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JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE ON ELECTORAL MATTERS

**Reference: Civics and electoral education**

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## JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE ON

### ELECTORAL MATTERS

Friday, 22 September 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 Brandis, Hogg and Murray and Mr Ciobo and Mr Lindsay

#### **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.

**WITNESSES**

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**SAEGENSCHNITTER, Mr Lester, Principal of Concordia College, Association of Independent Schools of South Australia..... 1**

**WORTH, Mrs Joan Lorraine, Director of Curriculum Development at Concordia College, Association of Independent Schools of South Australia ..... 1**



**Committee met at 10.15 am**

**LE DUFF, Mr Garry, Executive Director, Association of Independent Schools of South Australia**

**PLISKO, Mr Igor, Senior Secondary Teacher of Politics and History, Association of Independent Schools of South Australia**

**SAEGENSCHNITTER, Mr Lester, Principal of Concordia College, Association of Independent Schools of South Australia**

**WORTH, Mrs Joan Lorraine, Director of Curriculum Development at Concordia College, Association of Independent Schools of South Australia**

**CHAIR (Mr Lindsay)**—Welcome. The Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters is inquiring into civics and electoral education. This inquiry was referred by the Special Minister of State on 24 March 2006 and we have received 100 submissions. We are focusing on the quality of education provided to young Indigenous and migrant Australians and we are interested in finding better ways of inspiring and engaging these groups in Australia's electoral process. It is going to be very interesting this afternoon as we are going to hold a school forum in the Legislative Assembly chamber. It will involve 60 students and eight teachers. It will be the first time that we have done that, although we have talked to students in classrooms.

Witnesses are reminded that we do not require you to give evidence under oath, but the hearing is a legal proceeding of the parliament and warrants the same respect as the proceedings of both houses. Do you have any comments to make on the capacity in which you appear?

**Mr Plisko**—I teach at University Senior College.

**Mrs Worth**—I am at Concordia College currently—but only from this term. I was recently at Woodcroft College for an extended period of time.

**CHAIR**—Do you wish to present any additional submissions or would you like to make a short opening statement?

**Mr Le Duff**—I would like to make a short opening statement. I also add that we have other information that we have collected since the written submission was presented, particularly making contact with one of our schools that has a very high enrolment in Indigenous students. That may be helpful.

**CHAIR**—Is that written material?

**Mr Le Duff**—No, I can make a presentation on it.

**CHAIR**—Okay. Mr Le Duff, please proceed.

**Mr Le Duff**—First of all, thank you for giving us the opportunity to be present at this hearing. Our written submission was actually based on consultation with our member schools. We

represent 100 per cent of the independent schools in South Australia. I am not going to give a detailed outline of the submission but will identify some key messages. First of all, we want to emphasise that, whilst concerns have been expressed about the negative aspects of young people's involvement in the political process and, more broadly, in the community, our work with our schools indicates there are numerous examples of very positive involvement in the community—locally, nationally and internationally.

We believe that the matter of electoral education and young people's understanding of and interest and involvement in the political process must be viewed in the wider context of their knowledge of civics education and social engagement in the community generally, and that engagement in the political process is one element of that active participation.

We believe that the area of civics and citizenship, until very recently, has not been given the policy priority that other key areas of the curriculum have been given, particularly areas such as literacy and numeracy, and vocational education and training. However, in more recent times, both at a national level and at a state level, there has been greater emphasis placed on this area. You probably would be aware from other written submissions and presentations that recently there has been a national trialling of the civics and citizenship national assessment. In South Australia we have a review of the senior secondary certificate. That includes a key capability referred to as civic participation, and that is one of the recommended areas that will be included in the new curriculum that is about to be developed.

You are probably aware also that national statements of learning have been developed. One of those is civics and citizenship. That has just become available and we will certainly be making our schools aware of those initiatives.

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

The written submission actually outlines some examples and strategies that are used and my colleagues here today, who are from two of our member schools, will be in a better position to detail those. I can also indicate that we have made contact with Crossways Lutheran School at Ceduna on Eyre Peninsula, which has an Indigenous student enrolment of 72 per cent, and that school has given us some information that you may wish to explore. In the submission we do make reference to young people's disconnection from the political process, including the parliamentary process and other structural institutions within the community. We also make reference in the paper to the characteristics of the Y generation and how there is a disjunction between some ways that young people think today and institutional structures that may discourage their involvement.

In summary, the paper does make reference to some proposed initiatives, for example, a provisional electoral enrolment process, comprehensive professional development for teachers, a special focus week, and stronger links between local government and schools. Lastly, whilst there has been a focus on improving the knowledge of electoral and political processes for young people, we believe the major challenge is to facilitate the engagement of young people across



levels of government and within the community. So I will leave it at that and my colleagues can help you with responses that are more detailed.

**CHAIR**—Just a point of clarification: you talked about the Crossways Lutheran School at Ceduna. Did you say you had information?

**Mr Le Duff**—Yes. If you wish, I can briefly outline it.

**CHAIR**—Yes.

**Mr Le Duff**—Two major points that were made were, firstly, this is not mainly at primary school; it is at primary school and middle school. The principal indicated to us that he did not see any major difference in the engagement in the curriculum or in the projects that the school has in connecting to the community between the Indigenous students in the school and other students. Secondly, contrary to some other advice that we have received from other schools, he indicated that often the Indigenous students were more passionate and had a better understanding of some of the major social issues, such as social justice issues, and were engaging more in debates on those issues than other students. I thought they were very interesting comments.

**CHAIR**—Very interesting. In your submission you made a point which we have not seen anywhere else in the Commonwealth of Australia. You said that your association would not support a uniform approach to the topic of incorporating civics education into your curriculum. You would rather see it incorporated in a way that best meets the needs of the student population. Could you expand on that for us?

**Mr Le Duff**—In the submission—and the people from the schools can certainly add to this—we have identified four or five different approaches. There might be core knowledge but the strategies and the curriculum structures that are used—and this occurs in other disciplines as well—should be able to vary to best suit the school. We would not see necessarily, firstly, a standardised stand-alone curriculum or, secondly, particular strategies imposed on schools. We have given some broad strategies and approaches to this which we think are appropriate for each of the schools involved.

**Mr Saegenschmitter**—If we take Concordia College as an example, we have an integrated approach that goes from year 7 through to year 12 where different things are done at different year levels. We take advantage of our proximity to Unley council, which is down the road from us, and our proximity to the city and so we have access to resources that are close at hand that maybe a school at Reynella or a place further from the city would not have. For instance, our year 9s come into the city and spend a week and amongst the things they do there is visit Parliament House. They spend some time going through the Adelaide Town Hall, getting information about local government and so on. Those kinds of initiatives are not really part of a program that necessarily other schools could have. Because of our proximity, it is an opportunity for us to develop a program that is associated with our particular location.

**CHAIR**—As a principal, have you received any approaches from the AEC offering electoral education or offers by the AEC to come to the school to talk to years 11 and 12?

**Mr Saegenschnitter**—We have a legal studies subject at years 11 and 12 and the information is directed at that level. We certainly take advantage of those offers. I think that University Senior College too is a—

**CHAIR**—But the question was: have you received an offer from the AEC to come to your school?

**Mr Plisko**—Yes. They are very outgoing in reaching out to schools. It is not a problem with me because we are literally 200 yards down the road and we just walk up here. Next week I am taking both my year 11 classes to where you were this morning, and I would probably visit that office about six or seven times a year because of the number of classes I have at year 11 and year 12. They play a very important role.

**Senator HOGG**—Just to clarify, is that across all the year 11 and 12 students or are these students in a specific strand that studies—

**Mr Plisko**—They are students who do year 11 and year 12 Australian and international politics. I have two classes at year 11 and three classes at year 12 and as part of the education, within year 11, there is a topic called ‘Government’ and I take them—

**Senator HOGG**—I accept that, but there is still a range of students in years 11 and 12 not exposed to what you are doing?

**Mr Plisko**—Specifically, the AEC, no.

**Mr Saegenschnitter**—We receive that information and I give it to my legal studies teacher who uses that.

**Senator HOGG**—It is the legal studies kids?

**Mr Saegenschnitter**—Yes.

**CHAIR**—So you are aware of the availability?

**Mr Saegenschnitter**—Yes, certainly. I mentioned City Week before. We did not do that this year but in the past we have taken students to that during City Week and they have an opportunity to participate in mock elections and to understand the election process.

**CHAIR**—Is it just very hard to fit these additional things into the year 11-12 curriculum?

**Mr Saegenschnitter**—It is huge, yes. We are in a situation where at a national level there is concern expressed at our position in the OECD countries in relation to the PISA test in literacy and numeracy and so on. We really do concentrate on those things. We have a big emphasis on those. We do try to fit in these other things but it is not one of our prime focuses at this stage.

**Mrs Worth**—What we are talking about in schools is the crowded curriculum. I think this is one of the reasons why Garry would be talking about not making a compulsory unit that should be implemented in schools. Students and schools have a great deal of subject knowledge areas of

curriculum to cover and to have something else to be done in an obligatory way would not work in many schools. You need to have flexibility because there is so much that you want to address in the curriculum. In the national goals of schooling you have eight areas of curriculum that you have to address at all year levels for all students. You have great pressure to develop students in IT and in values education and you have got the pastoral care programs that we operate. That is why we need flexibility. We can take on board a whole range of things but we need to be able to work with our local clientele as to how we offer it and when we offer it. So what would be useful for schools would be to have guidelines for a program that you might put in place and a set of outcomes or objectives and then the school should have the flexibility to work out where that would best fit and how that would work in with the curriculum as it is offered in the independent school system.

**Senator HOGG**—In your schools do you set about consciously and actively seeking to enrol students in their last year of school and put them on the electoral roll?

**CHAIR**—Could I modify that question—with respect, Senator Hogg—and ask the witnesses to please answer the senator’s question but add this to it: do you think schools have a responsibility to assist their students in enrolling to vote in their last year of school?

**Mr Le Duff**—If you go to our submission, there is a proposal there for a provisional enrolment, which to us would be some way of taking up that responsibility and perhaps making it part of their education. I would like to pass over to the others to explain that in more detail, but while I have the opportunity: one of the elements that I think schools are facing at the moment is that the priority for particular areas of the curriculum is essentially being driven by national policy so that, quite often, the pressure on schools to move in particular directions is not necessarily, as I said earlier, done in a coherent way, where the totality of the curriculum is viewed. I mentioned the area of literacy and numeracy, which nobody is going to say is not important. But there are these huge demands being placed on schools, and the need to get some coherency in these initiatives, and look at the commonalities and how they contribute to one another, is very important. But you may want to pursue the provisional enrolment issue, which we would see as linking the formal curriculum to enrolment in the electoral process.

**Senator HOGG**—I accept that, but is it something that takes place at the moment—

**Mr Le Duff**—No.

**Mrs Worth**—No, not at all.

**Senator HOGG**—that schools actively promote electoral enrolment with their year 12 students, who—

**Mr Plisko**—We actually do.

**Senator HOGG**—You actually do?

**Mr Plisko**—We actually do. A number of my year 11s who are 17 will enrol at these sessions. They know about the age difference of 17 and 18, and I would expect them to know that. One of the common responses I have from this group, though, is: why should I enrol? What is in it for

me? It is almost the typical generation Y scenario—and then they look at the stereotypical picture of politicians. That is why I have got my class here, so they can see you guys in the flesh.

**Senator HOGG**—We are different!

**Mr Plisko**—They have these stereotypes of corrupt, lazy, pigs in the trough. They bring the stereotypes from home and they say, ‘Why should I vote for somebody who is self-seeking and self-serving?’ That is a constant media presentation. One of the things that I do in the classroom is represent you guys, to some extent, and try to present a balanced view—another point of view on the work that politicians do, the amount of material that is being discussed. I use snippets of programs such as *Order in the House* and others that are on TV. It is about educating the students that what we see in the media, in the 6.30 pm TV programs, is simply not true.

**Senator HOGG**—I put it to you that you are the exception rather than the rule.

**Senator MURRAY**—We have got the students here, I think.

**Mr Plisko**—Some of them will be here this afternoon.

**Senator MURRAY**—There are 30 or 40 of them. I wonder if they could just raise their hands if they are enrolled, so I can see how many of them are enrolled.

**Mr Plisko**—These are year 11s.

**Senator MURRAY**—Are there any 17-year-olds there?

**Mr Plisko**—Is anyone 17?

**Interjector**—I turned 17 three days ago.

**Interjector**—I turned 17 yesterday.

**Senator HOGG**—I turn 17 tomorrow!

**Mr Plisko**—Now you are lying!

**Senator MURRAY**—So, for the purposes of *Hansard*, two are enrolled. That is right, isn’t it?

**Mr Plisko**—Yes. When we go to the AEC next week, it is one of the things they do automatically.

**Mr Le Duff**—Could I just take up Senator Hogg’s point. I was visiting the Riverland member schools over the last couple of days and because we were coming here I had a discussion with the heads and some of the teachers. I am not sure that it is necessarily widespread, but among those schools is Loxton Lutheran School, where they have set up a parliament within the school, for the upper primary schools. The principal was very positive about the opportunities that we have in this country as a democracy and was very positive about the role of politicians. So I

would agree with you on that as a general statement, but I think it is probably much more widespread among schools—there is an effort to try to give an indication of the benefits of the processes that we do have in place, as well as, I think, point out that we do have those negative images which may be contributing to that disengagement from the political process.

**Mr CIOBO**—Can I pick up on this point. Mr Plisko, you made reference to ‘what’s in it for me?.’ and the generation Y attitude. I address this to all of you: a number of witnesses who have come before the committee have indicated that the great problem with underenrolment, the great problem with lack of representation, is a problem with the customer—the phrase that I use—and not with the process that we use to educate young Australians about the need to enrol.

We have had some witnesses who, thankfully, have said, ‘No, actually, maybe we’re going about it in the wrong way.’ As to your comment on ‘what is in it for me?’, in terms of curriculum development and the actual education of young Australians, how do you evaluate and send the message to young Australians, saying, ‘Being enrolled to vote is not something that is just about process or the machine of voting; there is a reason why you should vote.’ That could be to do with important historical figures who have had an impact. Do you talk about Lenin and Churchill and these sorts of significant milestones in our world history?

**Mr Plisko**—I am not sure where to start with that.

**Mr CIOBO**—In the development of the curriculum, I guess the central thrust is the machinery of voting versus why you vote.

**Mr Plisko**—At year 11, when the students come into my classes, basically I spend about a month to six weeks engaging them. I engage them by asking them about their values and what is important. I make the whole situation relevant to them. By making them realise that they have an opinion, a voice and a say and that we should be listening to them, they do get engaged. We participate in an activity called ‘Defend your position’. I remove the desks in the classroom and we get away from the traditional situation. I throw them in at the deep end and I confront them. Once we reach that stage and they are in a trusting environment within the classroom, I then begin to bring in the politics of it. I begin to bring in the relevance of laws and how laws can impact on them in education, as students going to university and when they are in the workplace. I bring in different speakers from different occupations—politicians and academics—and they make politics relevant to them. So I make a direct connection. I remove all traditional teaching methodologies to some extent. I take this group out of their comfort zone. I give them a hard time and they give me a hard time back. We develop a trusting relationship and that is what it is about.

**Mr CIOBO**—Would you say that is a technique that is common to educators in South Australia?

**Mr Plisko**—No, of course not.

**Mr CIOBO**—So it is something unique to you?

**Mr Plisko**—It has taken me 20 years to get to this position. When I first started teaching politics, or Australian studies and politics within it, I was very streamlined. I was in a traditional

Catholic school. I was the fount of all knowledge. As a baby boomer that is how I was taught and I used that methodology with that particular group. As we have gone through and the client, as you call them—the student; the person in front of me—and their values, attitudes and upbringing have changed, I have had to change or I would be an educational dinosaur.

**Mr CIOBO**—Mr Le Duff, in terms of independent schools, if that is a model that works, is that something that is rolled out across all independent schools? If not, why not? How do we go about altering what I think is effectively a rote learning method of teaching politics and civics?

**Mr Plisko**—I object to the words ‘rote learning’. It is not rote learning.

**Mr CIOBO**—No, I am not saying that is what you have done. I am saying that historically—

**Mr Plisko**—Historically, yes.

**Mr CIOBO**—teaching methods have been that way. I think that is why we get such a poor penetration rate. What you are doing is the exception. I am asking why we are not embracing that.

**Mr Plisko**—Before Garry speaks, can I say that it comes down to the passion of the teacher. It comes back to the classroom practitioner and how they feel about it. If you are out at Ceduna and you are a PE specialist and they say to you, ‘Go and teach politics,’ that person will kill the subject. The group of half a dozen teachers in Adelaide who teach it are very passionate about it. The reason I got involved is because, although I taught senior history and senior geography, when I taught senior politics I saw in front of me the changes that occurred as I gave those students the knowledge and empowered them. Once that empowerment occurred the interest just flowed and the passion for the subject flowed.

**Mr Le Duff**—As an association we cannot impose a uniform process. I am not sure that is the best strategy. What we have used in other discipline areas is what I call the ‘best practice classroom’ area, where teachers actually share those different approaches. I think that is the approach that we would take. The second point I would like to make is that we are not dealing here just with years 11 and 12. It is across the area. We would have to look at how those various approaches would work for the early years of primary and also for the upper years of primary. We would have to have a look at how schools are actually organised and how they develop participatory processes for students inside the school, let alone in the community.

The final point I want to make—and I keep coming back to this—is the emphasis on policy-driven initiatives. One area that has not been able to get a guernsey, if you like, in the sense of policy initiatives, is the social sciences. We have had the recent debates about where history fits in the curriculum, the integration of social sciences into society and the environment and so on, and whether we do need to explore whether some of the more traditional discipline boundaries are in fact better ways to re-engage with and re-emphasise the historical processes and the critical steps in the history of the country and society. So there is a number of elements there. The role of the association, I think, is to look for initiatives within our member schools and share those initiatives, and we would certainly be interested in facilitating that.

**Mr CIOBO**—But, from a policymaker perspective—and this is what I am interested in getting your opinion on—I think it is fair to say that the vast bulk of civics education is failing: it is failing to cut through and it is failing to take the attention of young Australians coming through. That is clear; it translates into community attitudes and opinions which are exacerbated by the media culture you talk about. If we are going to get an educated civilian population that understands the importance of democracy—and I use the word ‘educated’ relevant to that—then surely there must be some carrot or stick, or whatever term you want to use, beyond merely saying, ‘We need to sit down and have a conversation about it and try to encourage people to adopt best practice.’ Surely there must be something a little more rudimentary and fundamental required of teaching staff, if we are going to ever truly move beyond this old-style approach.

**Mr Le Duff**—That goes to my introductory comments about a national strategy, which would, I think, not just involve schools but also other resources in the community. One of the points we make later in our written submission is about the development of teachers not only in-service but also in their initial training.

**Mr CIOBO**—But how do we evaluate whether that is working?

**Mr Le Duff**—You have to conduct evaluations. And I think, when the national assessment process is more comprehensive, we will have some understanding of that. But my concern is really the engagement beyond school—engagement in the community. Schools have a critical role to play in that but so do, I think, people such as yourselves and other agencies. What we have to do is look at all of those different points of resources, including the young people, and develop a comprehensive strategy.

And, lastly, if you want more of a stick approach rather than a carrot approach, we do have registration processes across Australia for non-government schools; that could be used to review the strategies and the content of the curriculum. But it is much more comprehensive than just schools. Disengagement is not just about young people; it is also about adults in the community.

**Mr Plisko**—History is against you, I am sorry. You are fighting against it.

**Mr CIOBO**—That is why we need to make the change going forward, in my view.

**Mr Plisko**—I will ask you a question: what happened in 1924?

**CHAIR**—I will rule that question out of order!

**Mr Plisko**—Compulsory voting was introduced to this country in 1924 because the politicians, prior to that, were concerned about the 40 per cent to 50 per cent that were voting. After that, and up until now, it is 96 per cent. If you look at the *Hansard* debates at that particular time, you see that they stated that we have to introduce this to educate the electorate or the politics so that they know what is going on. Since 1924 up until now have we educated our population or the parents who socialise their children? No, we have not. The other part of history that is against us is the formation of Federation. I am currently taking my students through this; the lecture after is going to be about the 1890s and the conferences that occurred, which, to me, were absolutely fantastic, exciting times. This morning I asked my 14-year-old daughter about it and she said, ‘Boring.’

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

**CHAIR**—I would like to ask you a question in return but we are running out of time. I have two senators who want to ask questions, but I would have asked you: why is it that students come out of your system thinking that the informal vote actually goes to the government?

**Senator BRANDIS**—I want to pursue the very topic you have just been talking about and your observation a bit earlier in the morning that there is a very poor opinion of politicians. I think that is right. The impression I get from you and from others we have heard from in these hearings is that students think: Australian democracy good, politics bad, politicians very bad. Is that basically it?

**Mr Plisko**—Yes. They take democracy for granted.

**Senator BRANDIS**—When students have sort of engaged in the kind of debate or educative experience you have explained to us, has that, in your observation, altered their attitude to politics?

**Mr Plisko**—I will use a politician's answer by giving you a story. At the beginning of my course, I tell my students: 'After having spent 16 weeks or one semester with me if you come away with one thing, I am happy. Before you put a one on your ballot paper, I want you to think for 30 seconds about to whom you are going to give this power to represent you in parliament. If you do that, I have done my job.'

**Senator BRANDIS**—And generally you succeed in achieving that outcome?

**Mr Plisko**—I do not want to know. How they vote is none of my business.

**Senator BRANDIS**—I guess I am looking particularly at this distinction between electoral education and civics education. One of the risks that we run—I am not only directing this to you, Mr Plisko—is that if we talk about electoral education in isolation, we become too concerned with process and not sufficiently concerned with the values that underlie the process and the outcomes that the process should produce. You all seem to be nodding in agreement with that. Going back to your observation that students find politics boring in Australia because we do not have revolutions and wars and so on, is it an angle of approach to say: 'That is because our democracy is successful. Wars and revolutions are an example of a system failing and the reason we have not had that in Australia is because our system has worked better than almost any system in the world'? Is that something that you can get through to students?

**Mr Plisko**—Not at this level. That is a degree of sophistication that you would expect at the tertiary level. My purpose is to engage the students in understanding their political system. When you talk about civics and the electoral system, to me they are both tied together, because civics



and citizenship are about being a member of a nation. You are part of a nation that has rights and responsibilities and part of that is voting at elections when we choose our representatives.

**Mrs Worth**—I think what Igor has been pointing to in all that he has been saying is that the whole issue in schools depends on methodology and pedagogy by which the material is delivered.

**Senator BRANDIS**—And also the quality of the teacher. I am sure that Mr Plisko is a great teacher; you can see his passion.

**Mrs Worth**—That is what I am talking about. It is the pedagogy that the teacher employs. It is also about teacher knowledge. Igor has mentioned there is this attitude in broader Australian society that is anti-politics. Loads of people do not read the newspaper, they do not watch any TV, they never watch a news broadcast et cetera. Most teachers are no different to the rest of the Australian community. They might be slightly better educated perhaps than the average person in the Australian community, but they too are fairly apolitical in many instances and most of them do not have any formal academic training in civics or politics. So when you are looking at how we improve the delivery of what everyone agrees would be a good thing to have in schools, you have to look at both educating teachers and working with them to deliver it in interesting ways that will engage students.

**Senator BRANDIS**—I think that is a very good point, but is it as sophisticated as that?

**Mrs Worth**—It is.

**Senator BRANDIS**—Is it?

**Mrs Worth**—Yes.

**Senator BRANDIS**—Basically what I am concerned to do is to make the link, which I fear is not being sufficiently made, between the parliament and the democratic process—which we talk about in electoral education—and political involvement. I will give you an example. My daughter is in grade 9. She is, at the moment, very interested in the environment and the environmental issues that she is being taught. My feeling is that kids in the early teenage years get very interested in issues, but what we have to do is to convey to them that the way to deal with and to have a say about issues is through political participation. That is the mechanism through which they can translate their concerns and idealism into outcomes. To do that we have to give politics a good name, but not necessarily politicians. Mocking politicians goes back to the ancient Greeks, so that is not a problem. But we should give politics a good name and encourage students to be involved in politics. Mr Le Duff, you talked before about community involvement. Community involvement in public issues to me is almost a definition of politics, but I am not sure that that is being conveyed to students.

**Mr Le Duff**—We have to have a connectivity between what we are trying to achieve in the way that you have explained, but are the structures that are set up facilitating that? Is the way that young people view that you get involved consistent with the structures that are set up? Are there barriers between their interest in those political and social issues and the way that they can have active involvement? We have already had debates in recent days about structures in one

political party, and whether the structures of those political organisations are in fact set up to somehow make that connectivity. I would agree with you that there needs to be encouragement and a more positive attitude to that, but the point I made earlier on is that schools can also facilitate that. But to engage what is a potentially great set of talent and interest, how do you then connect that up into the structures among political institutions?

**Senator BRANDIS**—To answer your question, I agree there are barriers. But I think a lot of those barriers are barriers of perception and, in particular, the perception that political parties are inaccessible. I take it you were referring to Senator Ray's speech the day before yesterday when you made that remark before. But if you look at what he said, what he was really saying was that there are too few people involved in the Australian Labor Party so it becomes a series of fiefdoms controlled by warlords. And is not just the Labor Party that has that problem. The answer to that is to get more people involved in political parties. I would have thought that as a civics educator a great thing to do would be to break down that barrier of perception and encourage people who are interested in politics to join Young Labor, to join the Young Liberals and to actually get involved in a political party, because it is not that hard.

**Senator MURRAY**—I would not say that I am an expert in education, but I went to nine schools so I came across many, many teachers. The fact is that passionate and great teachers are rare and scarce. Most teachers are average, ordinary human beings; they are not outstanding. Therefore you cannot rely on the best to convey what you want. You have to get a general standard up.

For those who are not skilled and are not great teachers in this particular area, what is the quality of the support material that is available? What are the educational aids like? What are the textbooks and the audiovisual aids like? What is the material like that is available to assist the teacher who is less than inspired or less than informed, who is not a passionate person but still has to convey this knowledge? What is the curriculum like?

**Mrs Worth**—There is a lot of excellent material around. The Discovering Democracy kit has been promoted through schools and many teachers have been in-serviced in that. That has brought quite a lot of success in terms of curriculum delivery in that area. Essentially, what many teachers do, as Igor has said, is to go to the internet, to all of these different sources, and draw them all together into a form that they can deliver. Most teachers find it very difficult to just take something that someone else has prepared and deliver it as stated. Teachers have to internalise the information, the knowledge and the concepts that they want to convey and then work out how they are going to do it. I think one of the biggest issues is not a lack of materials—there is such a wide range to choose from; it takes ages to sort through it—but the teacher has to have time to internalise it and work out a curriculum that they can deliver. There is no point in prepackaging something and saying to the teacher, 'Go and deliver that and deliver it in this way.'

I think a lot of it comes down to investing a great deal of resources—if you are talking about school based delivery of this sort of material into teacher education—and possibly even release time for teachers to develop their teaching programs and things like that. To just say to a teacher, 'You're going to have to include all of these things in the curriculum and add this in with whatever else you are doing; you'll have to work out what you have to drop out, but you still have to teach your five or six classes in the week,' is not going to get you much of an outcome,

unless you have people who can be workshopped on as to how to do that and also provided with the time to physically do the task.

**Senator MURRAY**—Tell me about that then. If you say that teaching aids, textbooks, audiovisual material and so on are all of high quality and it is the teacher—even those who are not inspired and passionate people—who needs to reach a certain degree of training and development, what are the professional development and the retraining circumstances like for teachers in this state?

**Mr Le Duff**—It depends on whether we are talking about the teaching workforce in general. I think we have two groups. We have the group who are the specialists—people as compassionate and as expert as Igor—but if you are talking more broadly, and we have had a focus very much on the senior secondary, the other group I keep drawing back to is the primary sector and its role in this. That is a very large teaching workforce if you are expecting the teaching workforce generally to enthuse and give knowledge. That would be quite a major thing. There are funding programs available through the Commonwealth such as the Australian Government Quality Teacher Program. There is funding available through other externally funded programs. But the independent sector particularly relies on the Commonwealth. There are minimal funds, almost zero, available through the state government for these sorts of areas. To me, it is very patchy and, again, it is driven by the immediate priority of the moment, whether it be literacy, numeracy, VET or whatever the policy initiative is. There would need to be an enormous amount of resources available if we are talking about the existing workforce having a major role in this area.

**Senator MURRAY**—The intention that lies behind the thinking of our terms of reference and the general approach we are taking is to enlarge the field of engagement to make civics education and political and historical understanding much broader within the student community, and indeed the migrant community.

**Mr Le Duff**—One quick response to that is, in moving around the schools, as I do, the range of local resources which are available is quite extraordinary. We are probably having a focus here on national politics, but if you look at local government and the engagement between local government and schools, I think that is another area, particularly in rural areas, because the rural schools are not necessarily going to have access to people.

**Senator MURRAY**—Are you saying it is high or low, or there is a potential?

**Mr Le Duff**—Again, it is very patchy in my movements across the state. In the Riverland over the last couple of days, two out of the three schools have got very strong partnerships with the local government and other agencies. So I would say the potential is there and it is patchy.

**Senator HOGG**—The last question is to Mr Plisko. We have done a straw poll amongst students and teachers who have come before the committee on how many students read newspapers as a source of information about civics, politics, and general matters. When you have responded to that, depending on your answer, does it change at the end of your course?

**CHAIR**—Did you also mean television?

**Senator HOGG**—And television, yes.

**Mr Plisko**—I will stick to newspapers. Making Canberra and Parliament House accessible for students outside is a critical feature. I have a student in this class over there who is passionate about politics because she went to Canberra last year. Making it accessible, I would do a three-day trip, travel overnight, go to all the different places—the High Court et cetera—and it would be stunning. I get the *Australian*, the *Sydney Morning Herald*—

**Senator HOGG**—No; we are talking about students. How many students?

**Mr Plisko**—Yes, I am getting there. I get three or four national newspapers a day. The back of my classroom is piled up with newspapers. We go through the newspapers. I have an exercise whereby I take them through political cartoons—

**Senator HOGG**—Yes, but prior to your course, how many students?

**Mr Plisko**—Very few. I expect zilch.

**Senator HOGG**—All right, and at the end of your course?

**Mr Plisko**—How many are reading them? Hopefully, most of them. Who is reading the paper, guys? There we are.

**Senator HOGG**—That is good. We cannot show that on the *Hansard* record, but the *Hansard* record should show that the majority of the class are now reading a newspaper.

**Senator BRANDIS**—Would you acknowledge, though, that Canberra is much more accessible than it used to be? The idea of school parties going to Canberra, usually at about grade 7 level, is very commonplace now in a way that it used not to be. There is a cost factor, of course.

**Mr Plisko**—The cost factor is obviously a feature. A three-day trip, leaving on a Wednesday night and coming back Saturday morning, is about \$500.

**Senator BRANDIS**—You must have taken groups—

**Mr Plisko**—I have not taken any groups, no.

**Senator BRANDIS**—There are so many. Maybe this is more an eastern seaboard phenomenon, but there are so many excursions. Parliament House is geared to cater for those excursions—they have got it down to a fine art—and they don't just go to Parliament House.

**Mr Plisko**—The rebates, though, are pretty poor. This particularly applies to rural schools. It is just pathetic, to be quite frank.

**Senator BRANDIS**—What are the rebates?

**Mr Plisko**—I don't know. It varies by distance, but it is somewhere between \$60 and \$200.

**Senator BRANDIS**—Would you urge this committee, in the recommendations it makes to the government as a result of this inquiry, to increase the rebate to make those school visits to Canberra more affordable?

**Mr Plisko**—Yes.

**Mr Le Duff**—Particularly for rural schools. Again, in the Riverland over the last few days three schools—government and independent—joined together and went off to Canberra but the cost for those schools to do that each year is significant.

**Senator BRANDIS**—I agree with the anecdote that Mr Plisko gave us—that when somebody who is just becoming aware of public issues, at about 13, 14 or whatever, visits Canberra and actually sees parliament in operation, there is a very good chance that they will be captivated by even just the drama of it and from that point on begin to take a serious interest in politics.

**Mr Le Duff**—Yes.

**Mr Plisko**—Yes.

**Mrs Worth**—There are logistical problems with transporting large numbers of students to Canberra, so this could only be but one of the many—

**Senator HOGG**—Could you give us a supplementary submission on just that issue—the problems—

**Mr Le Duff**—We would be happy to do that.

**Senator HOGG**—And give us some idea of the number of schools that access it, the number of students and, if they do not access it, why they do not access it, and the difficulties—

**Senator BRANDIS**—You say 'the logistical difficulties'. Of course there are, but I am from Queensland. There are numerous schools from quite remote towns in western Queensland, who would have fewer logistical difficulties than people in Adelaide, who make the journey to Canberra. Maybe the culture of participation varies from state to state. In my state, it is more common than not for schools to make the visit, no matter how far flung their localities are.

**Mrs Worth**—I would be interested in looking at the overall statistics for the state—just what proportion of students actually undertake that journey. How would a school go about transporting 180 year 9s—13- and 14-year-olds?

**CHAIR**—The Parliamentary Education Office will be able to provide that information.

**Mrs Worth**—It can be done. The point I am making is that for a school this would be a major undertaking. It would exclude outdoor education programs and everything else that may be undertaken during those particular years of schooling.

**Mr CIOBO**—With respect to the supplementary submission, could I also ask you to perhaps include some assessment of the value of going to Canberra versus attending, for example, your state capital?

**Mr Le Duff**—That was the point I was going to make. There would be schools that would use local resources, like the local government or here. So I would be happy to do that.

**Mr CIOBO**—The state capital in South Australia, for example, is perhaps unlike Queensland in that you have both chambers.

**Mr Le Duff**—Schools do utilise that.

**Mr Plisko**—The answer is by coming here and by going to Canberra you explain division of powers. It is as simple as that. Explaining the bicameral system, the bicameral houses, is difficult. To explain the division of powers, you physically show the difference of where it occurs. Then you bring in separation of powers, which throws them yet again.

**CHAIR**—Thank you for your attendance here today.

[11.08 am]

**BUTLER, Mr David, Policy and Program Officer Society and Environment, Office of Primary, Middle and Senior Secondary Services, Department of Education and Children's Services**

**COCHRAN, Ms Maureen, Superintendent Middle Years and Learning Areas, Office of Primary, Middle and Senior Secondary Services, Department of Education and Children's Services**

**CHAIR**—I welcome representatives of the South Australian Department of Education and Children's Services. We do not require you to give evidence under oath, but these are legal proceedings of the parliament. Please respect them as such. We have received a written submission from you. Do you want to present any additional submission or would you like to make a short opening statement?

**Ms Cochram**—We would first like to recognise that you have not received a written submission.

**CHAIR**—Do you have a short opening statement?

**Ms Cochram**—Thank you. I am going to focus the opening statement on our curriculum framework for public schools in South Australia. The South Australian standards and accountability framework is the mandated curriculum framework for all DECS schools. Civics and citizenship education is a key element of the framework. Civics education—learning about political, legal and social institutions, structures and processes—is included within the social systems strand in the society and environment learning area. Our curriculum framework embraces birth to year 10. The society and learning area promotes democratic processes and supports values such as a commitment to individual freedom; the rights and responsibilities associated with participating in a democratic society; respect for the law and for legitimate and just authority; respect for different choices, viewpoints and ways of living; and commitment to ethical behaviour and equitable participation in decision making. These values contribute to students' understanding of what constitutes a fair and just society.

Citizenship education and engaging in decision making and community activities in the classroom, the school and the community involve the engagement of students in their school and community life and around the absolute concept of responsible citizenship. I would like to emphasise that that is across the curriculum. We could possibly talk about that a little later.

Electoral education is the blending within our curriculum framework of civics and citizenship education. The understanding of democratic decision making and active participation in decision making is a feature of many policies and programs implemented in schools. Experience indicates that a young person who is actively involved in citizenship based activities from an early age is more likely to understand their responsibilities as a citizen and be engaged in fulfilling their electoral rights as adult citizens.

Whilst specific learning about voting and the Australian electoral system usually begins in year 5 in many schools, there is support for children from their first year in school to actively participate in classroom and school based decision-making processes. I will refer to the particular strand in society and environment—that is, social systems. At standard 3, which is at the end of year 6, students have an outcome to be achieved. How democracy operates in Australia and other countries and how people participate in government is inherent in that standard.

With regard to very early learners in reception and year 1, standard 1, which comes toward the end of the early year period—year 2—is very much focused on people and cooperation in society. Our framework strongly supports civics and citizenship and subsequent civics education. There are quite explicit links to electoral education. Right from the word go, students learn to cooperate with others to solve problems and analyse why and how decisions are made through their daily life in the classroom and in school. Then there are a range of forums and structures in place in South Australian schools, from class meetings through to more formally structured student representative councils and management groups that link directly to school governing councils. So it is through engagement with the curriculum and the particular areas that I have emphasised that students are provided with the opportunity to engage in informed decision making and develop the knowledge, skills and values necessary to participate actively as citizens now and in the future. With that curriculum framework as a backdrop, we are very keen to provide any additional information and respond to questions from the committee. Thank you.

**CHAIR**—Thank you for that detailed statement.

**Senator BRANDIS**—Thank you very much for that, Ms Cochram. I want to explore, as I did with witnesses previously, the link between electoral education and civics education, which you have addressed. Do you agree with me, as a general proposition, that whereas electoral education is largely, though not exclusively, about matters of process, a fuller understanding of civics education is about values? It is important in order to form the minds of students that we do both. Do you agree with that proposition?

**Ms Cochram**—I do not agree with that proposition. I think it would be important for David Butler to talk a little bit more about the approaches in South Australia where, in very real, explicit ways and sometimes against considerable odds, we engage students in very specific civics activity and the interface with electoral education. Perhaps David would like to speak to that.

**Mr Butler**—The practice of citizenship involves understanding the fair processes, which is a lot of the electoral information. For example, I work with a group of young people, the Youth Environment Council of South Australia, which is a joint activity between the Department of the Environment and Heritage and our department. It goes across the three sectors of education; our youngest child is an eight-year-old and our oldest child is 21. They have meetings with the Minister for Environment and Conservation and the Minister for Education and Children's Services. Their job is to inform the ministers of young people's views on environmental issues. Three weeks ago when we had the AGM, we discussed, as the executive, how to go about the election of members and what was fair. We talked about proportional representation and the first past the post system, so we were talking about electoral matters in doing our business. We also talked about the role they have. But what is interesting is that when other people come and talk



to this group, they assume that they are at the level of writing letters to the council, not knowing that young people are quite able to, and do at a very early age, talk at a high level to ministers of the Crown.

**Senator BRANDIS**—That would be unusual though, wouldn't it?

**Mr Butler**—That is the problem. From that, we now have another group formed in South Australia across the three sectors again, through School Care, where they address the police commissioner. They report to him about issues in schools. It is through the practice of citizenship, engaging in electoral matters and doing it. You may be aware that each year in March, a group of year 12 students from around Australia come to Canberra for the constitutional convention. I have been involved in that with Penny Cavanagh and Di Walker from the state electoral office and Peter Cavouras from the legal education part of the law course. We work with young people in doing that. Two years ago Marnie Curtis, who went to the first convention 10 years ago, chaired the meeting. She said: 'I am standing here today as the deputy mayor of the Charles Sturt council area, as a member of the Young Labor executive, and I work in the Department of the Premier and Cabinet. The reason I am here is that eight years ago I came to one of these.' That is part of it.

**Senator BRANDIS**—That is a very good outcome.

**Ms Cochram**—I would like to pick up on a couple of points David has raised because there are several inhibitors. They are fairly and squarely in the hands of adults. It is about adult behaviour that inhibits the personal agency of young people to actively engage in these matters. The other aspect I would like to emphasise—

**Senator BRANDIS**—Before you go on, what are they?

**Ms Cochram**—It would seem to me that in many instances adult behaviours are premised on a view that adults need to tell young people, do things to young people, rather than engage with them and give them the opportunities in a way that is enabling and enhances their personal agency. I will give you an example. I would like to juxtapose the statement 'we will teach children about politics' with the examples David has referred to, some very concrete examples, of 'we will provide opportunities for young people to actively engage in the political dimension of democracy and the fine-grain detail of electoral education through passionate, real issues for them'. So it is about actually working with young people on issues of concern to them and enabling them to engage in very active citizenship, taking into account the political dimensions and domains. There is of course a place for teaching about certain matters. There is knowledge to be shared. But the major difference is that it is not a program that is going to teach kids about politics but rather an approach that liberates young people to actively engage with politics.

**Senator BRANDIS**—I must confess, Ms Cochram, that strikes me as a false antithesis, because I would have thought that the latter is one of the ways, one of several ways, in which you achieve the former.

**Ms Cochram**—It certainly is. I am proposing that there is a dominant view that blocks the opportunity for young people to actively engage.

**Senator BRANDIS**—That is certainly not the evidence we heard from the previous witnesses; in fact, I found some of that evidence, which I think you were in the room to hear, quite inspiring about the modes in which participation is encouraged but in a pedagogical framework. All of us are members of the federal parliament, but there was a day when each of us for the first time learnt of the existence of the House of Representatives or the Senate, and that was because we were taught about it. What is wrong with that?

**Mr Butler**—We are not saying either is good or bad. It is where those meet that the power is, and the fact is that you have to have a powerful understanding of the political process. For example, the Youth Environment Council know how the political process works because they are part of it. So you have to have the knowledge. But the knowledge has to be provided in a way that allows you to use it. I will just give you an example. Nine days ago, in this building, it was the last state constitutional convention and the topic they were looking at was: how representative is representative government? They had Dean Jaensch and Clem Macintyre talking. Everything was done by young people. There was a group of people from across the three education sectors talking, and one particular student was passionate about a particular issue—I will not name the issue, I do not really have to—and someone else said to her, ‘But you can’t just be passionate about it; you have to do something about it.’ And they were talking about how you do it.

It is what I said to you; you cannot rely on the teacher, because the teacher often cannot do much about it, because it is in you. The thing is: how do we involve in education that powerful learning stuff with students which Igor was talking about but at the same time do so in a way that students individually and collectively gain the understanding that they can make a difference themselves? The Youth Environment Council runs workshops with other students about how you become involved in running an environmental campaign in your area. Up at Renmark earlier this year they were talking to a group of students about doing a program at one of the schools, and the kids said, ‘But we can’t do it, because the vandals will take it.’

**Senator BRANDIS**—Because the—sorry?

**Mr Butler**—Because the vandals would destroy it. So the young people worked through it together, and their solution was to work with the vandals to do it so that the vandals owned it, rather than saw it as something foreign to them. These kids worked it out. It was not adults telling them what to do; it was kids working out amongst themselves that they could be powerful in doing that stuff. The thing is they need the knowledge to go with that. Also, a lot of the ways forward are within the kids, and sometimes in education we do not take that on board.

**Senator BRANDIS**—How important in civics education is the fostering of patriotism, whether through more conventional modes like having kids singing the national anthem and understanding the history of the flag and things like that, or more generally inculcating in children a love of their country and an appreciation of the liberal democratic values that it stands for?

**Mr Butler**—I believe that it is there in most students—it is how we connect with it in powerful ways. All you have to do is visit any primary school across Australia and go to an official function and you will hear the best rendition of our national anthem in Australia, except maybe this year at the Commonwealth Games in Melbourne. That was quite spectacular too.

They had the words written up on a board, though. So it is there. It is in there. It is how we as educators connect with that and grow that in powerful ways. It is not something you have to give to them; it is how we connect with it.

**Senator BRANDIS**—I suppose I am asking that question because we are now, I hope, approaching the end of a phase in our history where it was said, I think with some justice, that a lot of educators were infused with the disease of cultural relativism and moral relativism and that patriotism was almost a dirty word. You do not think that is the case any more?

**Ms Cochram**—I do not think so.

**Mr Butler**—Not with a lot of the students.

**Ms Cochram**—I would also like to put that in the context of students' engagement with the world as a whole. It has been interesting over the last short while to see two things occurring. One is the engagement of school communities in the Commonwealth Framework for Values Education in Australian Schools. In South Australia the interest and level of engagement has been extremely high. We have had numerous workshops, seminars and forums. We have had to turn people away. We have had to go to larger venues. The whole business of engaging in the discourse of Australian values is well and truly on the agenda. It must be—recognising, too, that in that discussion there will be a number of people who will have some resistance to the methodology that has been applied in promulgating those values or their views about how Australian values are being operationalised at a political level. So there are some interesting tensions and perceptions.

Back to your point, Senator Brandis. I wholeheartedly agree with what David has said—that patriotism is there in our young people and our children. On a very personal level, young Australians demonstrated that to me at Gallipoli in very powerful ways. The search for history, meaning and identity is supported through our curriculum framework. One of our essential learnings is identity. The other essential learning is interdependence. In that respect the curriculum, as well as the learning area 'Society and Environment', are highly supportive. On the issue of patriotism, I think young people are appreciating that more in the sense of their global village. So as young people are connecting, as schools do, with children in Mexico and children in Japan and all of those things are happening, there is a wonderful opportunity for them to reflect and engage with 'What does it mean to be Australian?' They are challenged. As I heard recently, a group of young Australians in Korea went to a wonderful event where they were given entertainment by Korean students and then were struggling with: what does an Australian event look like? What does it mean to be Australian? As that discourse begins to strengthen in a global sense, I think there is an increasing sense of a search for meaning and a growth of patriotism.

**Senator HOGG**—I suppose the answer to this question will be how long is a piece of string. How well is the curriculum that you are in charge of actually translated in the schools? Do you have a measure as to how well it is applied and, if so, what sort of research can you assist us with?

**Mr Butler**—South Australia is different to other states and territories—you have probably already found this. Our curriculum is a framework. We do not actually have a curriculum board

like most other states do. We have one for years 11 and 12 and from birth through to year 10 each sector has their own. Even though we agree on it and we support each other, it is actually done by each of the sectors. So we do not have a syllabus like New South Wales. Schools use the framework to actually develop their own curriculum. In answer to the question—I am actually stretching the string out a little—

**Senator HOGG**—That is what I thought might happen.

**Mr Butler**—I am aware that in some schools it is done well and in other schools it is not. This is the issue and it is our job to look at it. Through the National Consistency in Curriculum Outcomes and the national assessments in civics stuff, we can get evidence which shows that we have to improve what we do in our schools. In some places, it is quite good and in other places it is not. We actually need information to assess that, but we also have to make sure that the information we are after is good information. What are we really assessing and what does it mean to value those things? In answer to your question, at this stage we actually do not know, but we are aware that in some places the stuff is fantastic and in other places it is not. There is a variation in that stuff, and that is the nature of education across Australia.

**CHAIR**—Can I preface my question by saying that we have received evidence that the Australian Electoral Commission, which provides very good educational resources and offers these to schools, has been refused access by some schools in the Commonwealth of Australia. What is your policy in regard to this? Are you aware of any schools in South Australia that may have refused access to the AEC? Would you be supportive of a recommendation which encouraged the Electoral Commission's access to all schools in South Australia?

**Ms Cochram**—Can I firstly set the scene in terms of DECS's policy. In South Australia in the public education system there is increasing local management, and we are operating in a tri-level system: the local school, the district and state office. With that as a backdrop, the policy position is that schools make choices about the resources that they utilise to engage with the SACSA framework and provide the curriculum. There are numerous resources that arrive in the principal's office in schools in South Australia and, quite clearly, there are a whole range of considerations in selecting from that range of resources. There is certainly, in my view, benefit in every school in South Australia receiving information, in the first instance, about resources that are available. Receiving the resources, however, is only the beginning. It is about the process at a systemic level and there are a number of systemic levels—at the Commonwealth level, if you like, at the state government level and of course at the department level—that would support teacher engagement with those resources. It is of concern that so many resources are produced and they are not utilised.

**Mr Butler**—I have actually been involved at previous times in some of the programs. You should have received a paper I sent through to Sonia about an electorate education centre reference group we have in South Australia. It involves the Australian Electoral Commission people who work here—just across the road, the State Electoral Office, parliament house, our department and also a government association coming together and working out ways in which we coordinate what we are doing.

The issue with that is—and the paper explains this—that the connection between what happens with the Australian Electoral Commission education section and what happens in the

state does not flow very well. The state electoral office, parliament house, the Department of Education Services and local government meet regularly. We have trouble getting the connection with the Australian Electoral Commission education people because things change so much. There is need for a flow, a connection, with how you work federally. It is a federal-state thing again: how you work and do the stuff.

**Senator BRANDIS**—Why don't you just sit down and talk to them?

**Mr Butler**—We try. We do. But the thing is it changes. And for people here it is hard. Often it is done around each electoral office. I think it needs to flow better with that connection stuff and with how we support each other.

**Senator BRANDIS**—All I can say, having spoken to the AEC people as recently as this morning, is that I detect on their part a tremendous eagerness and dedication to do this.

**Mr Butler**—I know; as have we. We have actually done so and the paper we have provided looks at that. But the thing is that it flounders. What happens in everything we do—and it is not just them—is that there is changing people and personnel. We are such a small state that initially you have one person doing something, whereas in Alice Springs you might have two or three people doing it. So when that person goes things change. I believe—in regard to what you are talking about, the resources—that if it has worked with these other groups then it would work okay; it would be good. And, as Maureen said, we have nothing which says, 'We do not want you here.' We want the staff. And we know that in the past some really powerful learning has occurred from that.

**CHAIR**—What you are saying is that you leave it to the local principal to decide if he or she can fit the AEC into the schools program. Is that right?

**Ms Cochram**—Yes. That is our policy; however, I must add that, in terms of our department, we have a very clear statement of directions, with priorities that are reviewed and monitored annually. A number of those priorities are directly and explicitly linked to priorities in the South Australian state plan. In relation to those matters, we, at a systems level, have some very substantial leverage, because principals of schools are accountable for delivery on those targets. If there was just cause to get civics, citizenship and electoral education in to strengthen our statement of directions, or even the state plan, then we would have a different approach. It would be much more an opportunity for leverage and for accountability. It would also provide us with a significant opportunity to gather data about the number of students who are achieving in those areas.

**Senator BRANDIS**—With respect, Ms Cochram, that sounds very much like bureaucratise. It cannot be very hard, when the AEC writes you a letter to say, 'Can we come on a particular day at the convenience of your school to address the school assembly,' for the headmaster to write back saying, 'It would suit us for you to come on such and such a date.' What is the big drama about this?

**Ms Cochram**—That is not hard. It is the most appropriate approach and many people do that.

**Senator BRANDIS**—That is not how it works; why does it not work that way? It would be so much easier.

**Ms Cochram**—I do appreciate that you can perceive it that way, but, equally, there are many, many other letters arriving with expressions of interest and good intent. I would think it would be reasonable to propose that principals in South Australia would share with you in quite strong terms the number of different and competing demands that they need to manage over time.

**Senator BRANDIS**—It is not a question of process, then.

**Ms Cochram**—No.

**Senator BRANDIS**—It is a question of priorities.

**Ms Cochram**—Yes.

**Senator BRANDIS**—And it is a question of the policy makers saying, ‘Getting kids enrolled on the electoral roll and having an elementary level of electoral education is something that is worth one school assembly a year.’

**Ms Cochram**—Yes.

**Mr Butler**—Working with this group here—and that is one thing we are on about—is one way of doing it. And you are right. I was harsh on the AEC in the sense that I know that Penny Cavanagh and the people over in the aid office actually do coordinate professional development programs as well as learning programs for students to do stuff together. My thing is that sometimes, when we are working with our department and working with these other people, we can actually facilitate an easier entree into enrolments for schools.

**CHAIR**—I thank the South Australian Department of Education and Children’s Services for their attendance here today.

[11.41 am]

**CAMPANA, Ms Wendy, Executive Director, Local Government Association of South Australia**

**HYATT, Ms Jane, Marketing and Communications Officer, Local Government Association of South Australia**

**CHAIR**—Welcome. We do not require you to give evidence under oath but these are legal proceedings of the parliament and we ask you to show the same respect to the proceedings as would be shown if we were in the parliament. We have received a written submission from you. Do you want to provide any other submissions or would you like to make a short opening statement?

**Ms Campana**—We would love to make a short opening statement.

**CHAIR**—Please proceed.

**Ms Campana**—It is really exciting for us to be appearing before you today because local government in South Australia is in full throes of our local government elections. There have been some changes made to our electoral processes. In particular a four-year term has been introduced. We were particularly concerned, moving from three-year terms to four-year terms, about whether we would be able to encourage enough people in the community to put their names forward to be candidates. We have been absolutely overwhelmed by the number of candidates that we have received. Nominations closed on Tuesday of this week and only one council in the country, a very small council, has one position unable to be filled. The majority of councils are going to elections and we have many more candidates than we have positions to fill. So it is good news for us.

**CHAIR**—You have a postal vote, haven't you?

**Ms Campana**—We do have a postal vote.

**CHAIR**—Is it compulsory or non-compulsory?

**Ms Campana**—Non-compulsory.

**Senator MURRAY**—Are these four-year terms fixed terms?

**Ms Campana**—Yes, they are fixed terms. Over the last few months we have been pretty much led by Jane in our organisation in running a very extensive campaign around civics education with a particular focus on our local government elections. A couple of things have happened since we put in our submission that we want to highlight with you. Firstly, what tends to interest people in local government are things that happen in their local area, so we decided that we would target schoolchildren this year by running a competition on what they would do if they were the mayor of their council.

We have been overwhelmed by entries. We have had 1,000 entries. If there is any disappointment at all in that it is that most of them have come from our younger age group; there are not very many from the secondary system. That is an issue for us given that we also have a target to try to encourage young people to go into local government as candidates at future elections. So we have an issue that we need to deal with concerning our secondary students who may not be focusing as much on the opportunities that local government provide to them either as candidates or just by simply living in a local government area and understanding what local government does.

Our objective with the schools competition was that we were hoping that young kids would go home at night and talk with their family and friends and get some ideas about what they might put forward in the competition. Their entry could be a picture, a poem, an essay et cetera. That competition closed last Friday so we are in the full throes of organising all the entries to the various groups of people that are going to judge them for us. There will be regional winners and there will also be a statewide winner that we will announce at our October AGM this year.

Certainly we have had a tremendous partnership with Messenger press and Rural Press. We have also had some funding from the state government for the competition and the LGA has certainly put funding in and run the administration of the project. It has given us an opportunity to not only put the local government elections in front of the community and young people but also gather a bit of media interest, which has been free advertising, if you like, for the local government elections. We have a major campaign around that, but any other advice or promotion we can get is very welcome.

For us, that certainly is something that is new since the submission was done. We have also just finished off with doing the local government component of the Youth Parliament project that is run by the YMCA here and funded by the state government. We provide a little bit of funding ourselves on the basis that Youth Parliament looks at at least one piece of legislation that has something to do with local government. I believe that in a few weeks time they are going to be taking up seats in Parliament House and performing as a youth parliament at that time.

The only other comment I wanted to make was that part of the difficulty we have in local government in terms of promoting at least the civics component of local government's business is resourcing. Under the Local Government Act councils are required to promote the elections, which they certainly do. However, resourcing them once every four years is difficult, so we actually try to run a campaign not on the elections component as such but, rather, throughout those intervening periods to raise awareness of local government. Whilst we get very good support from the state Electoral Commissioner and the state government, there are never enough resources to do all of the things that you would really like to do.

Also, I suppose that the other thing we have noticed a change in is that in the past we have had difficulty working with the education system to get them encouraged about providing local government civics education. There has been a tremendous increase in interest as the state education department has been working with us over the last four or five years. We have prepared some careers kits and other governance information that they have willingly taken on board. After we have done the competition and the stats, we may need to do a little bit more work, I suspect, at that secondary school level to get a better understanding of how we can



interact with them. Those are the key points in summary. Jane, is there anything you would like to add at this point?

**Ms Hyatt**—No, I think you have covered most of the basics. I am happy to take questions.

**CHAIR**—In this year's local government elections—I am well aware of them; I have been to your website and seen all of your information sessions that you are running for candidates, which is fantastic—what is the age demographic of candidates? Is it getting younger? Do you have young people standing for local government?

**Ms Campana**—Regarding the candidates for this time we do not have the statistical information yet from the Electoral Commissioner, but we will have that shortly so we can do that assessment. Our gut feeling is that we are starting to get more and more younger people interested in local government—'younger' meaning that 18- to 35-year bracket. There are lots of ways to participate. It is not only as a candidate but also sitting on some of the committees that councils establish as a way of influencing and understanding the government's practices. All councils, bar about two, have youth committees. They can have people aged from I think about 14 through to about 21 on those committees. They are quite active. Our statistics as yet are not in, but we would hope that our campaign has done that.

**CHAIR**—In your information sessions for candidates, what is it that you tell them? What is it that they do not know?

**Ms Campana**—Jane, do you want to field that one?

**Ms Hyatt**—A lot of them do not understand the actual process—the way that council meetings work and the process of decision making.

**CHAIR**—They stand for local government but they do not know what it is they are standing for?

**Ms Hyatt**—They understand the local issues, but it is actually the process that they often come along to be educated about. The information sessions have two components. One component, which the LGA provides information on, is about how the structure of council works, the relationship between council members and staff and the roles of the mayors and chairpersons compared to council members and those sorts of practical issues. The State Electoral Office also runs a component of the information sessions which has much more technical information around the nomination and election process. That involves the rules—what they can and cannot do.

**CHAIR**—Do you think most candidates do not know that information?

**Ms Hyatt**—Which part?

**CHAIR**—Do you think that, when they stand for local government, they do not know?

**Ms Hyatt**—It is mixed. That is general anecdotal feedback from attending the sessions. Some of them have a very clear understanding or have been involved in local government in other

areas, whether on informal committees or other sorts of processes. For others it is clear that they do not.

**CHAIR**—You have smaller councils in South Australia, don't you?

**Ms Campana**—We are certainly a smaller area. Ninety-nine per cent of the population of the state is covered by local government.

**CHAIR**—In an election that is a postal ballot, how do the candidates tell their constituents what their policies are? Do they try?

**Ms Campana**—They certainly do. A lot of our candidates get information about their ward area. We have wards and sometimes we have area-wide councillors. Of course, the mayor is running the whole area. They can access only a hard copy of the electoral roll. Our electoral roll is probably a bit different, as you would probably understand, to the one in the state or federal election because we have a business franchise and a property franchise. We have a roll that compares a local government roll and a state roll that comes together, so it is a unique roll in terms of a sphere of government. What they tend to do is get that information and a whole pile of people to help them out and they just walk around the neighbourhood and talk to people and meet people in major community centres. They certainly provide a paragraph to the Electoral Commissioner, which is checked for all of the appropriate things that can and cannot be said under our legislation. That information goes out with a little picture of the candidate. If they just rely on the postal ballot information, that is probably not the best move. We do provide a session on campaigning where they get an understanding of how to campaign.

**CHAIR**—Are candidates allowed to advertise?

**Ms Hyatt**—Yes, as long as they follow instructions under the act.

**CHAIR**—So they could put an advertisement in the local newspaper?

**Ms Hyatt**—And some do.

**CHAIR**—And put up signs?

**Ms Campana**—Certainly they put up signs. In fact, we are having an interesting time at the moment because there are conditions as there are in state and federal elections for the putting up of signs, so there is quite a bit of active work going on out there at the moment.

**Ms Hyatt**—You raised the issue of smaller councils and how they get out to their constituents and things. Often in the rural councils they all know each other anyway, they are involved in the school council and so they have met a wider group of people. I actually think that issue of campaigning is less of an issue in regional areas than it is in the city where the electorates are larger.

**CHAIR**—How successful are your information sessions that you would conduct for Indigenous councils compared to a council here in Adelaide?

**Ms Hyatt**—The LGA is not involved in those. The LGA encourages Indigenous people to stand for positions on the local government councils but Indigenous councils are separate organisations. They come under the Local Government Act in South Australia. We ran some information sessions targeting Indigenous communities to encourage them to stand on council or local government councils but we do not have any involvement in the actual Aboriginal councils.

**Mr CIOBO**—With respect to your councils, are very many of them politicised?

**Ms Campana**—No, they are not, or not obviously. Clearly, many local government people are connected in some way through either interest or membership of political parties. We understand that. But what we have seen in our sector is that you can have an issue about a particular government matter before a council and there may well be a range of Liberal, Labor or Independent people on that council but they tend to always vote for what is good for the local community rather than what the party may determine. However, we would be aware that obviously people do have contact with their politicians. In fact, an increasing number of politicians heading into our House of Assembly or our Legislative Council have had practical experience as elected members.

**Mr CIOBO**—Are metropolitan councils politicised at all?

**Ms Campana**—I would say there is no difference between metropolitan and country.

**Mr CIOBO**—The reason I ask is that I am interested to know whether or not there is a higher or lower level of voter participation when councils are politicised but, if they are not, there is probably no evidence of that.

**Ms Campana**—We would have no evidence to suggest that either way.

**Mr CIOBO**—In the ballot process that you have, one of the common themes from a lot of the evidence we have received is that council is often regarded as being more familiar with voters and with citizens than perhaps the state or federal tier. I actually did not appreciate the voting methodology for local government in South Australia. But given the way that it is, its difference to state and federal and previous testimony which has said, ‘Perhaps there could be a greater role for government in electoral education’, do you think it would be difficult for the South Australian Local Government Association or others within that sort of area to play a greater role in electoral education given the difference in systems?

**Ms Campana**—I think the emphasis for us would always be on local government elections because that is where we have a legislative obligation to educate. I think there is certainly an interest in local government being more involved in civics education, but I suspect it will be very much confined to the nature of the business of local government rather than the other spheres of government, if that is where you were suggesting we might be involved.

**Mr CIOBO**—I am wondering about the spill-over effect—and perhaps this question is better directed at others. Have you had any evidence, because of the difference in voting systems, that as you more effectively educate people about local government voting it spills over into the state and federal arena with informal votes et cetera, or is there a feeling that it is not compulsory to vote at a state or federal level?

**Ms Campana**—The informal voting issue in local government is extremely low because it is a voluntary system, so when you vote you want to have your vote counted.

**Mr CIOBO**—That is what I am wondering. Given you are actually actively required to educate people on local government voting, whereas other tiers aren't, it strikes me that potentially the more successful you are the bigger impact you will have—not at local government level but at state and federal levels.

**Ms Campana**—You would hope so. Certainly the conditions that sit around candidates when they are running for election and, in fact, when they are elected in terms of conflict of interest, registers of interest, donation declarations and those sorts of things are similar systems to the other spheres of government anyway—that is, the parliamentary processes or the election processes for other candidates. I am sure that there would be a training ground, if you like, for both electoral information and civics education, and potentially future parliamentary experience occurring at a local government level.

**Ms Hyatt**—In our submission, we actually mentioned that one of the best ways to do civics education is to get young people engaged in local issues, to build up that level of understanding of democracy and citizenship, and those sorts of things, which could then flow on to all spheres of government.

**CHAIR**—We certainly found that in Tasmania when we took evidence there.

**Senator MURRAY**—I apologise that I had to leave the room briefly. Did you deal with the migrant population at all?

**CHAIR**—No.

**Senator MURRAY**—I want to ask you about that. It has very specific relevance to my state of Western Australia. Like Australia generally, we have a very high percentage of migrant citizens but, in our case, a lot migrant citizens are going into the country because of the mines and the resources sector, and to provide services in country towns. How are those people reached in terms of understanding our ethics, our values, our electoral systems and the processes on a practical basis as well as in terms of an engagement process? My assumption is that the best contact point certainly in the country is likely to be local government, whereas cities have TAFEs and AEC offices and that sort of thing. Do you attend to this area at all? Is it a focus of yours? What programs do you have? Can you outline that for us?

**Ms Hyatt**—I am not sure what the statistics are for migrants moving into country South Australia. I think it is a growing trend, but I do not think it is prevalent in a lot of areas yet. Certainly in the current campaign, we have been working with Multicultural SA to try and engage multicultural communities. You do need to be an Australian citizen to stand as a candidate in council elections, but you do not need to be an Australian citizen to vote. Our focus has actually been around encouraging migrants and people from culturally and linguistically diverse communities to vote and participate in local government that way.

**Senator MURRAY**—So a resident who is not a citizen can vote?

**Ms Hyatt**—Yes, they can vote in council elections.

**Senator MURRAY**—That is not true everywhere in Australia, I might say.

**Ms Hyatt**—No, and it is not in state government either—or federal, I assume. As long as they go into their council, they can fill out a form—it is called a form 1, I think—and they can apply to be on the council roll. I am also aware of a number of metropolitan councils that are producing a guide—but it is a resource that is going to be used more widely across other councils—to give out to new residents which has a summary about all different council services and support, and things like that in their council area.

**Senator MURRAY**—I am thinking in a different direction. I accept the value and encourage the value of getting migrants involved in local government politics and issues, but I am more concerned with the general migrant population being able to engage as citizens—knowing how to access the services and how to participate and vote, knowing who they vote for and why and being able to engage on issues and that sort of thing. That requires, of course, bedding into the culture and the systems we have. You might like to give that some thought and come back to us with any supplementary views you might have. I particularly want to know what programs, materials and educational packages are available. We have been advised that TAFE, for instance, run migrant citizen courses along with their English courses and so on, but that is not always available in a country town or in a shire.

**Ms Campana**—The Migrant Resource Centre does have a settlement package that actually provides state, federal and local government information in the appropriate language for various migrant groups. That is certainly available through local government and the Migrant Resource Centre and others. Multicultural affairs work very closely with councils because they are aware of the settlement processes or locations and they do make contact with local government. Certainly from local government's perspective, it is a question of what is the appropriate role for local government in terms of advising on local stuff, local services issues, and providing support when, in some instances, they are not in a position to provide the sort of support that is required or they do not have the linguistic skills to communicate with the new migrant groups to identify what resources, information or support they might need.

There is an issue there, certainly for both metropolitan and country areas, though more so in the country because in the metropolitan area you can generally readily access interpretative skills and so on, and community service departments are quite large in some of those metropolitan councils as opposed to the country. But then the country has that other little safety net in that they are so close that there are usually other people within the community who might well be providing a resource or a support that the council might not be aware of. But there certainly would be people falling through the cracks.

**Senator MURRAY**—My last question is really a request. Could you give some thought and let the committee know if you have any bright ideas as to how this area of ethics and electoral education could be improved for migrant citizens and migrant residents, in your case, because they do vote and participate in local government elections. That is with respect to courses, to materials and to methods of communication and so on. You know the draw. Could you come back to us on that?

**Ms Campana**—Certainly. We would be happy to do that.

**CHAIR**—I think we have the evidence that we need on the public record now. We appreciate your coming along.

**Ms Campana**—Thank you.

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

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

**Committee adjourned at 12.04 pm**