds from 2004 to 2006. The enrolment figure at the moment is 48.7 per cent. The figure that we had for 18-year-olds in—

Mr DANBY—Forty-eight per cent of all 18-year-olds were enrolled as at 2006?

Mr Pickering—That is the national figure. The figure is low in all states around Australia and the figure climbs following a federal election. What I am identifying here is that the number drops. For example, the figure in December 2004 was 68 per cent and it has dropped to 48 per cent in 2006.

Mr DANBY—Was the figure of 68 per cent after the election or before the election?

Mr Pickering—After the election.

CHAIR—And which month in 2006?

Mr Pickering—In June.

Mr Campbell—Our submission, on page 9, shows 58 per cent as at 30 June 2004. As Mr Pickering said, at the end of 2004, after the federal election, it was 68 per cent. That is based on a projection. We use ABS figures because nobody actually has a complete database that tells us the exact number.

Mr DANBY—How many people does that include in total—the 52 per cent of Australian 18-year-olds at the moment? What is 52 per cent of—

Mr Campbell—Of the total figure?

Mr DANBY—Yes, of all Australian 18-year-olds?

Mr Dacey—They are 18-year-olds that we estimate are eligible to be enrolled.

Mr DANBY—And who theoretically would not vote at the moment. But, when an election comes up, I know that more of them get on the roll. It is still interesting to know.

Mr Pickering—The potential total figure—the algorithm that I spoke about earlier, with the revised ABS figure, with the ons and the offs—is 260,000. We have 126,000 enrolments, which is the 48 per cent that I was talking about.

Mr DANBY—So 134,000 18-year-olds are not enrolled as at this minute?

Mr Pickering—Yes, potentially.

Mr DANBY—Your statistics for the 2004-05 annual report showed that it was 81.4 per cent of 18- to 25-year-olds. I know enrolment increases as people get older, but have you seen the phenomenon of the drop-off in that year between 2004 and now in the 19-year-olds and the 20-year-olds as well?

Mr Pickering—Yes. I will give you some examples. The participation rate as at December 2004 for 19-year-olds was 82 per cent and at the end of June it was 66 per cent. For 20-year-olds it was 85 per cent. It is now 79.9 per cent. Then we move into a cohort. My stats move to the age group 21 to 25, and there were 88 per cent enrolled at the end of 2004 and there are 83 per cent now. It shows that across the younger age category there is a drop-off, which identifies what Mr Campbell said earlier too—that is, that an election is a great stimulant for enrolment and participation of those younger ages.

Mr DANBY—Preferably they are enrolled before elections come and do not pay the price of new arrangements that exclude them. You have a very big job in front of you, as you can see from your own work. I am sure you do not underestimate it.

Mr Dacey—With Mr Pickering's figures, that decline post election and then the building up again is not just a trend in the youth. It is a general trend with total enrolments. It has been a

trend over time. Post election it does tend to dip down, and as you build up to the next election it tends to peak again.

Mr DANBY—I suppose that answers my question, which was going to be this. There is no change in the generations? This is a phenomenon that you see? It is not getting worse?

Mr Dacey—Yes, although some early figures indicate—and we would not like to be held to this yet—that more recently people are not becoming engaged until later. It was the 18- to 25-year-old group that we thought were taking their time to be engaged, but we are suggesting that that might be creeping up to people in their late 20s and early 30s.

Mr DANBY—I am not going to ask for this now, because I am aware of your time constraints, but I would like the numbers of all of the people aged 18 to 25, as of June 2006, who are not enrolled and what percentage of the Australian population they form.

Mr Campbell—Mr Danby, we will do that.

Mr DANBY—Thank you.

Mr Campbell—I need to make one other observation. There is one other fact that has occurred in the time frame here that is relevant. As you are aware, six years ago we moved to a continuous roll update program, moving away from the two-year habitation review. That, by its very nature, with the population moving around the country, means that you will have at various times people dropping off the roll—because of the way the CRU process works with letters and objections et cetera—and then coming back on the roll. We need to just be a little careful here. Part of the movements is a reflection of the fact that, in a non-election environment, people do come off the roll. We eject them from the roll, then we find them and then they come back on the roll.

Mr DANBY—I am sorry; I have to ask one more question, therefore. All of us on the committee have supported your use of different databases to do this continuous roll update. I think it is a very good development of the AEC to keep as many people on the roll and to keep the system as democratic as possible. But what possible ups and downs are there in the system? People register with the Transport Accident Commission, with Telstra and with other databases all the time. Why would there be a drop-off of one group of people you are seeking to enrol by that system—a system we all support—at one time more than another?

Mr Dacey—One of the issues is that when you are in the trough, or the middle period between elections, we might pick up those changes through databases and write to Mr Danby and say 'update', and he thinks, 'There's not an election yet, I'll stick it on the fridge,' but he does not get back to us. People really need that stimulus of an election in the wind to get that form in. That is one of the reasons. One of the other things in our favour is that the three most populous states will hopefully be having elections before the federal election, which you may be aware of. That is a great stimulus for an increase in enrolment as well.

Mr DANBY—So you are hoping for an election in Queensland.

Mr Dacey—Yes.

Mr Campbell—When we write to you, because we know you have moved, and you have not answered, because of the way the system works, if we know you are not living in your old address, we have ejected you off the old address. We are waiting for you—

Mr Dacey—So there is a net decrease of one until you respond.

Mr CIOBO—I want to touch on the point you raised earlier about different voting systems in different states. It seems to me you have done analysis with respect to the informal rate. For example, at the last election in Queensland there had been a local government election, optional preferential, and state government election, optional preferential. I saw very little advertising about the need for a full preferential vote to be cast in order for it to be a formal vote. There may have been instructions given to your workers on the day. However, off the top of my head, informal rates were up around eight per cent, where people would just vote in one. Isn't this pretty central to the AEC's role? I know this goes beyond school aged children and what not, but this is a fundamental part where people are actually thinking they are casting a valid vote. Isn't it time we stopped saying, 'The problem's the audience'? Maybe we should be looking at our message delivery systems.

Mr Campbell—I agree, but I want to make a couple of points. The eight per cent informal were not all people who voted in one only, there is a whole—

Mr CIOBO—I do not dispute that.

Mr Campbell—However, we have done some analysis of the 2004 election, which is on our website. We compared what happened in the division of Werriwa in the 2004 general election and the by-election in early 2005. You are quite right. As Mr Dacey said earlier, we are conscious that there are two particular states where they have optional preferential voting. That has the potential to create confusion or lack of certainty for voters.

Given that those two states are going to go to the polls—in March next year for New South Wales and by May for Queensland—we are now working on, as part of our public awareness strategy, how we can actually manage that. This will include what we do in the polling booth, what we put in the polling booth, what public advertisements we do. For example, in the last election our ads on how to vote in the House of Reps and the Senate were two separate ads. Presumably these were shown between breaks in the movie on a Sunday night or whatever. We have spoken to our public relations and our advertising agencies, and we have said we want to do them in one ad, so people will have that there. It is probably multifaceted, the way we plan to tackle it.

Mr CIOBO—As a participant in the whole process, I did not see much. In Queensland, I saw very little in terms of public advertising about the need to number every box to have a valid vote. Is that a budgetary constraint? Why wasn't there much more emphasis?

Mr Campbell—I was not here in the 2004 election, as you know, but I can assure you from what I have been told there was no conscious decision not to work on that issue. And the issue was known. That is why we talked about what we did in the various polling places. We will be more conscious of it, that is one way of putting it, and we will be putting more energy and resources and hopefully skills into getting the message across.

The issue you have raised is not uniform across Queensland and New South Wales, and in some divisions it is a far greater issue than in others. So we will also be targeting this issue at the local level. Some divisions will get more targeted local activity on this one issue than others. We do not walk away or deny the issue. Late next year, after the election, I hope you will be able to say that the Electoral Commission, in their advertising at national, state and local levels, raised this issue and tried to get through to the voter that we have two voting systems within the Commonwealth, and when you go in on the day you can just fill in one square for the white paper, but for the green paper you have to fill them all in.

Mr CIOBO—I will just pick up on some of the points that Mr Danby has raised. In your submission, you talk about an electoral education course for year 11s of two one-hour units, for example. Have you had contact with state education authorities or state governments about rolling this out? I fail to see why there is a higher penetration rate with those who have a driver's licence. I suppose I understand why that is so, but the point is that intellectually perhaps there should not be such a great gulf between the willingness of 18- to 25-year-olds to get a driver's licence, an 18-plus card or any of those kinds of things and their willingness to be enrolled to vote. At citizenship ceremonies I attend—and I can only talk about my part of the world—I often observe the presence of the AEC, who are there to enrol new citizens, which I think is a tremendous initiative. But are you visiting every school; if not, why not? Are you making sure that this course is built in as part of the curriculum; if not, why not? What are the obstacles to doing that? You say that we are capturing 48 per cent, but I believe there is no excuse for our not capturing 80 per cent of 18-year-olds. What are the barriers to making that happen?

Mr Hallett—The place to start is probably with our School and Community Visits Program and we have information about the number of visits that our divisional returning officers make. We mentioned earlier that we are looking at better resources and better training for them to do that. Recently we have looked at what we tell our staff is a 70-30 rule. That is, we have directed our staff to ensure that, in the course of a year, they visit 30 per cent of the schools in their electorate and that 70 per cent of those should be secondary schools, bearing in mind that we are aiming particularly at people who are ready to enrol.

Mr CIOBO—That is not a lot though. For example, in my electorate there are about 16 secondary schools. Did you say that you visit 30 per cent?

Mr Hallett—Yes, 30 per cent.

Mr CIOBO—Of which 70 per cent are secondary?

Mr Hallett—That is correct.

Mr CIOBO—So we are talking about perhaps five schools in a year. I think you could be big and bold and aim to visit all 16 in a year.

Mr Campbell—At the risk of not doing ourselves any good here, it is more than we are visiting at the moment and it is more than we have traditionally visited.

Mr CIOBO—Sure, and I am not being critical.

Mr Campbell—No, I understand that and that is why I am helping.

Mr CIOBO—I just want to understand why we are not visiting every school. Is it a resourcing issue? What is stopping you?

Mr Campbell—There are 11,000 schools in Australia. I will go back just a couple of steps in this process. First, when these sorts of visits are undertaken, a presentation must be made and the presenter must have certain skills and attributes to enable them to get through to the children, be they primary or secondary students, which will depend on the school they are visiting. We have been doing that but probably not in as targeted or as concentrated a way as we, the commission, would like. That is why we have gone for the initial target this year, which Mr Hallett has mentioned.

We have to develop the kits—Mr Hallett has mentioned the kits we are developing—both for the staff to present and to give out to the schools. But, over and above that—my staff tell me this continually—there is the issue of the school actually saying, 'Yes, you can come and, yes, there is a slot there in which you can make your presentation.' When I start to talk up the target and say, 'I want you to get to the schools,' they will say, 'It is easier to get into primary schools.' As I think you suggest, much of our priority should rest with secondary schools, but they are not easy to get into and they do not find it easy to slot you in, which goes back to something we said about half an hour ago. I think that then comes to the first part of your question about education departments and the education system. In the end, we cannot direct education departments or, indeed, individual schools. So I think a big responsibility here rests on the education system and the education departments at state level and what they do.

Mr CIOBO—You are experiencing resistance from education departments at a state level, blocking AEC staff from going into schools.

Mr Campbell—I would not use the word 'resistance', because I think that is a positive term. I would say that they do not open the doors for us when we make contact.

Mr CIOBO—For some reason, there are lots of schools I never get to set foot in either, so I understand what you are saying. But, from a non-partisan perspective, I find it extraordinary that that occurs to a government body that is simply trying to undertake its duties, as directed under the act.

Mr Campbell—Late last year, in one state, an exercise was carried out at the local level by the divisional returning officers. The divisional returning officers wrote to most schools in their divisions—I cannot say all schools, as I am not sure—and to a lot of community bodies. You will see a little reference to it on page 13 of our submission. We were not getting any responses at all to those letters.

Mr CIOBO—That is pathetic.

Mr Campbell—My response to that is, 'That's not going to stop the commission,' and we will be asking staff to go and knock on doors. It is much harder not to respond when someone knocks on your door and says, 'Hey, I represent this body that has this responsibility.' But it goes back to something we were saying earlier on. 'Curriculum overload' I think is the term—

Senator CARR—Crowded curriculum.

Mr Campbell—'Crowded curriculum', the term that Mr Hallett used, is where we and our product at various times are not at the forefront of educators' minds.

Senator CARR—I have read your submission. On page 9 you speak of school participation rates. I understand you to say that, in 1994-95, 100,000 students were involved in school visits by the AEC, but 10 years later that number had dropped by 10 per cent to 91,000 students. Have I read those figures correctly?

Mr Campbell—With the way your submission has been printed, its pages have been numbered differently. Can you give me a paragraph number, please?

Senator CARR—It is paragraph 3.8 and is about priorities of electoral education.

Mr Campbell—What figures are we comparing?

Senator CARR—In 1994-95, school participants in AEC school visits numbered 100,000, but the equivalent figure for a decade later was 91,000. That is almost a 10 per cent drop.

Mr Campbell—I will make two comments about that difference. One is that, in that 10-year period, 1994-95 was not an election year and 2004-05 was; therefore, in the first half of 2004-05, there would have been less time to visit schools. Also at that stage, in 2002-03-04, the commission gave less emphasis to primary schools and tried to focus more on secondary schools. However—I think you would be aware of this because we have discussed it in other forums—we recently changed that and went back to giving an emphasis to both primary and secondary schools.

Senator CARR—You say that in the Melbourne electoral centre, in 1997-98, the figure was 27,000. What is it now?

Mr Hallett—In 2004-05, the Melbourne electoral education centre conducted 563 sessions at which there were 14,748 participants.

Senator CARR—That is a very substantial drop. It is a 50 per cent drop or thereabouts.

Mr Campbell—I think there is an issue here. That is just visits. There is also the question of the outreach that the centre does.

Senator CARR—I just want to get the same figures that you have used. I would ask you to take on notice to give me an equivalent figure. You are presenting the argument that there is a problem with a crowded curriculum—people do not have time to hear from you. I would like to know whether there could be another explanation. On page 9 of your submission, you summarise the priorities. Then you refer to the ages of some of the centres. You say that the funding for teacher relief ceased in 2000-01 and you say that makes the groups difficult to access. You say that you have introduced abridged courses.

I would like to know whether the commission gives a lower priority to your third chartered obligation—namely, public awareness—rather than there simply being the issue of a crowded curriculum. That is a proposition that you can answer one way or the other. I need to test that by asking you some specific questions about the amount of money you are spending, because I think that is a measure of prioritisation. Over the last 10 years, has there been a reduction in the scale of AEC education programs and the level of AEC financial investment?

Ms Davis—Just generally, those figures you were picking up before reflected the active policy decision within the commission that the move would go away from lower primary school children, which is reflected in that 100,000 figure, towards more identified target groups that were underrepresented in enrolment terms. The moneys that were available were also put into outreach activities for people from different linguistic backgrounds and for Indigenous and young people. You will see that period of time reflecting that move to spread our public awareness activities to other groups. In relation to the funding—and Mr Hallett might have the figures—my recall is that the funding for our third outcome has remained at approximately the same level over the last five years, at around $5 million.

Senator CARR—What percentage of the AEC budget does that represent for that 10-year period? Is it up or down?

Mr Campbell—Just to make sure that we do not mislead you, we will take that question on notice and get back to you.

Senator CARR—Thank you. What were the equivalent expenditures, both as an absolute figure and a percentage, for each of the electoral periods throughout that 10 years—that is, from 1993 until the present? How many staff were employed for electoral education? Did they work full time or part time and were they casual or permanent? This information will tell me how much priority you are allocating. Just so I get a sense of what the prioritisation is, how do those figures compare with the employment figures for the periods of, say, 1993, 1996 and 2001?

Ms Davis—There might be a presentational issue here in that the staff that we attribute costs to for public awareness activities are not just the staff who would be employed, for instance, in Mr Hallett's branch but also our divisional office people. Over that time, we might find that, again, because we were targeting our public awareness to particular groups, there is a mix of expenditure, for example—and I cannot recall what year this was—to outcome No. 1 rather than to outcome No. 3. We will give you this information when we get back to you, but, in relation to our figures in an election year, obviously the expenditure on public awareness is boosted, but that is also reflected in outcome No. 2.

Senator CARR—I am interested to know whether or not there has been a change in your priorities. Is this in fact a retreat from face-to-face educational programs and an increasing reliance on more indirect forms of education, which your submission also says are more difficult to control and manage, if you like, and less effective? Is this a policy decision or an issue of you responding to your financial position?

Mr Campbell—We will take all that on notice. We will have to answer your first question before we can answer the second question.

Senator CARR—Thank you.

CHAIR—Senator Carr, we have to be mindful of the time.

Senator CARR—Yes, I am. On page 10 of your submission you suggest that you are involved in arms-length or indirect education. How much has it cost you for the electoral education resources for the primary and secondary education program you have developed, including the *Every Vote Counts* program and the other videos and programs? What was the cost for each of those and what was the total cost for the production of those materials?

Mr Hallett—We will take that on notice.

CHAIR—That is the end of questions to the Australian Electoral Commission. You have been very interesting witnesses. Thank you very much for your attendance this morning.

Mr Campbell—I will make just one comment. The joint standing committee over many years has had the joy of having Mr Hallett attend and answer questions. As some of you are probably aware, this is his last week in the AEC because next Monday he takes up his new position as the Deputy Official Secretary to the Governor-General. So you might see him in a different context in future.

Senator CARR—Congratulations and well done.

Mr Hallett—I am always happy to help the committee.

CHAIR—Our best wishes, Mr Hallett. Thank you.

[12.01 pm]

PRINT, Dr Murray, Director, Centre for Research and Teaching in Civics, University of Sydney

SAHA, Dr Lawrence J, Joint Chief Investigator, Youth Electoral Study, Centre for Research and Teaching in Civics, University of Sydney

CHAIR—Welcome. Do you have any comments to make on the capacity in which you appear?

Dr Print—I am the co-director of the youth electoral study.

Dr Saha—I am at the Australian National University, doing sociology.

CHAIR—Thank you. While you are not required to give evidence under oath, I remind you that these hearings are legal proceedings of the parliament and therefore have the same standing as proceedings of the parliament. We have received a written submission from you. I now invite you to make an opening statement.

Dr Print—Last week I was in Oxford giving a keynote address. In July I was in Japan. In both those places—and, indeed, many other places—I am often asked the question about compulsory voting and sanctions: 'What is your program for civic and electoral education in schools, given that you have compulsory voting?' My response is: 'Not very much.' We have done a major national research project which is investigating elements of youth participation. What we have found is in our submission, but we make one qualification, which is that this study is ongoing, so the findings are not absolute, and we would be expecting to produce a lot more findings over the next few years.

CHAIR—Before we proceed to questions, would you like to make any responses in relation to questions that you heard us ask of earlier witnesses?

Dr Print—We heard some very interesting questions—and I have to say we would not necessarily agree with some of the responses that were given. You asked a question about young people in remote areas. We do not want to get too much into the area of parliament, but it is quite clear that, the more remote and rural you are in Australia, the less likely you are to be knowledgeable and participatory. That has come through fairly strongly.

CHAIR—Thank you for reinforcing my concerns; that is terrific.

Mr CIOBO—Dr Print, I have been reading the conclusions you have drawn as a result of your study, including, for example, the need to better target people close to voting age. You said it is often considered boring to teach students the process of voting and so on—which I think you cover in these points as well. To my mind, though, it all springs from one wellhead, so to speak, and that is that there is a very deep level of cynicism towards politics—and I think, by natural association, towards parliament—deeply embedded in Australian culture and news

media. I do not think we have tackled that issue fundamentally. Perhaps if there were a little less cynicism towards politics and politicians and therefore the parliament, we might be more successful at educating young Australians about what politics is about and the way in which these institutions work. I would just be interested in general comments from you, and if you have some specific ideas I would invite those as well, in response to that assertion.

Dr Print—I think the Clerk of the House of Representatives actually made it quite succinct. People do have some very grave concerns about politicians as professionals, but not necessarily politicians as individuals—people that they know in their own particular area. There is, amongst young people in Australia, a very healthy scepticism—healthy in the sense that it is very substantial—about formal political behaviour; not about political issues in general, but about formal politics. So there is a great deal of interest and concern about political matters and, shall we say, alternative political behaviour, but there is a deep scepticism about formal politics.

Dr Saha—I think your statement is reflected in some of the data that we have produced. We did ask questions of this kind in our survey and it is true—you can see in our reports—that young people generally feel that there is a certain level of lack of trust, perhaps, in what goes on in parliament or is done by parliamentarians and things of that kind. We are aware that this may be part of the cultural bias that is bigger than just what young people themselves say, but we can analyse this further and down the track—

Mr CIOBO—Did you say you cannot analyse it further?

Dr Saha—We can, to try and find out if there are any differences between those young people who in fact do hold very cynical views and those who do not. One thing that we did discover—and I think it is related—is that a lot of the cynicism about electoral matters seems also possibly to be related to their experiences in school elections, and in our second—

Senator MASON—In school elections?

Dr Saha—In school elections, yes.

Senator MASON—Really?

Dr Saha—In our second survey, which we are about to embark upon, we have chosen to pursue in greater depth the issue of what goes on inside schools and, in particular, school elections. Recall that we didn't only have the survey; we had 16 electoral divisions in which we conducted focus group interviews with students from four schools in each of those electoral divisions. That is something like 500 students at least. We found it both in the focus group data and in the survey data. I can give an example—and Murray can add to this if he likes—of a school election where the results were overturned by the teachers because the teachers did not agree with the elected candidate. These stories were told to us in the focus groups as well as being reflected in our data.

Mr DANBY—That is really close to a dictatorship.

Dr Print—Shall we say they select candidates who are more suitable in the eyes of the school.

Dr Saha—This raises a number of issues about how school elections ought to be conducted. We have views about that and we are going to pursue that in greater depth. But you find students making statements like, 'What does it matter? It's a sham; it's not a real election.' And so they carry this kind of attitude with them.

Mr CIOBO—That is very interesting. I think it is more than that, though. Again, this is anecdotal, so I am not putting too much weight on it, but when I have year 7s here—and I might have 10 or 15 or thereabouts per annum—one of the first questions I ask is: 'Who's heard good things about politicians?' and I might be lucky to get one or two students say yes. But when I ask, 'Who's heard negative comments about politicians?' I guarantee that every hand will go up. That is sort of sad. I just wonder sometimes whether we are flogging a dead horse, having all this inquiry and conversation about the need to instil respect for democracy and so on and so forth, when it is very clear that, right from day one, young Australians are being told that politicians and politics and, by extension, our parliament, are largely a waste of time, or should be viewed negatively, or whatever language you want to attach to it; it is generally negative, though.

I am interested in the cultural aspect and whether your research has addressed that to ask whether there is any point in us spending millions of dollars on trying to encourage more young Australians to vote and questioning the AEC about the rollout of their programs, when in fact the problem is possibly cultural. Until we address that cultural bent, we are never going to get young Australians to want to enrol. Do you follow the thrust of my question?

Dr Print—I think you can balance these things. I think there is a widespread scepticism about politicians and parliament across the age range, totally. But, by the same token, we know that young people believe in democracy. We know that they believe in the parliamentary system.

Mr CIOBO—So you are getting that? That in itself is interesting.

Dr Print—Yes. They know about voting. They may not necessarily want to vote, but they certainly know about voting.

Mr CIOBO—And have faith in it?

Dr Print—Yes. So those things are very positive. I bought a car recently. I had to go to a used car salesman. I was sceptical about going to a used car salesman. Their position on the social index is very low—but I still needed a car.

CHAIR—If this committee were to make a recommendation about the validity of school based elections, what would you suggest we say?

Dr Saha—We have a lot that I think we can offer. Remember, we are not saying that every school election is tainted in this way. We are getting anecdotal evidence that some of the cynicism can be traced back to the experience that they perceive themselves to have in their school elections. The AEC will actually go in and run school elections, for example, in the ACT.

Mr DANBY—Also in Victoria. They do one in my electorate.

Dr Saha—Right. So we know that that goes on. But the school has to invite the person in to run the election and, as I understand it, they will only run the election under certain conditions. The conditions are that it be a fair election and that the criteria—for example, for nominees, candidates and things of that nature—be made very clear ahead of time so that no-one appears on the ballot, so to speak, that the teachers have automatically decided is not going to be an eligible winner. One way, I suppose, is to get some outsider to come in and run the elections, so that is one of the suggestions. But we do believe that elections are a very key component. Other studies have supported this. We also know that, for students who run for office in student government in school, the legacy of that remains with them as they go into adulthood. They are different types of people in terms of their political behaviour. So there is something very important about student politics. As I say, we have another survey coming up in which we are going to explore this.

Dr Print—Can I just continue with your comment, Chair. If you had an outside agency as Larry suggests, like the AEC, coming in and conducting elections in schools, the validity and the status of them would rise substantially. We know that. Secondly, apropos of a question that I think you and Mr Danby might have raised before, we also know that many teachers do not feel comfortable about electoral matters in schools. They lack knowledge. They lack understanding. They lack knowledge of procedures. So an outside group would considerably enhance the validation of elections.

CHAIR—Thank you for that.

Mr DANBY—On page 8 of your submission, you say that the New South Wales Board of Studies has refused to report civics based knowledge items separately from history and geography. Have they provided any reason for refusing to separate these items?

Dr Print—I received a letter which would be best described as obfuscation. No. In other words, they did not have to.

Mr DANBY—Is this something that comes from the department of education in New South Wales, or is it something that is engendered from the teachers union? Do you have any feeling for where this kind of attitude is coming from?

Dr Print—I was very surprised. I wrote to the minister, the minister passed the letter to the board and then I got it back through the minister some time later to say that they were not prepared to release this information. I think the board has a certain view about what role the data should have and provide. They did not necessarily think that this should be in the public domain. We would have in Australia the only very specific data about student performance in this area at this age.

Mr DANBY—They have got it.

Dr Print—Yes.

Mr DANBY—In your submission you say:

A more appropriate age to introduce electoral education is closer to the age of voting—

and you refer to a course offered in Western Australia entitled Politics and Legal Studies. I have a series of technical questions about that: is that subject elective for years 11 and 12; have you any figures of how many students are enrolled in that course; and are you suggesting this course be made mandatory for years 11 and 12?

Dr Print—The first one: it is elective. The numbers I do not know.

Mr DANBY—Could you get them to us?

Dr Print—Yes, I could find those out. The notion essentially would be that a course like that—and I think Larry probably would agree—should be compulsory, and the appropriate age would be in year 11.

Mr DANBY—Is there any willingness in other states to contemplate it being compulsory or incorporated in the program?

Dr Print—No.

Mr DANBY—Let us turn to young people's intention to vote. What do you think explains the gender gap in intention to vote—50.2 per cent for females surveyed compared with 38.9 per cent of males?

Dr Saha—The data on political behaviour has shown in recent studies, not just our own, that young women are more active than men. Men feel more confident. They feel that they know more and they also feel more confident about their ability to behave politically and behave in a politically correct manner; young women seem to be more compliant when it comes to doing what is expected of them. I think this is partly reflected in the gender gap that we have seen. If you look at other aspects of the data, on the other hand, the men feel more confident about voting than the girls, but the girls—

Mr DANBY—But this does not represent a new trend amongst young males that they are not going to participate in the compulsory voting system that we have in Australia.

Dr Print—I would suggest that it is a trend that is starting to emerge. It is more likely that young males will disengage than young females.

Dr Saha—Remember: our data are intentions and not behaviour. These people have not voted yet, so we do not know whether they will follow the intentions that they are articulating.

Mr DANBY—You were here—I saw you sitting in the back—when the AEC gave their testimony about the lower levels of enrolment of young people particularly, at the moment, say, compared to 2004. In your research, have you identified anything specific about this generation of young people that would make them more likely than previous generations not to enrol?

Dr Print—I believe—Larry and I may disagree on this—there is a growing generational effect. Normally, we talk about a life cycle effect versus a generational effect. Young people do not engage very strongly. As they get older and more established, they get married, have children, buy a house and those sorts of things, they are more likely to engage because they have

vested interests. Generational effect talks about the difference between matureds—my group, the baby boomers—and so forth. All of the research shows that the older you are the more likely you are to vote, particularly in non-compulsory countries.

Mr DANBY—And the presumption is that, as you get older, each generation will do the same thing?

Dr Print—That is the presumption. I am making a tentative statement at this stage that I think there are certain characteristics out of this new group, which I am calling the 'dot nets'. We have to talk to our journalistic colleagues to see if we can encourage them to move beyond the Y generation. They are not a Y generation. The X generation was named because of a certain set of circumstances, and we baby boomers were named for a particular set of circumstances, but 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.

Senator MASON—When I was a little boy reading anything on the web was technological.

Dr Print—It was. So was the industrial age. I did qualify that a bit.

Dr Saha—This comment was made with an earlier group, and I think this is true. We did receive in the focus group interviews with students comments like, 'Why do we have to enrol at all? Why isn't it done automatically? We are born in the country. Everybody knows we exist. Why doesn't it just happen?' So there is this sense that we have moved past the point of filling out forms and putting in sheets of paper.

CHAIR—But how do you enrol somebody automatically when you do not know where they live?

Mr CIOBO—We do.

Dr Saha—I cannot answer that question, but I understand that databases are increasingly becoming available and that it should be possible. I am just saying that these are the kind of perceptions that they have.

Mr DANBY—That is a very interesting point: because of technology and because most of them are living in cyber world for a large percentage of the day they automatically assume that they will be enrolled and they say, 'Why bother?'

Dr Saha—They ask why they cannot automatically be enrolled. That is what they are saying, 'Why can't we? It should be able to be done'. They say similar things about voting—that voting should be made easier and that you should be able to do it from your computer or something like that.

Mr DANBY—At home.

Dr Print—They would certainly believe that there is some sort of supercomputer underneath Parliament House or something that has all of this information about them. In fact there is a

country to our near north which I believe actually does know this information. When you are born in Singapore I believe that you get an identity number straightaway and you then follow certain identity cards along your life. They know exactly when you are eligible and you get a notice to say, 'Come and vote.' They have compulsory voting in Singapore too.

Mr CIOBO—Some of us are trying to stop that.

Dr Print—I am not suggesting that we would necessarily go down that path. The question was, 'Can we do that?'

Mr DANBY—But you get an automatic invitation to vote here. The Electoral Commission are very effective with that.

Dr Print—They are.

Mr DANBY—What we have is a take-up rate that is dropping off.

Dr Print—The issue about the take-up rate, and our research has shown this too, is that if there is some major event, the likelihood that young people will enrol is increased substantially. The most important trigger has been, of course, the elections.

Mr DANBY—What about if the Electoral Commission were to write them over the net asking them to enrol? Would they get a better response then?

Dr Print—They are certainly much more internet orientated than other generations. I am not quite sure how the AEC would get hold of their individual email addresses.

Mr DANBY—They could write to them asking for their email addresses.

Dr Saha—Going back the question of how they find out about enrolling to vote, what we are trying to tell you is something about the youth culture and the way that they see this whole political arena. You wanted to know why they are disengaged. It may be because they are uninformed and they may be operating from a position of ignorance. The point is that, for the most part, most of them know about the green form. They have seen it. They have told us that their teachers often distribute it in the schools. On the occasion when a student in a focus group said, 'I've never seen one,' others were able to explain what it was and where you could find it. So I do not think it is a matter of not trying to get the information out there; there is also a question of the pick-up at the other end. Whether it is done electronically or whether it is done in hard copy forms or something of that kind, I am not sure that it would make that much difference. But we have never tested that. We do not know; we really do not have any information.

Dr Print—Indeed, a number of young people said, 'Why don't you just enrol us at school automatically?' That is a very complicated thing with the state education systems, but it is a viable proposition.

Mr DANBY—Presumably all of the high schools have ways of contacting their students by email. Even if the AEC were not to be given the email, if they were to ask the schools to email

an electoral registration form or an invitation to enrol to the students, that might be another way of reaching into this internet world.

Dr Print—It is possible. One of the things I have heard come through in questions you have asked is the understanding about what role schools play. Schools have an enormous amount of independence and autonomy, even though they may work within education systems. We basically have three, and even the state education system, which accounts for about 70 per cent of all students—sorry, individual principals and school staff have quite a lot of autonomy. If they do not want you in their school then they can make it very awkward and very difficult. Independent schools and the Catholic system, for the other 30 per cent, have quite an autonomy.

Mr DANBY—I take it the general thrust of your whole submission is that, in a compulsory voting system, this reluctance of the schools—for cultural or autonomy reasons or whatever—has to be addressed and we have to, in a compulsory voting system, communicate with young people about how to enrol, how to vote, how to participate in the system.

Dr Saha—There was a comment made by an earlier group about why did the AEC not visit all of the schools in a division, or something of that level? I remember one of the DROs in a division I was working in actually said, 'I have written to all the schools asking to come and talk to them, and none of them have responded.'

Mr CIOBO—That is outrageous.

Dr Saha— These sorts of things do happen. In another division, the DRO was able to say, 'I have visited every school in my division.' It varies considerably. At the moment, as I understand the structure, there is no reason why a school needs to comply with a request from a representative of the AEC to come in and talk to the students or distribute forms or something of that kind.

CHAIR—You have made a recommendation in your submission that the federal government should fund a national centre for research and teaching electoral education. Is that right?

Dr Print—Yes.

CHAIR—How would you see that model working? Where would it be located? What would it do? What would be the outcomes? What would be the cost?

Dr Print—It is quite clear that electoral education is a very low priority. That clearly needs to be increased and enhanced substantially. One of the problems we have is that we do not know enough. We are doing a study, but every time we raise a question, a multitude of other questions are raised, and of course you have raised questions in this inquiry as well. In terms of a centre, there are a number of models. There is a national history centre, which I believe DEST has funded as a model. There could be funding through the Australian Research Council. There could be deliberate and specific funding organised through parliamentary sources. But I would have thought the way to do it would have been to get a consortium organised. I think you need it for a centre to be located in one particular site, but having contacts around the country, that would be the logical and optimal approach.

CHAIR—Finally, I have a question on the creative approaches that you talked about. Tell us what you know about the organisation Kids Voting USA.

Dr Print—It is an outside group, in the sense that it is groups of people who are trying to basically stimulate young people to participate. Essentially, they go to schools and try, in an extracurricular sense, to engage young people in understanding democracy and the voting system and get them out to vote. In the United States, except for the slight aberration in 2004—and my perception is that it was an aberration—the vote of 18- to 25-year-olds has been declining since 1972, which is when the United States lowered the age to 18. At the moment, in a presidential election about 36 per cent of young people, 18- to 25-year-olds, vote. In congressional elections, it is 18. We see similar trends in the UK, Ireland and some countries in Europe. This is one of the reasons, also, by the way, that I would argue that we need a centre that helps investigate reasons why there is decline and therefore can come up with suggestions about policy and programs. But Kids Voting USA is essentially a community activity, trying to go into schools, from an outside point of view, to generate interest.

Senator MASON—I would like to bounce off Mr Ciobo's questions, which were very interesting as always. Do you detect a greater degree of cynicism among Australian youth in comparison with other Western youth? We always complain about the cynicism of Australian youth with respect to political matters and matters of civic education, but is that perhaps overblown? Is it any worse here than elsewhere?

Dr Print—You have a masking effect and that, of course, is compulsory voting. We asked young people whether they would vote if voting was not compulsory. Fifty-one per cent said yes.

Senator MASON—That might indicate that they are more civic-minded than their American counterparts.

Dr Print—I think so, but not strongly so.

Dr Saha—There have been some good studies in the UK where similar declines are being experienced in the participation of young people, and the level of cynicism there seems to be pretty high. Whether it is higher than, let's say, what we are getting from our students, is difficult to say. I think the real issue, though, is that we will never really know, because of the nature of compulsory voting. It is really a non-comparable situation.

Dr Print—But I think we have to try and balance these sorts of things. Cynicism can be generated from a variety of sources, one of which could be that you do not agree with some of the policies the government or with something that has occurred. You wanted them to do X; they went the other way. So therefore you would be cynical. I am more concerned about people's fundamental behaviour, whether they are actually still going to support the system.

Senator MASON—Or participate in it.

Dr Print—Exactly. You can be a participant and cynical.

Senator MASON—Sure. And you can protest against the government and be out there in the streets, but that does not mean you are not a participator; in fact, you may be a big participator in the democratic system.

Dr Print—Exactly.

Dr Saha—Exactly.

Senator MASON—You may hate the government, but you may be participating in the democratic system.

CHAIR—Gentlemen, our time has expired. You have given us some fascinating evidence; thank you very much. We do appreciate your attendance today.

[12.33 pm]

HADJIMICHAEL, Mr Noel, Deputy Executive Director, Constitution Education Fund Australia

HUSSEIN, Miss Mariam, Research Scholar, Constitution Education Fund Australia

CHAIR—Welcome to today's hearing. Thank you for helping to move this process on. We appreciate that. You have heard that we do not require you to give evidence on oath, but you have also heard that these proceedings have the same standing as proceedings of the houses of the parliament. We have received your written submission. You have given us another submission here?

Mr Hadjimichael—It is a copy of our annual report.

CHAIR—Thank you. Do you have an opening statement to make to the committee?

Mr Hadjimichael—If I may. Firstly, may I place on record on behalf of CEFA's trustees their encouragement and support for this committee in the conduct of this vital inquiry. We have spent most of today listening, and this is our chance to make a small contribution. It is both timely and relevant that the Australian parliament addresses certain priorities. The terms of reference pick up on three areas of priority which CEFA believes require attention: the nature of civics and its relationship to electoral education, which is term of reference 2; the age electoral education might begin, reference 4; and the potential to increase electoral knowledge outside the schooling environment, reference 5. CEFA wishes to emphasise a few key points made in our original submission, and for each of these points I have some examples from the coalface, which the committee may be interested in. These examples come from a range of sources, some of which are illustrated in our annual report, and they come from the majority of states and territories.

Firstly, preparing young Australians to understand and participate effectively in the political process should be a policy priority. At CEFA, we see an awareness of those pillars of democracy which underpin our civil society as necessary before civics education can offer any fundamental skills required by our democratic system. As early as 1997, Dr Hirst, who was part of the Civics Experts Group, stressed that we do not want students to learn about political and legal systems as a series of institutions set out on a chart but as living things which have evolved and can respond to new demands. The commitment by MCEETYA to develop both statements of learning and professional elaborations covering government, citizenship and history confirms this sense of priority. Finally, only this year, at the national 2006 Civics and Citizenship Education Forum hosted by DEST, Tom Calma, Acting Race Discrimination Commissioner, praised the impact of cross-curriculum approaches to human rights as a way of making civics outreach realistic and effective.

Civics is also, in our view, not just about knowledge; it is also about a disposition towards participating in the democratic decision-making process. We would like to celebrate democracy harder and more often. Professor Print has noted in 2001 that the need for a student body which becomes more informed leads to more active citizenship. We know that the Constitutional

Centre of Western Australia, itself working in partnership with the AEC, has shown that relevant and diverse education strategies can reach students and then lead to a higher disposition to participation. We know that the committee will have the opportunity—I believe in Sydney—to have a presentation by Mr Don Perna and students from St Joseph's Catholic High School from the Illawarra. They run an effective year 7 to year 12 extracurricular parliamentary club. His work deserves close scrutiny, as we believe it may be a model to bring parliament to high schools, given the difficulties of bringing high schools to parliament.

Thirdly, we believe a partnership model is more efficient and more economical to pursue. It has the capacity to harness the resources, insight and communication networks of various stakeholders, public and private. We know that the Legislative Assembly of the Northern Territory goes on roadshows, but it goes with the Australia Day Council from the Territory in conjunction with the education authorities. Our own First Voter program, trialled in Queensland this year for launch in October and finalisation in December, will reach 16- to 19-year-olds, many of them at-risk or marginalised youth. But that has involved the AEC, Brisbane City Council, regional stakeholders, youth spaces and the sort of drop-in centres that my generation did not have that young people access, and also university campuses. That is the pooling of resources to reach some common aims. We know that, for example, in the more formal setting, the Victorian parliament, CEFA and the Victorian YMCA have worked together this year to ensure that the 20th Youth Parliament to be held in Victoria includes some of the smallest, most isolated communities—people who would not otherwise have had the opportunity to become involved.

Finally, we would argue that civics cannot start too early. We appreciate that electoral education has a significant impact at the higher high school level, but we know that students as young as six and seven can grapple with effective yet simple civics messages. From our engagement with classroom teachers, academics and students, we believe that there is a hierarchy; that content knowledge is easily tested; that skills development is harder; and that, finally, confirmed disposition to participate is the toughest, because you really only find out after they have left the institutions. We note with interest and support that the Premier of Western Australia in his submission has echoed the plea of others that civics commence as early as possible. We know that that can be done with students as young as year 3. We have also seen a one-teacher school in regional Queensland, using one of our pilot programs, teach civics designed for students in years 5, 6 and 7 to students in year 1. That may often be due to quality teaching, but it can be done. We also recognise that a whole-of-school approach, as has been shown in some of the Victorian secondary colleges, is a sound approach.

If I may, finally, before we take questions, I indicate that we think you do need to look outside of Australia. We, as taxpayers, do not want to send you overseas if we can help it, but we cannot pass up comment on the significant resource base that some NGOs and some organisations in, for example, Canada, have made towards registration, enrolment and participation. We recognise they face similar and sometimes different issues, but we would suggest you look at Canada's Dominion Institute, based in Toronto, and the Student Vote program. It had 450,000 high schoolers in more than 2,500 schools not just, as the AEC mentioned, vote on the day of the election or thereabouts but actually in the run-up to the election run a real-life parliamentary contest with real parties and real representatives reflecting the Canadian political spectrum. They were not make-believe and not pop stars but people who decided to stand in their school

parliament as a liberal, a separatist, a green or a conservative. The results, whilst they did not exactly mirror the results of the Canadian election, indicated significant participation.

We would love to see duplicated here some of the research being done by the Dominion Institute. They are a private organisation that spend only $1.1 million a year. They punch well above their weight. We believe also that the Student Vote program is worthy of this committee's consideration, given this is a large, federal nation that is very similar to Canada. Finally, if we could take questions, we would be delighted.

CHAIR—Thank you for your additional comments. You are a private organisation. You heard earlier evidence about the disadvantage that regional students face in getting here to Canberra and the value of having students come and participate in the parliamentary process. Do you think private organisations would get involved in helping fund students from all around the country to come to Canberra?

Mr Hadjimichael—I think there is some opportunity for private organisations to assist. We actually do have a program called Elected Life, which will be first launched in the Perth divisions early next year, where local individuals tend to support something happening in their backyard. Funding something to happen in Canberra may be somewhat distant from their interests. I know that, for example, the YMCAs and some of the Rotary programs tend to be much more state and territory focused. But, yes, if there is an incentive and an opportunity for private organisations to play a guidance or a leadership role, there would be opportunities to support regional and remote students.

For example, the 13 schools that were involved in our primary exercise last year were hand-picked to be representative of the mix of schools in Australia and included one school 520 kilometres, I think, north-west of Alice Springs. It was very remote and it was an important part of any program to ensure that geography and personal circumstances of students do not mean denial of access.

CHAIR—In your submission you note the stark contrast between students' awareness of matters relating to Anzacs and electoral matters. Why do you think that is? Why do children, students know all about our Anzac traditions but little about our electoral processes?

Mr Hadjimichael—I will initially speak and then ask Miss Hussein to also make a comment. We understand that young people do follow the news and do follow public affairs. They are, as Dr Print mentioned, very much part of the digital age, but it has to be something in which they have an interest and some connection with. Unfortunately, the way civics and electoral education is packaged it does not have the grab. Primary schools and high schools are telling us that and also we are getting it from some of the younger teachers who were part of the lost generation in the seventies who did not get civics, went through to maybe teacher training and stumbled back into it.

Miss Hussein—I also believe from personal experience that most children know more about Anzac Day because they are taught it more at school. It is in the home environment. They know more about it; it is in the newspapers and on the TV and radio. Whereas voting and civics is not really a subject that is promoted and, when it is promoted, it is promoted during election year, so it is not something that is consistent.

Mr Hadjimichael—It is more of an idea than participation: you go to an Anzac Day ceremony in a small school or a large school. You stand, you see the flag, you hear the speech. My generation had dads who marched. Younger generations, thankfully, for very good reasons, do not have that personal connection, but it is more personal and something that I have experienced every year in April, whereas this whole political, government game, is very distant from their life experience.

CHAIR—Does that mean then that we do not fly the flag of democracy enough?

Mr Hadjimichael—We definitely do not fly the flag of democracy, because we are a robust and successful liberal democracy with a great tradition of social justice in terms of the electoral system.

CHAIR—I see that you endorse compulsory national school-conducted testing and assessment for civics and electoral knowledge.

Mr Hadjimichael—We do so for two reasons. One is we have no problems with state or national based testing, but we are very much committed to ensuring that school communities take civics as an important responsibility and also with new and more direct school reports, having just waded through reports of my nine-year-old and five-year-old only this month. It is important that schools know where their students are so they can address deficiencies of knowledge and deficiencies of connection to the materials—by all means at the higher levels—but we believe that schools should drive this. As it has been the case in some of the commentary today, school leadership is critical. Some school principals could literally go slow on this and it could just die. It would just go back in the background. When we did some work with schools we found that some of the Democracy in Schools materials that were provided in the late nineties by the taxpayer were sitting in plastic bags unopened. It is not a criticism of teachers. They have a lot on their plate, but we think we can do better.

CHAIR—You also recommended that material be provided in languages other than English. I initially reacted to that, thinking, 'We're an English-speaking nation.' Can you explain the rationale behind that?

Mr Hadjimichael—You may have noted that we did send some annual reports with our original submission as well. Four of the schools that we chose are actually bilingual schools. At one school in the remote Northern Territory, English is the third language for the majority of the students. In three schools Arabic, Indonesian and Greek were utilised to run our civics materials. It was not so much that there were language barriers; it was to ensure that if there were another significant language of tuition then civics, just like maths and science, could be taught outside the English language environment—so it is not just a special little class for 40 minutes every third Wednesday. We felt that you needed to provide more flexibility for schools. It is interesting that the Anglican school that runs the Indonesian has no natural Indonesian speakers; they just have a commitment to languages at that school.

Mrs MIRABELLA—That seems rather strange, considering that university entrance exams and assessment are all based in English, other than for the study of other languages, as I did myself. Does CEFA have no particular concern about education and ensuring that students actually understand the concepts in English? If one speaks a language other than English, it is

perhaps easier to appreciate that certain concepts and ideas are at times difficult to translate. That is the first issue.

The second issue is: how do we get around involving young people in civics, and as young adults in a democracy, if we cannot even teach them about these things in English? We conduct our democracy in English. As a parliamentarian, I would hope that we would not end up with communities in Australia that deliberately promoted another language instead of English. Other languages are commendable, but they should be in addition to a child's basic understanding of English; otherwise you get, as we have seen—as I am sure you have seen—children who are poorly equipped in English and poorly equipped in another language; they sit somewhere between the two.

Mr Hadjimichael—Just to assist me, I will take the second point first and then I will try to get back to the first point. CEFA as an organisation would be deeply concerned if young Australians who enter into the franchise do not have a workable knowledge of English, because that is the national language and also the language of the broader community. What we are suggesting is that, to ensure take-up initially, if there are environments where materials on civics and citizenship can be provided to schools outside of pure English language resources, we think that would assist take-up and would assist the earlier and the stronger understanding of the materials involved. I think that has possibly addressed the second point, Mrs Mirabella.

Mrs MIRABELLA—No, it has not addressed it; you have provided CEFA's opinion on it.

Mr Hadjimichael—I am quite happy to elaborate further, if it will assist.

Mrs MIRABELLA—No, that is fine; you have answered the question.

Mr Hadjimichael—If you may rephrase the first part of the question. Or have I covered the gist? You are concerned that civics materials should maybe not be made available in either a community language or a language other than English. Is that—

Mrs MIRABELLA—No, what I am trying to get at is that we have a problem with people, both young people and adults, being disinterested in politics and in Australian history, which is linked into civics. Surely it is a further dilution of some sort of commitment to understanding and being part of Australian democracy to start stripping English as the main language of teaching these fundamental principles and the history and structure of government. I find it perverse. Does anyone else agree with me?

Mr Hadjimichael—To answer the core of your question, I refer you to page 11 of our annual report. You will see the students at Al Zahra Islamic College at Arncliffe playing a CEFA designed board game to assist them to understand the concept of parliamentary sovereignty. It is a board game based on the English civil war. It brings students back to that time in the 1600s when the decision was made as to who did have the more effective power—in particular taxation, and effective political power. Parliament was able, through a range of outcomes, to achieve that supremacy but then drifted into an unacceptable form of executive power. Then there was the Restoration. It gives them a feeling for something which was 400 years away from their life experience. We believe that is a particularly helpful acclimatisation. Coming from a

household where nine languages were spoken, I am probably unusual because I only picked up English, but that is possibly my generation.

Mrs MIRABELLA—I don't understand. Are you trying to equate the teaching of Australian civics to children in another language with trying to explain certain parliamentary principles by using an historical example?

Mr Hadjimichael—I am saying that if the tools were available in a language other than English, where it was helpful and would assist, we see that there is some benefit. We would always say that the first and foremost language of tuition should be English, it being the common language of community life in this country, but we see that there is some benefit in materials being made available to reach the market, especially when there may be some newly arrived members of the community who may or may not have as strong a command of English as people—

Mrs MIRABELLA—But we were talking about school children. It was pleasing to hear that you believe English should be the primary language but do you not think that, in the instance you raised, being able to provide this information in another language would be of some assistance, and that where that is directed towards school children the greatest assistance we could possibly provide is ensuring that they have a command of English adequate to have the full course taught in English?

Mr Hadjimichael—It would be ideal if literacy in the national language in students as young as year 3 were sufficient to allow all students to participate. Our organisation is particularly interested to ensure that the widest percentage, the largest band, of students have exposure to civics and citizenship materials in a build-up over time from the age of six, seven or eight all the way into their mid-twenties. We would hope that it is not just a one-off course in primary school and a one-off course in high school. We would want it to be a series of experiences which build on their capacity.

Senator MASON—At the top of page 144 of your submission is a quote from the Prime Minister, and I agree with him:

> 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.

I do not think that is quite right. I think the Constitution actually reflects the democratic culture from where it has come—but nonetheless. This is where this morning has taken me to. It has helped me here. We have legends of sport, we have legends of warfare—I think the chairman mentioned the Anzacs before—and we even have probably the most influential Australians, Australians who have in a sense changed the world we live in, scientists Sir Macfarlane Burnet and Lord Florey with respect to antibiotics. That discovery saved literally tens of millions of lives. He is probably the most influential Australian in that sense of all time. We do not really have democratic legends, like the Americans have Jefferson, Washington, Franklin, Madison and Monroe. We have Barton, Deakin, Parkes and a few others. I am not having a go. But do you see my point? Even in Britain they have legends of democracy. There is Churchill, for God's sake. You mentioned the English civil war. We do not even have that.

In a sense, I understand—and I love history, and I know Mrs Mirabella does; the story of Federation to me is a fascinating one—but it is hard to engage when you are 11, 12, 13, 14, 15 or 16. If you are a middle American kid sitting in Iowa, I can well understand being fascinated by the American revolution. There is a bit of a war and a bit of subterfuge! There are democratic heroes and there is the most beautiful and eloquent language used to describe the outcomes. There was the birth of beautiful, modern democratic language, which the Americans invented. They invented an idea that many of us copied. It is hard for us as politicians, because people say, 'Oh, I may have heard of Deakin or Sir Edmund Barton,' but they are not captured by that. They are captured by Sir Donald Bradman and maybe by a scientist, if you are lucky, or they are captured by the Anzacs. It is hard for us.

Mrs MIRABELLA—Or Errol Flynn!

Senator MASON—Or Errol Flynn—God forbid!

Mr DANBY—A Tasmanian!

Senator MASON—Do you see my point? That is the problem. Is there a way of capturing those people and somehow placing them within the democratic equation? I know you have a quote from Steve Waugh there somewhere. That is good. Perhaps you could have Shane Warne on political philosophy! I do not know. Do you see my point? It is a serious point. We do not have the democratic legends, do we, really? Or they have not been sold that way.

Mr Hadjimichael—Senator, both of us and the education team go to schools just about every week. That is in places like Gippsland and Rockhampton as well as in Sydney, Melbourne and Canberra. You are spot on, to use an analogy, in that we do not have a great raft of champions—although we do have some very good stories which have gone off the radar. For example, Sir John Monash, a great wartime leader, made a significant contribution to both the Victorian Jewish community and Victorian public life in his postwar experience.

Senator MASON—But it is hard to top being the greatest Allied commander of World War I. How do you top that?

Mr Hadjimichael—It is very hard. But the fact that he kept on being involved in public life is a very good story. Another example is that we believe that young people—and it is through some of the work of Dr Print and others as well—are looking for good and positive stories but stories that do not colour everything too rosy. They are looking for stories maybe of determination and stories of encouragement and achievement. For example, some states in the United States still call their ballot system the Australian ballot because they borrowed some very good ideas from Australia in the latter part of the 1800s.

We know that the young people we see—the snapshot of the young people, the other 350 who are in the classrooms that we visited and others, or the young university entrants in our national essay competition—are actually quite positive about the Australian story, but they are searching for that narrative. We have had meetings with senior educators in places like the QUT, the Queensland University of Technology. We spoke to some key history educators, who said that history needs to get a line of its own, needs to have that prominence, because we really have lost that over a period of time.

Senator MASON—You say it is there. So, if we look back through Federation—

Mr Hadjimichael—The stories are there; it is getting them out.

Senator MASON—we have stories of courage, heroism—they are there.

Mr Hadjimichael—I believe they are there, but they need to be repackaged.

Senator MASON—It colours the democracy, doesn't it. When you have that colour it makes more beautiful the narrative by far.

Mr Hadjimichael—I think it makes it more powerful and it also makes the take-up rate better. Miss Hussein might be able to assist as well. She is a little bit on the younger side of me.

Miss Hussein—If I may make a comment on what Professor Print and Dr Saha said earlier. They said that most young people were more interested in getting their licences than in enrolling to vote, which is very true. A lot of the students that I go to university with are not enrolled to vote. Most of them say that is because it is a waste of time or a hassle—'I can't be bothered.' It is seen as something that is irrelevant and they are not interested in it. I really do believe, as Noel said earlier, in one of the points that we made: it is not just about knowledge and teaching kids; it is also about a positive disposition towards active democracy and decision making. I think that is instilled in the home as well as at school.

CHAIR—Thank you for coming down from Sydney.

Mr Hadjimichael—May I very briefly say thank you for the opportunity. Can we leave the one message that we believe non-government, non-partisan organisations, do have a role to play in addition to the institutional players that we saw today.

CHAIR—I think we already understand that. Thank you for your message.

Resolved (on motion by **Mr Danby**):

That this committee authorises publication, including publication on the parliamentary database, of a proof of the transcript of the evidence given before it at the public hearing this day.

Committee adjourned at 1.08 pm