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JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE ON ELECTORAL MATTERS

**Reference: Civics and electoral education**

MONDAY, 4 DECEMBER 2006

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**JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE ON  
ELECTORAL MATTERS  
Monday, 4 December 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 Hogg and Murray and Mr Ciobo, Mr Danby, Mr Griffin 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.

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**Committee met at 9.08 am**

**CAMPBELL, Mr Ian, Electoral Commissioner, Australian Electoral Commission**

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

**DRURY, Dr Chris, Australian Electoral Officer and State Manager for South Australia, Australian Electoral Commission**

**URBANSKI, Ms Gail, Assistant Commissioner, Communications and Information Strategy Branch, Australian Electoral Commission**

**CHAIR (Mr Lindsay)**—I declare open the final public hearing of the Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters inquiry into civics and electoral education. The committee has been across Australia taking evidence and has received some very good evidence. This morning we are going to start the hearing with the Australian Electoral Commission. I welcome representatives of the Australian Electoral Commission to today's hearing.

**Mr Campbell**—Dr Drury is here both as a state manager but also he manages nationally our education centres.

**CHAIR**—You already know about the provisions about giving evidence under oath and so on. We have received three written submissions to the inquiry from you, Nos 72, 115 and 116. Do you wish to present any additional submissions?

**Mr Campbell**—Not at this stage.

**CHAIR**—We have received extraordinary support from the AEC. We thank you for that. Your officers have been with us on many of the public hearings that we have conducted across the country. I hope that you have found that a very good process. We have certainly found it a very good process and we were able to, from time to time, where some technical point was needed by the committee, call in one of your officers as a witness on the spot. That was very useful for us. Mr Commissioner, thank you for your cooperation and assistance. If you wish to make a short opening statement that is fine, but the idea of this is to go back over some of the evidence. What would you like to do?

**Mr Campbell**—I would go straight to your questions on the evidence.

**CHAIR**—I should also apologise for the absence of my colleagues. There are other pressing matters today in relation to elections that need to be conducted. Page 4 of your annual report states:

The AEC recognises the need to implement a substantial external communications program well in advance of the next federal election, in particular to publicise new enrolment procedures including close of roll arrangements for when the election is called. As part of this process independent market research was commissioned in May 2006 to help shape a communications strategy, including methods to target younger eligible electors.

Can you tell the committee about any preliminary recommendations from the market research and what the AEC is proposing to do to improve electoral awareness of young people, migrants and Indigenous Australians before next year's expected election?

**Mr Campbell**—I will ask Ms Urbanski to take you through the detail of where we are at with our communication strategy to date.

**Ms Urbanski**—In the lead-up to the next election, but also in terms of a phased approach, we are taking a fresh look at our communication strategy. We are developing a longer term strategy that will take us out to 2010. As part of that, we did some market research back in May and June, and that included about 16 groups that were targeting what was going on around youth. We also did some special groups looking at Indigenous and NESB groups so that we could get a better understanding of what we needed to do in those areas.

In terms of the work with youth, we have also had the longitudinal study, the YES, which also provided some valuable insights. There is a disengagement of youth to a certain extent, and there are a range of factors for that. One of those is that we tend to be in a bit more of a just-in-time society. The most recent YES report undertaken actually looked at the role that parents play. For example, they found that the mother had an important role in being the one that would prod the teenagers to fill out their enrolment form, whereas fathers tended to have a little bit more of a role in terms of just talking about politics in the home. They also found that kids get a lot of information at schools and from teachers as well. We got information that told us that we needed to target youth, but that it was also important to look at parents as part of the general communications strategy and that we supported teachers in schools.

I will now talk about some of the things we are doing in our communications strategy now for young people. In doing what we are doing, we are trying to be most effective with our different target audiences and the research gives us insights into where best to target the markets. For youth, what we are starting to do is to roll out some national events in the lead-up to the next election. Our overall communications strategy has three phases. The first phase is the enrolment message, which is going to say, 'You need to enrol before an election is called.' That is really dealing with the issue of the earlier close of rolls. The next phase will then be the voter services at an election. We are also having a special effort around informality, because we have done the research on informal voting. After that, and after the election, we go straight back into the enrolment cycle. We are taking a longer term approach to what we are doing.

With young people, we are looking at special national events and one is starting this week. We are doing a big promotion on Triple J around the Big Day Out events. This week we will start to see a two-week promotion with Triple J where young people can win some double passes to Big Day Out concerts provided that they are enrolled. The Triple J Rock Enrol site will direct young people to enrolment forms which they can download and complete. So there is a promotion going on there. At the Big Day Out concerts we are organising with our public relations consulting firm to have other young people out there actively promoting. We will have sponsorship, wristbands and a very active presence at the Big Day Out concerts. That will be over the next couple of months.

Next, the Electoral Commissioner is about to write out to all principals of secondary schools. We are proposing to have a major promotion on a national enrol to vote week, which we are



looking to conduct between 28 May and 1 June. This is the first time we are doing this promotion. We are going to get coordinators in each school and we will be developing a range of activities during that time. If that is successful, the idea is that it can be rolled out every year. As well as that, in working with the state electoral commissions we have been taking on and rolling out nationally a very successful birthday card program for 17- and 18-year-olds. It has been at the Victorian Electoral Commission. We have been working with each of the state electoral commissions to bring on that program next year. We have locked in just about every state now to do that, including South Australia, where there had been some initial difficulty; that now seems to have been rolled out. Quite a big hit of events are coming through on young people. We will then roll into a communications strategy which will have more traditional things, like media, advertising and things like that.

Turning to the NESB groups—non-English speaking groups—again, our research is telling us there are two areas that we need to work on: new citizens and people who have been here for a while but who for linguistic and cultural reasons are not engaging as well as they should be in that process. We will be developing a separate strategy for that group. Again, it will have an enrolment phase—voter services and informality. There will be a particular emphasis around informality, because we have identified some groups within that group that are more at risk. We will be doing a range of things. We have our Schools and Community Visits Program. While that also targets youth on an ongoing basis, we use that community program to run sessions in migrant resource centres and through local councils to community groups.

Again, they will be targeted through the media. We are trying to look more broadly at the various areas where we need to target information to these groups. We have also been liaising with Centrelink. The Electoral Commissioner has written to DIMA as well. We are going to be meeting with them to talk about how we can improve our targeting to this group. We had some very good advice and support from Centrelink in that area just the other week. We are going to have a big blitz on the new citizenship ceremonies. We are looking at how those ceremonies are run and what information might be provided at them. We are trying to have a much bigger presence at the Australian Day ceremonies and Citizenship Week in the coming years.

I forgot to mention that under the youth strategy there are two other significant things. In our Schools and Community Visits Program we are going to be supporting our staff in divisional offices better to deliver those programs on the ground. We have a new presentation kit for DROs being prepared. That should go out early in the new year. The other thing we are doing to support teachers is making a significant investment in developing what is called an Electoral Education Resource Kit for teachers, which will be issued to all schools in February/March. We are trying to hit this from all angles.

The Indigenous sector is another area where we will be doing special promotion and activity. We are having a really good look at this area. We need to target Indigenous people in both rural and remote areas and urban areas. We are having a good look at both of these areas. We will be having special promotional products. We will again run our Community Education and Information Officer Program. That was very successful before the last election, but it is actually getting liaison officers out into the communities. We hope to roll that out a little earlier than we did last time so that there is more time to go out and give some of the other ‘enrol early’ messages and things like that. Is that enough?

**CHAIR**—Yes, thank you.

**Mr Campbell**—On the broad strategy, including youth, I wrote to you last week. We have just checked with the secretariat and they have not received it yet so I am having a copy of the letter faxed up to us so that we can give it to you here today. It is obviously in the system.

**CHAIR**—Thank you—timely as always. I have a follow-on question from that, but a tough question. We have had some very good evidence in the Northern Territory and Western Australia in relation to Indigenous education. Some could put a case that it is not a good use of public funds to expend the resources on trying to have everybody in very remote communities on the electoral roll and voting properly. You understand the sensitivity of what I am saying to you. Some would say that there is never going to be a satisfactory outcome or a near satisfactory outcome. What would your advice be to the committee in relation to that proposition? Is it worth continuing to try? Should resources go somewhere else? Should there be another approach? I understand this is sensitive, but please speak plainly.

**Mr Campbell**—Perhaps I can give a comparison. We think we have less than 50 per cent of 18-year-olds enrolled. I cannot recall the figure for 25-year-olds, but my guess is that it is probably around 60 per cent. It is higher than 48 per cent but well below the average of older Australians. As we have just outlined, we have put a lot of resources into youth in Australia. On the question of remote Australians, including non-Indigenous—we do have non-Indigenous citizens in remote Australia—I would not countenance a lessening in activity until we embarked upon a program of work that was coordinated and consolidated and we thought that we had given it a fair go. To that end there will be two things I will mention to you. One is that in recognising this problem of remote Australia we are well advanced in developing, predominantly internally, a program for northern and central Australia, NACARAS—the Northern and Central Australia Strategy. In effect, it is not only for Indigenous Australians, it is for all people in rural and remote. We are crossing our state and territory boundaries.

**CHAIR**—You are a supporter of that?

**Mr Campbell**—We are and we are driving it through. Indeed, we are having a conference in Darwin next week of the relevant divisional returning officers from the divisions and state managers to put the finishing touches on how we roll it out. In a lot of ways we are looking at being more flexible. We might have a divisional returning officer for Lingiari or Solomon cross a state boundary in terms of enrolment or in terms of mobile pre-polling. In the last two elections we have had the Northern Territory undertake some mobile pre-poll voting for northern South Australia. I would want to give that, together with working with communities, a go before I did anything else other than say—

**CHAIR**—I understand.

**Mr Campbell**—The second issue is that we have started to do preliminary work on urban Indigenous people, because sometimes the question of Indigenous people in the cities is lost a little bit in this area. That is at a very early stage. A small number of divisional returning officers have done a project for me. I had a presentation of that project last Friday from them. But it is early days, because in effect what we are looking at there is how we relate to the community. That is very important in urban Australia as well as rural Australia. I would not want to put great

hopes up that we are going to make great strides, but equally I would want to have a little bit more time making the effort first.

**Senator MURRAY**—There are three areas that I want to deal with in terms of election-year preparations. The first is the straightforward issue of getting people enrolled as citizens. I had a concerning discussion with an English professional in Perth who told me that he was very keen to become an Australian citizen and had qualified. However, the person—it was a woman in this case—at the local council responsible for these matters was very offhand and very rigid. They had only two ceremonies booked for the year. Both of those ceremonies were booked in school holiday periods, which is when people take their children away. He told her that it was difficult for him to make either of those, and she was dismissive. She told him that if he did not make it he would lose his chance at citizenship, and was very aggressive. I doubt that is typical, but what it does do is minimise the chances of people becoming citizens and therefore getting on the electoral roll, if that is occurring.

I wondered whether, in your research and your evaluation of this area, you were looking at that area at all to check that the whole process through councils is effectively and sympathetically coordinated. He said to me that, as an Englishman, he can cope with the language and because he is a professional he can cope with the attitudes, but he said that if you were a person who did not have English as your main language and who struggled with the systems and the culture, it would have been very off putting.

**Ms Urbanski**—I understand there are around 714 councils, so I expect that there is probably some variation in approach within the local councils themselves. As I understand it, the conduct of the citizenship ceremonies is a responsibility of the department of immigration. We have asked to meet with DIMA at the national level to talk about how we can improve our presence at these ceremonies and to see what can be done to improve the role that we have on those important occasions. Perhaps some of that questioning might need to come up with the department of immigration. We are certainly looking at what we can do.

**Senator MURRAY**—I am uncomfortable with that response. I have high regard for your independence and I do not see you as a normal government department, but surely it is possible for you to consult directly with a department and say, ‘Let’s just go through what you do, when it’s done, how it’s done, who does it and so on to satisfy yourselves that, from your perspective—because they would have different perspectives—you coordinate well.’ If we raise it in the parliament, it becomes a question and answer process and time passes. We are all grown-ups. I think your authority should talk directly to theirs.

**Ms Davis**—What might be worth pointing out is that a lot of the more successful initiatives can start off on a local base. Where we have good relations between the divisional returning office and local councils within their area, through normal enrolment activities—for instance, an address based register or something like that—those sorts of relationships can build up so that in areas that are more remote from where the divisional returning officer is based the local council authorities stimulate and take enrolment cards themselves. Again, in terms of what we can do to support our staff, relationship building with local government authorities is probably one way that we can encourage this as well as through national contact through DIMA.

**Senator MURRAY**—I welcome that, because it is very important to interconnect at the local level. My point simply is that we do not want to see the AEC operating in a silo. You want the connection at the top level as well. Let me move on to a second area of interest. At the last hearing of this committee we heard from the Southern Cross Group by teleconference. They were looking at ways in which we can improve the voting participation of expatriate Australians and how to pick up their interest. It might be interesting if the commission were to look at the transcript and, perhaps if you have any thoughts, write back to us on them. One area that I wanted to ask you about was the very low percentage of expatriate Australians who vote. I think there are 60,000 or 70,000 out of a million or so. It was asked whether it would be possible to do a trial with an AEC officer or officers in a booth at Sydney Airport—and you would get people when they are relaxed, after they have been through Customs, have done their formalities and are waiting in the boarding area—to see if you can capture the attention of young Australians who are travelling backwards and forwards, who live overseas and come home for family occasions or to visit so as to ensure they are enrolled and they know the process for voting overseas. Of course, the question is whether you would consider the issue of doing a couple of weeks' trial to see what the effect was and how effective it was.

**Mr Campbell**—I have no in principle objection to considering that. Obviously a major element would be the airport authorities. As you know, we do go into airports but not, as you point out, behind Immigration in terms of international. I will take that onboard and, as I said, have no in principle objection to it, but I would put the caveat on it that we would have to get the agreement of the airport authorities.

**Senator MURRAY**—Obviously, and there are security issues. It is really a trial to see if there would be any material useful from adopting it as a process. I wondered through the chair if I could ask you to have a look at Southern Cross's interaction and perhaps come back to us with any views so that we can incorporate those into our report, if that is acceptable.

**Mr Campbell**—We have had some exchanges with Southern Cross, including meetings, and on a couple of issues we are also talking to DFAT about some of the things that they have raised, but it is early days.

**Senator MURRAY**—My third interest in terms of election year preparation is in the area of coordinating activity with states that have elections. My understanding is that quality, immediacy and accuracy in terms of the fulfilment of electoral roll obligations is enhanced when you have the prospect of an election. New South Wales is going to have one early next year, as I understand it. That is a third of our country. There may be an opportunity to capitalise on that event to lift your own enrolment consequences. I am particularly thinking with respect to migrants and getting them on to the roll. Is there a possibility of looking in that area or are you doing anything in that area?

**Mr Campbell**—There are probably a couple of things. I have not been told yet how many cards we had handed in on the day of the Victorian state election a week ago. In the Queensland state election in the first week of September, 46,000 cards were handed in by people at polling booths on the day, which is a worrying figure to my mind. We are looking at a number of issues in terms of the timing of mail-outs and other activity. However, we were concentrating our activity in the early part of next year more around the introduction of proof of identity, which of

course has to occur in the new year, and getting ready for our own elections. We were not planning to do a particular level of activity prior to the state election.

Ms Urbanski mentioned the birthday cards. The New South Wales State Electoral Commissioner recently wrote a letter to all 17- and 18-year-olds in New South Wales, in lieu of a birthday card, encouraging them to vote. Early indications, although only anecdotal, are that that might have had a bit of an impact on the enrolment of young people. But the answer is, no, we were not running a specific campaign or planning to run a specific campaign during the state election.

**Senator MURRAY**—My assumption is that people are more interested and more likely to engage and respond because they are conscious that there is a state election coming up. In view of the quote that the chair read out at the beginning of the session, I did think that if the states were doing particular things to lift the accuracy of their role, engaging with migrants or young people and so on, you could ride on the back with your existing proposals and just coordinate them with theirs. Really my request to you is whether you would consider consulting with them to—

**Mr Campbell**—I misunderstood your question. We certainly would. For example, the letter that I mentioned was a totally coordinated exercise. We certainly do and will cooperate and build on the back of it. I misunderstood in that I thought you were asking whether we would do something specific that is not in concert with the state commission.

**Senator MURRAY**—I would think of it as in concert.

**Dr Drury**—Every state manager negotiates with his or her counterpart electoral commissioner a yearly plan for enrolment promotion activities, and this year is no different. Indeed, we have engaged with our state partners as to how we can cooperate to boost enrolment in the run-up to the election.

**Senator MURRAY**—This is not a criticism, but I understood from Ms Urbanski's long explanation of what you proposed to do as a result of this research and renewed interest in these areas that there were new initiatives that might not have been included in those plans. What I am really saying is: let us not wait for the next plan; if we have a state election coming up where a third of Australian voters are involved let us get the two up to date and coordinated. Is that possible?

**Mr Campbell**—Yes.

**Mr CIOBO**—I am interested in exploring a couple of areas. One is with respect to younger voters. In essence, in your submission you talk about younger voters feeling detached from government and not being motivated to enrol because of a sense of disconnect. In many respects that is part of what we need to address as parliamentarians. In addition to that, I have raised on a couple of occasions my concern with that framework of thinking, because for me it is akin to saying that the problem is not the product, the problem is the consumers. I am interested in whether or not the AEC has done any more work off the back of some of your studies that starts to address that culture and says that the problem is not the product, the problem is that the customers are not buying it. Do we need to be looking a little more laterally at ways in which we

are enrolling young people and the measures that we take to enrol young people rather than trying to specify the problem as their disengagement?

**Mr Campbell**—I make two observations there. Before you came in—and you will read this in the transcript—Ms Urbanski ran through the strategy that we are embarking upon, and I also wrote to the chair last week so that is on public record. There is the issue of engagement and whether young people feel that they can have an impact or make a difference. That is not unique to Australia. It is in a lot of Western countries. My major thought in all of this is that the Commonwealth Electoral Act—and here we are talking about the system and not the customer—is 22 years old, 1983-84. However it is still an Electoral Act of 10 decades ago. It is not at all friendly in terms of communication for young people. In other words, you have to enrol and every time you move you have to re-enrol. We know that and you know that, but I daresay that a lot of the Australian population do not know that. It is a bit counterintuitive. Under the new provisions coming in proof of identity is worked through in the processes that the regulations will show. Even when they move they again have to fill in a form. They cannot do it online; they cannot do it by phone; and they cannot do it by any other way than signing a form and sending it in to us.

We have a very sophisticated process of contacting addresses in our roll update but at the moment we do not have provision for them to say, 'There are no changes to this address.' They have to send back the form. We do not have provision for them to email us with a reference number or to SMS us. We are examining all of that now because, if there is no change in address when we send out a review letter we can do that internally and we do not have to amend the act. We are now examining whether or not we can set up an SMS process that will be computer and internet linked. We are about to give all of our divisional officers their own divisional email address that will be available for the public, and that will be publicised.

I am on the same wavelength as you in that we are operating still with an act and a system that is technologically some decades old, when young people operate very much differently. They do not queue. They do not go into offices. They can get car insurance and all sorts of other things online, but they cannot enrol with us online. We have not taken a very aggressive public stance. I have indicated what we are trying to do when there is no change to the address by having them contact us. I also raised this in the second or last paragraph of our original submission where I make the point that if we have a generation that is used to communicating in a very different way from past generations the onus is on us to look at our act and to say—in a sporting analogy—let's play in their field, because that is how young people now do business.

**CHAIR**—Would your advice be that, if Australia had a system such as Sweden's in some form, for example, where everybody has a unique national identity number, it would ease your problem about voter registration online or applying to the AEC online for other purposes because you would know whom you were dealing with?

**Mr Campbell**—Yes, most certainly. We have met with the committee looking into the smart card. I know there are other issues and there will be other thoughts and other concerns about the electoral roll and a smart card. To my mind, if we were on the smart card we would be the third largest user but we would be a subset of one of the other users. The biggest users would be Centrelink and the Health Insurance Commission. We would be a very substantial subset of the Health Insurance Commission group, because they have to be citizens and do not have to be over

18. If the smart card goes forward as is, then you are creating a smart card that everybody I interact with will almost certainly have.

**CHAIR**—This would be a way of getting youngsters and the AEC into the digital era and easing the current problems that occur?

**Mr Campbell**—We take great pride in our address register. I know other agencies also have pride in their address register, but ours is fundamental to our business. A person is eligible to enrol, but the address register is fundamental to where they actually vote. That is a very fundamental principle for us, a core principle. To my mind, that says that in any development of this sort of activity our address register should not be ignored.

**Mr CIOBO**—With respect to the rollout of the access card, I take it from your comments that you would be quite optimistic about the ability for that to bring you a high degree of certainty, which this committee previously sought in its initial report into the review of the 2004 election that motivated some of the reforms and changes that we made—the concerns over ID and so on. I get the impression from your comments that the access card will address that to a large extent. Following on from that though, it seems that once you get over that initial hurdle of concern that the committee has and which the AEC has to enforce over verifying one's identity and so on, subsequent address changes could be done online ideally from your perspective or via SMS or via other alternatives—is that the case?

**Mr Campbell**—Yes. At this stage I am not aware of any decision that we would be part of the smart card. I am putting forward a proposition that there is a very strong case for it.

**Mr CIOBO**—I am sorry, I thought you were.

**Mr Campbell**—I am putting forward a strong case for it.

**Mr CIOBO**—The AEC would like to be?

**Mr Campbell**—To my mind, there is a very strong case. Once that happens you are then into a position, which the committee has raised in previous reports, in terms of direct address change. Once a person is on the roll and they move from point A to point B and you have gone through a process such as proof of identity or a smart card access arrangement to check their identity, then changing address rather than re-enrolling makes sense. I will be quite blunt here: I think it is counterintuitive for a person who goes on the roll at 18—or if you go back 30-odd years, at 21—to have to re-enrol every time they move. It is an outdated concept. I am being very blunt and very frank. Frankly, citizens do not have to go through all of that process for anything else in the country.

**Senator MURRAY**—Can I just explain, as a migrant myself with migrant children, when you move, which young people do regularly and they re-enrol, it is much harder because they have to search for the migrant citizen form, find the number and put that in. There is such a detailed requirement that unless people are very organised, which most are not, it is antagonistic to re-enrolment.

**Mr Campbell**—There is one slight complication there for English migrants, and that is the 1984 changes. We have to check that they were on the roll in 1984.

**CHAIR**—Would it be theoretically possible, if you change your address on your smart card with the agencies that use the smart card, that that information could automatically go to the AEC without anyone having to contact the AEC to say they have changed their address? Is that right?

**Mr Campbell**—Theoretically, because there will be a number of agencies that will be working with the smart card. As I understand it, the names, addresses and those details will be outside their own individual databases of financial issues, et cetera.

**Mr CIOBO**—This now leads to the second issue that I would like to explore, which is, irrespective of the process—be it a paper form, smart card or whatever—we still need to have that interaction whereby the AEC is reaching out to those aged 17 and 18 to get them to enrol. In this committee's various investigations we have seen differing levels of proactivity by DROs—some excellent initiatives and some who stick to the letter of the law, so to speak, with regard to their role. I am interested in exploring the KPIs for DROs that the AEC has, because it seems to me that some DROs do have a very high level of proactivity and taking the initiative in terms of going out to schools, sending birthday cards and the like. Could you outline to the committee what the KPIs are, if indeed there are any, with respect to this facet?

**Mr Campbell**—I will ask Dr Drury, who is our state manager for South Australia, to talk about what happens, and I might come in with some general comments at the end.

**Dr Drury**—Every divisional returning officer has an individual performance plan and it is now the case that those plans right around the country include divisional officers visiting schools. There is now a target set in terms of their contacting 30 per cent of the schools in their electorate every year. That is something that will be discussed with each DRO by his or her manager during the mid-cycle review and at the end-cycle review of each performance period. There are specific targets. Yes, they are discussed and, yes, they are followed up.

**Mr Campbell**—One of the things that we have discovered, and which is mentioned in my letter to the committee of 18 August, is that our staff are predominantly engaged to maintain a role for Commonwealth, state and local government elections, to manage the federal election event every three years in their division, and other activity that comes their way. For example, if they are in Tasmania, they will do the Tasmanian state elections and so on.

In effect, while we have a very clear mandate for public awareness activities, historically it has not been a prime selection criterion for our DROs. The other two factors have been more in the selection process. That means that we have a group of DROs who are all good people but some of them are more comfortable than others in doing the issues that Dr Drury has talked about. Indeed, even those that are comfortable with it may not be that well trained in it. We have not as an agency always prepared them well with regard to kits.

Before you came in, Ms Urbanski mentioned two that we will roll out next year. One is an education kit that we will be sending to all schools that will cover primary school, secondary school and college. That will be for the schools to use and will include DVDs and those sorts of



activities. Secondly, we are very close to finalising a presentation kit for all of our DROs so that when they do the activity that Dr Drury is talking about they should have confidence that they have a professionally prepared kit with them. That is very important. For us just to say, 'You should go out and visit schools,' without giving them the wherewithal is not very fair.

**Mr CIOBO**—I understand what you are saying, and I am also acutely aware that many schools—perhaps even the majority of schools—are non-reactive to requests from the AEC. That evidence was clear. Frankly, if you recall, some of the evidence that we received from South Australia was positively terrifying in terms of the department of education's approach. I was keen to get a framework for the committee, because that is an area that I have a lot of interest in. I would like to see it rolled out.

**Senator MURRAY**—The state department of education?

**Mr CIOBO**—Yes. You noted a 3.4 per cent decrease in numbers attending the Canberra EEC between 2004-05 and 2005-06, but you state in your supplementary submission that 79 groups, or about 4,500 participants, were not able to visit the Canberra EEC because they could not secure a place during a preferred time and date. As of 1 October this year you still had about 11 schools, or 515 participants, on the wait list for the remainder of this year. Was the decrease that you saw in participation a consequence of a full program? I know that you are also at full capacity with respect to Old Parliament House, so I would seek your comments on that. Finally, I would seek your comments about how you see it going next year, a federal election year, when potentially we could see demand really ramp up.

**Dr Drury**—I am pleased to say that the wait list situation has dramatically improved since we chatted in Adelaide. There are no people wait-listed for the Canberra EEC currently for the remainder of 2006. We currently have 363 students wait-listed for 2007. You would understand that we have bookings going forward to 2008 for the Canberra EEC. You are right in your surmise that we would expect an election year to encourage more people to be interested in bookings, and indeed we are doing our part with marketing for all of the EECs, which includes newspaper display advertisements and various other brochures, flyers and so forth going out to people who can assist us to raise the understanding in the community of the services that we provide in the EECs.

**Mr CIOBO**—How do you see it coping next year?

**Dr Drury**—The Canberra EEC?

**Mr CIOBO**—Yes.

**Dr Drury**—We have made a number of changes to the way we are running. We are running additional services on Friday and we have started running earlier sessions every day of the week at the Canberra EEC. We have moved to increase our capacity to run extra sessions at the Canberra EEC.

**Mr CIOBO**—Is there an EEC in Queensland?

**Mr Campbell**—No.

**Mr CIOBO**—Do you have plans there?

**Mr Campbell**—No, not with my current funding base. I might add one other point about the EECs. As you know, we have one here in Canberra. We have one in Melbourne. We have one in our office in South Australia, which is joint with the state commission, and we assist with Western Australia. We do not have one in Tasmania, Northern Territory, New South Wales or Queensland. We are in the process of planning to move the Victorian one. It is currently down near Spencer Street. We are looking to move it up to where our office is, which is on the corner of Lonsdale and Spring Street, to be in the parliamentary area and, at the same time, to update its equipment—it is now 10 or 11 years old.

**Mr CIOBO**—I understand. With Queensland being the most decentralised state and, with the exception of WA, being a lot further away from Canberra than either New South Wales or Victoria, it would seem a logical place. I am sure the chairman would agree with me.

**CHAIR**—Mr Ciobo, I was saying it would be a good career move to consider that.

**Mr Campbell**—My funding base is not there.

**Senator MURRAY**—If we were to make that recommendation, we would have to accompany it with a funding recommendation. That is right, is it not?

**Mr CIOBO**—We are a magnanimous government.

**CHAIR**—I would like to follow up that line of questioning. We are running out of time, but there are some housekeeping matters that I would like to talk to you about. You put in another submission in relation to questions we asked you about the EEC here, and there were some big numbers. When we were down there we got the distinct impression that it was not coping with the demand. We also got the impression that schools would ring up, find they could not get in, would not go on a waitlist and they would just not go. That is an unmet demand that we do not know about. Is it your advice to us that we should report to the parliament that it is time to consider an enlarged EEC in Canberra to ensure that for all schools that want to come that demand can be met? Perhaps it does not need to be in Old Parliament House. You have told us that there is no room to expand there. Perhaps it should be somewhere else. Would it be in the nation's interest and in the AEC's interest that you are funded to provide a centre that can cope with all schools that want to go?

**Dr Drury**—After the committee's visit to Adelaide, we looked into the question of unmet demand. We understand there are 122,000 students who visit Canberra each year. We roughly get 70,000 of those visiting our EEC in Canberra. We cannot assume that the difference between that 70,000 and 122,000 is unmet demand. They may not have wanted to come to our centre. I am thrown back on anecdotal things here. We know that tour operators who drive the visitors to the Canberra EEC stop ringing after they find out they cannot get the booking they want. But there is no hard evidence that I can come up with about how to quantify that unmet demand, other than to say, as I mentioned before, there is a very pleasing decrease in the number on the waitlist. That we do not have anybody waitlisted for 2006 to me means that we are meeting demand.

**CHAIR**—I put it to you that we will likely recommend other measures that will see an increase in the number of students coming to Canberra, through a variety of mechanisms that you are not aware of. Why don't you say to us that the AEC thinks it is a great idea to have a stand-alone centre that can cope with whatever capacity happens to be there, because it is in the interest of the education of our kids? Why can't you say that?

**Dr Drury**—We can.

**Mr Campbell**—Perhaps I can add one point to this; I think we have answered that question.

**CHAIR**—Just for the record, you have said 'yes'; is that right?

**Mr Campbell**—If the committee makes recommendations that it increases the number of schools that wish to bring children to Canberra, we would be more than willing to have a program that provided for an increased number of schools visits in Canberra. My letter to you when this was raised indicated that within Old Parliament House we are losing not the education but that public display part, because of some of the initiatives announced in last year's budget that will be taking up space. For us to be successful, it would have to remain in the parliamentary area, because that is where the buses come.

**CHAIR**—I agree.

**Mr Campbell**—One of the reasons we hit a note down there is that we moved from Lyons to Old Parliament House some five or six years ago. I am saying this in the way of sharing information. As you know, the national office of the AEC is in West Block, which is indeed a very historic building in Canberra, as are East Block and Old Parliament House. We share that with two other tenants. My understanding is that both of those tenants will be moving out—one in July 2007 and one in July 2008. However, the second one may be earlier. It has occurred to us that, if the government is of a mind to ask us to expand the education centre, there would be sufficient space in West Block for us to do that, as long as funding was made available for fit-out et cetera.

**CHAIR**—Let me share some advice with you. There is currently a brief out looking at accommodation at Parliament House and how we might meet the future needs of the parliament. It might well be that, if we are looking for another location for the EEC, it could be incorporated in that to keep it close to the parliament. If the committee recommends that an EEC in Canberra be established to meet current and future demand—whatever that is—would you be supportive of that?

**Mr Campbell**—I would support that. I would like to continue to explore the West Block option. The only issue that I would put on the table—and I do not know what your recommendations are going to be—is that, if it were thought that an EEC should be built in Queensland and in New South Wales, that would lessen the demand on an EEC here. It would depend on how many we have.

**CHAIR**—Would you support students coming here in summer vacations? Could you handle them at that time?

**Dr Drury**—Yes. That is our downtime.

**Mr Campbell**—That would give us better workflow.

**CHAIR**—There are some other matters. We had some evidence in Western Australia that there are some emerging languages that are not in the mainstream, and the AEC needs to provide some material in those emerging languages: Russian, Ethiopian, African languages—

**Mr CIOBO**—Middle Eastern—Arabic.

**CHAIR**—Has the AEC any program to look at the emerging cohorts in Australia that have not been significant in the past in terms of providing material in that language?

**Ms Urbanski**—In our NESB strategy we have undertaken a process of selecting a NESB panel of consultants. They undertake a lot of the research. They are well connected into the networks in the NESB communities, and they advise us on the languages that we will use. We will again be going through a process of having a look at that, as in the last election, and we will be doing that again. There is a range of groups. We do the best we can to cover as many groups as we can and to cover a breadth of languages. My understanding is that we do cover Arabic, and a lot of the African countries' new arrivals do speak Arabic. So that is covered. And we do Russian in press and radio.

**CHAIR**—I just found the notes that I had. Italian is not covered. Sorry, the evidence was that we should drop Russian, Italian and Polish and go to other languages. In Western Australia there is quite a significant African population. Are you saying that you have that in hand?

**Ms Urbanski**—Yes.

**Mr Campbell**—Looking down the list, for those people who come from Africa and speak Arabic, that is okay. But what about those who come from parts of Africa that do not speak Arabic. And I am conscious here of cities such as Melbourne, which has a very significant African population. That is something we will be looking at. We will be targeting things at local levels as well.

**CHAIR**—In a DIMA publication, *Welcome to Western Australia*, for arriving immigrants there is a top 20 list of things that are important, but the word 'voting' does not appear anywhere. What is your view on that? That is out of left field, is it not? In other words, arriving migrants are not being told about the necessity to enrol.

**Ms Urbanski**—They have to be new citizens. Normally we start targeting around the time that people are becoming new citizens.

**CHAIR**—That is fine.

**Ms Urbanski**—That is probably a locked process when they are just new arrivals to be—

**CHAIR**—In Melbourne we were told that the Australian Taxation Office gives students a tax file number at age 17.

**Ms Urbanski**—Yes.

**CHAIR**—Has the AEC considered interacting with the ATO to explain that to them?

**Ms Urbanski**—Already.

**CHAIR**—Already?

**Ms Urbanski**—Yes.

**Mr Campbell**—Sorry, we are interacting with them; we have written to them and we are meeting with them in the next 10 days on the issue of trying to get into their tax file number program in schools.

**CHAIR**—Also in Melbourne, the AEC program Your Vote Counts has now been disbanded. It was an extremely popular program and it worked. Apparently that was a two-day professional development program that was fully funded. Why was it disbanded?

**Ms Urbanski**—It was not.

**CHAIR**—It was not?

**Ms Urbanski**—It was not. We still call it Your Vote Counts.

**Mr Campbell**—What has changed is that, up until about five years ago, we used to pay for the replacement for teachers when they went on the program. If it was a two-day program, we would pay for a relief teacher. We no longer pay for that, but we still have the program.

**CHAIR**—The secretary is advising me that they were full-day sessions and they have gone to abridged sessions now. Is that right?

**Ms Urbanski**—Yes.

**Mr Campbell**—The program is still effective. I think you will find that the concern is that we no longer pay for the relief teacher.

**Mr CIOBO**—What has been the impact of that?

**Ms Urbanski**—Do you mean in terms of numbers?

**Mr CIOBO**—Yes.

**Ms Urbanski**—I do not have the exact figures for the teachers. With respect to the pre-service and in-service sessions, we go to sessions, say, teacher-professional conferences and workshops, or we go to the universities to the education faculties and do pre-service sessions. We are probably getting to similar numbers of people as we were before.

**Mr Campbell**—The change occurred in the late nineties. Before it occurred, in 1994-95, 308 teachers attended Your Vote Counts courses. In the following year in which funding was available, which was 1998-99, 321 teachers attended. Then with the changed way that we are doing it, as Ms Urbanski said, in 2005-06 some 245 teachers attended, and so far this year 40 teachers.

**Ms Urbanski**—But we also got to 1,390 pre-service teachers.

**Mr CIOBO**—How many pre-service?

**Ms Urbanski**—Some 1,390.

**Mr CIOBO**—It sounds like the program is basically falling away, just on those numbers.

**Mr Campbell**—It has fallen away a little with our taking away the funding. But in a sense I do not see why we should be funding that.

**Mr CIOBO**—I understand that. It is interesting to note the impact.

**Ms Urbanski**—It is about a good balance and some face to face, and we are putting more resources into teaching. The new education resource kit goes to all schools. It is about the balance between that and the teachers.

**CHAIR**—In relation to the conduct of student elections, some of your officers are already going to schools and conducting the student representative council elections. We have found that students are sometimes very cynical of a process where perhaps the teachers arrange the outcome. You would know what I am talking about. That causes a resistance to get on the electoral roll. That could mean that the national elections might not in fact be robust. This may not be possible, but what if I put to you that we ought to recommend that the AEC conduct all SRC elections? That is out of left field.

**Mr Campbell**—Not necessarily. I was not thinking you would say that, but I would like to make an observation in that regard. There are just under 10,000 schools in Australia. Presumably they will all want to hold their SRC elections at pretty much the same time.

**CHAIR**—It is about time you did a bit of work! You do not have to respond to that.

**Mr Campbell**—It is cricket season; I'll let that one go through to the keeper. The other issue is that most of our divisional offices, as you would know, are small. Your divisional office is small, but of course yours is a co-located office where there are two divisions.

**CHAIR**—Yes, but we have the best DRO in Australia.

**Mr Campbell**—I will let him know that. In a sense, because they are small offices, usually of about three people and sometimes part time, we sometimes get caught a bit short in terms of illness or planned leave. While I would dearly love to take up the mantle and say that I would like to do them all, under my current infrastructure I do not think that we could do that.

**Mr CIOBO**—One of the most common issues that I have heard raised is that the work of the AEC is so sporadic. Obviously, there is always underlying work. I do not deny that. You have big peaks and troughs around election periods. Do you think with a higher level of base activity—and obviously there would need to be a resource commitment in that respect as well—and a higher level of proactivity and engagement in the community, such as these sorts of activities, from a managerial point of view it might provide the AEC with a greater critical mass of activities to maintain a higher base load of people. Does what I am saying make sense?

**Mr Campbell**—I agree with you. All I was saying in relation to schools is that because the quantum of schools is so great, and they all want to hold their elections at a similar time—at the end of the year running for the next year—logistically we would have to be a monstrous size for a short period. Picking your point up, yes, we are doing that. As you know, we are the default agent for protected action ballots since the changes in the Work Choices legislation. We have had quite a few of those.

**Mr CIOBO**—And some preselections, too.

**Mr Campbell**—Nobody has asked us to do any of those, or any other sort of election that might be in people's minds. We have quite a few PABs that we have done. As a matter of fact, well over 100 have been done since the change of legislation, and we have done all but three or four of them. The other thing we are doing is going into a fee for service. We are ramping up our fee-for-service, or commercial, activity. That started falling away some years ago. We are increasing our profile in that regard—gradually, because we do not want to be swamped—to let the community know that that skill base is available. As to your question, that is all in trying, firstly, to get a spread of work but also to get a spread of experience in doing elections. While our electoral rules for federal events are quite specific and quite clearly set out in the CEA, you can still learn quite a few interesting things by doing local community elections—for example, about rolls and joining rolls. We are trying to increase our level of activity there.

**Ms Davis**—We should also point out the commissioner's initial point that, in terms of that engagement within the community, we are talking about a different set of capabilities within our workforce. In terms of building up that profile, we can certainly help build up that capability with the people that we currently have, but it would probably mean in workforce planning terms a slightly different emphasis, for example, whether or not that is in each division, on a regional basis or whatever.

**Mr CIOBO**—My interest is critical mass. In some respects I could see it being beneficial.

**Mr Campbell**—I agree with you.

**Mr CIOBO**—Just to clarify this, you are not conducting the leadership ballot this morning in the caucus room?

**Mr Campbell**—I am here, aren't I? It is 10.15, isn't it?

**Mr CIOBO**—It would be over by now.

**CHAIR**—We have found some very fine officers around the Commonwealth. In particular, there are those who take a great interest in the schools and will set up cardboard booths and so on. They take the electoral material to schools and stage elections, which is wonderful. It really engages the students and the teachers, and that is fantastic. Thank you for your attendance here today. You have been asked to provide one additional piece of information, and we would appreciate it if you could send that along to us as usual.



[10.21 am]

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

**SIMPSON, Mr Noel Robert, Manager, Curriculum Branch, Department of Education, Science and Training**

**CHAIR**—I now welcome representatives of the Department of Education, Science and Training to today's hearing. You are aware that these proceedings are not legal proceedings of parliament but they require the same as proceedings in the House itself. We have received two written submissions from you for this inquiry. Do you wish to present any additional submissions?

**Mr Simpson**—No.

**CHAIR**—Do you wish to make any further statement?

**Mr Simpson**—No.

**CHAIR**—We have been around the country and got a lot of information. We might as well deal with the most difficult question first. Teachers agree that a visit to Canberra with their students is an extraordinarily worthwhile experience. It engages the students like no other process. If I put it to you that, because of the importance of this and because of the costs of getting to Canberra from states other than the close-in states, the Commonwealth should accept that all Australian students should have the opportunity to come to Canberra—and not just students from Sydney or Melbourne—do you feel that we should look at making appropriate funding available to ensure that that can happen, so that a student in Alice Springs or in Broome is not disadvantaged compared with a student in Coffs Harbour? Would you support that? What would be your advice to this committee on how that could be implemented or managed?

**Mr Simpson**—Given the national priority that is now being given by all governments in Australia to civics and citizenship education, that is a reasonable proposition. I have no doubt that what you have said about the impact of visits to Canberra for both students and teachers is true.

**CHAIR**—From memory, there are currently eight scales, with the top scale of the subsidy being \$200 or \$300?

**Mr Simpson**—Yes—\$260.

**CHAIR**—Obviously, for remote students that goes nowhere to meeting the cost. Have you done any work on an alternative model for how we might make it more equitable for students?

**Mr Simpson**—Even the model for this year is a very new model.

**CHAIR**—I understand that.

**Mr Simpson**—It has been operating since July. We are starting to see how that is operating and we will be tracking it over coming months as well. As you know, the number of categories was increased in order to differentiate more for relevant distances, and the amount of the rebate was also increased in all cases.

**CHAIR**—How could we work out a model for the net cost for a family to send a student to Canberra, no matter where they live?

**Mr Simpson**—You could get information through the tour operators and even the schools on what the actual costs are. The purpose of this scheme is that it is a rebate or a subsidy. It was never intended, in government policy terms, to pay the full cost of the excursion.

**CHAIR**—I do not think there was a suggestion that the full costs should be paid. It is just that the further away you were from Canberra the more the students, their families and the teachers felt that it was inequitable because of the high cost. Students on Lord Howe Island are given a Commonwealth subsidy of \$6,000 a year to come to the mainland and do these sorts of things. Are you aware of that?

**Mr Simpson**—No, I was not aware of that.

**CHAIR**—A student on Lord Howe Island is not as disadvantaged as a student at Warburton in the desert in Western Australia. When you look at students coming to Canberra to visit the national capital, you find that the visitation is the standard bell curve: early in the year the numbers are down, in the July school holidays they are right up there, and at the end of the year they are down again. In fact, the peak is August, as I understand it.

**Mr Simpson**—Yes—August-September.

**CHAIR**—What do you think about the scope to introduce a subsidy to schools that is higher at a time other than the August-September period?

**Mr Simpson**—That sounds like a reasonable incentive to me to try to flatten out the demand. There are obvious reasons. We know why the demand is higher at that time. There are a number of factors, of course. You probably need to introduce either some incentives or disincentives to flatten out that demand structure.

**Mr CIOBO**—I am interested in exploring a couple of areas. There was some criticism about the value of the Discovering Democracy program. Recently there was some either anecdotal or actual evidence with respect to the penetration of knowledge in young Australian teenagers about why we have Anzac Day, what the Union Jack represents and so on. Do you have any comments about that criticism? Do you have any comments about the way in which Australian students know their history and these related Discovering Democracy principles relative to other international students as well?

**Mr Simpson**—Those media reports were purportedly a leaked copy of a report from the ministerial council of education ministers. We alluded to that in our earlier submission; we were

expecting that report to be released in about August, but it is up to the chair of the ministerial council, MCEETYA, who is currently the Queensland minister, to release it, once all ministers have approved it. We understood that the latest impediment was the election in Victoria, which held up the approval from the Victorian minister. That report has not yet been released officially. The media commented on what they said were some leaked findings from that report. We cannot comment very much on those leaked findings at this stage. Of course, if they were true, they would indicate some concerns.

Let me go to Discovering Democracy first and then perhaps do some international comparisons. Discovering Democracy was a Commonwealth program that operated from 1997 to 2004. It came in at a time when civics and citizenship education had virtually disappeared in Australian schools altogether. What it did was to produce a great range of curriculum resources, and there was a considerable amount of professional learning for teachers to attempt to get them up to speed in this area again, and it was a very active program for those seven or eight years. What you have to keep in mind, though, is that the Australian government does not have the power to enforce the use of these resources in any schools in Australia. Perhaps now under current quadrennial funding that might be changing, but certainly back then there was no policy to attempt to enforce the use of those resources. The last evaluation of Discovering Democracy, which occurred in 2003, indicated that at that stage about 50 per cent of schools were using the Discovering Democracy resources in a regular way, which meant that 50 per cent were not. At about that time what happened was that the state governments agreed that civics and citizenship education was to become one of the top five priorities for schooling in Australia. The Australian government concluded that in a sense it had achieved its policy objective of making civics a priority again for schooling, and it was then up to the states who had signed up to this as a priority to actually deliver this priority in their own schools.

The first account we will have of that will be these test results, when they are officially released. They are test results taken from testing late in 2004, so they have certainly been a while coming. That will indicate how well the bite is in terms of good civics and citizenship education. There is very little doubt that we are starting from a long way behind in Australia in this and we have some considerable way to go. We did participate in an international test, as you say, back in the late nineties. Dr O'Connell might have more details about that.

**Mr CIOBO**—That was in the first half of 1999?

**Mr Simpson**—Yes. That indicated that in the countries that participated in that we were in the middle of the pack.

**CHAIR**—With respect to the assessment that you spoke about, have any preliminary assessments been made? You said that it has not been reported yet, but have there been any preliminary assessments?

**Mr Simpson**—We know that the testing has been completed, and all we are waiting for is the release of the results by the Queensland minister, assuming all of the state ministers have agreed to the release of the results. Perhaps the Victorian minister is still settling in.

**Mr CIOBO**—Was this the testing that was completed at the end of 2004?

**Mr Simpson**—That is correct.

**Mr CIOBO**—Have we been waiting nearly two years for the release by the Queensland education minister?

**Mr Simpson**—Yes, that is correct. All of the technical work had to be done by the agency that conducted the testing.

**CHAIR**—Surely that is not acceptable?

**Mr Simpson**—It is a fairly lengthy and, you could say, slow process.

**Mr CIOBO**—The single most common cause of complaint that I have heard on this committee from teachers is this notion of a crowded curriculum. You have touched on this in many respects already in your evidence, highlighting that the Australian government does not play a role in compelling the curriculum with respect to civics education. You mentioned that there was only a 50 per cent penetration. Let me rephrase that: only one in two schools on average had bothered to pick up the tools of Discovering Democracy. Of the schools that had not picked it up, were they using other resources?

**Mr Simpson**—There is no way of establishing that. I do not know that the evaluation went to that. I think it would be a reasonable assumption to say that—

**Mr CIOBO**—I will rephrase it. Are you aware of another civics education resource kit made available to state schools?

**Mr Simpson**—No.

**Mr CIOBO**—Those other schools presumably were not using other resources made available to them. In terms of the Commonwealth's ability to encourage and facilitate the use of these resources for civics and citizenship education, what is the department's view in terms of either compelling them or using a carrot and stick approach?

**Mr Simpson**—The carrots are there in the sense that the Discovering Democracy resources are still available. They are available online; they are available at any time. There are plenty of carrots. In terms of a stick, that is really a policy decision for the government to make. In the current quadrennium funding that the Australian government gives to education authorities for schools, for the first time with this quadrennium, 2005-08, a number of conditions have been applied to that funding, such as the use of plain English report cards and so on. You are probably aware that at the Australian history summit, which the minister held in August, there was a call from the summiteers in the communique to make Australian history a compulsory stand-alone subject in years 9 and 10. That in effect is a recommendation to government. Government will need to consider the normal mechanism for something to be done about that, if something is to be done about it, in the quadrennium beginning in January 2009.

**Mr CIOBO**—With respect to the one in two take-up rate of the Discovering Democracy program, do you have a state-by-state breakdown? For example, are you aware whether there was a higher level of adoption in New South Wales versus Victoria versus Queensland?

**Mr Simpson**—I do not have that. I am not sure if Dr O’Connell does.

**Dr O’Connell**—I do not think that it was in the report. I am not sure if the sample in some of the smaller states would have been statistically significant.

**Mr Simpson**—We could take that on notice and have a look for you.

**Dr O’Connell**—It was not in the report.

**Mr Simpson**—I do not know whether we have that level of detail. When these test results are released, you will get a state-by-state breakdown at that time.

**Mr CIOBO**—Presumably there would be some correlation between the penetration rate and the results?

**Mr Simpson**—Yes, there could well be.

**CHAIR**—The University of New South Wales has a mandatory course for all of its students. It is a six-credit point course in civics. Do you support the replication of this arrangement across all Australian universities?

**Mr Simpson**—Is this for teacher education students?

**CHAIR**—No; this is for all students attending the University of New South Wales. They are required to do a six-credit point course in civics education. Do you have a response on that?

**Mr Simpson**—It is certainly an acknowledgement of the importance of civics education for university students. Again, universities, as you know, are autonomous institutions in terms of the policies that they pursue in these areas.

**CHAIR**—But as you know, the Commonwealth does have a certain sway over universities.

**Mr Simpson**—It is certainly the major funder of universities, but it does not usually attach conditions to its funding, as I understand it—not that I work in the higher education area.

**CHAIR**—Would you be supportive of that?

**Mr Simpson**—All I can do is acknowledge that that is a significant contribution. It is a statement of the importance of civics education.

**CHAIR**—In respect of the point that you thought I was referring to—teacher training—have you considered mandatory civics and electoral units for all pre-service teachers during their university training?

**Mr Simpson**—As I said, we do not work in the higher education area. We work in the schools area of the department. My understanding is that the Australian government does not impose those sorts of conditions on universities.

**CHAIR**—But we could?

**Mr Simpson**—Theoretically that is possible.

**CHAIR**—I do not have any other questions. In terms of the Discovering Democracy program, the teachers we spoke to thought that was wonderful. They spoke highly of it and used it as a resource. Some teachers still did not know that it was available for them. However, that is an example of what happens right across the country in all sorts of areas. You have done well. Thank you for supporting us during this inquiry. We are looking forward to some interesting recommendations. We will send you a copy of the transcript and, if any corrections are needed, please let us know. Thank you for your attendance today.

[10.40 am]

**ELLIS, Ms Mary-Anne Cathleen, Assistant Secretary, Citizenship and Language Services Branch, Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs**

**VARDOS, Mr Peter, First Assistant Secretary, Citizenship, Settlement and Multicultural Affairs Division, Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs**

**CHAIR**—I now welcome representatives of the Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs to today's hearing. We do not require you to give evidence under oath but these are legal proceedings of the parliament and we expect the same respect as proceedings of the parliament itself. We have not received a written submission from you in relation to this inquiry. Would you like to present a submission, make a short opening statement or proceed directly to questions?

**Mr Vardos**—We have a very brief statement that we will read and table.

**CHAIR**—Please proceed.

**Mr Vardos**—My statement covers three issues: 'Let's participate': a course in Australian citizenship; the involvement of the Australian Electoral Commission in Australian citizenship ceremonies; and *Beginning a life in Australia*, which is for refugees and humanitarian settlers. The concept of an Australian citizenship course was launched by the then Minister for Immigration and Multicultural Affairs in February 1999. The government, through the Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs, funded the development of the course 'Let's participate' by the Adult Migrant English Program Research Centre.

The course and the accompanying teaching resources were developed to give learners in AMEP—that is, the Adult Migrant English Program—an introduction to topics in Australian civics and to assist them in their application for Australian citizenship. The broad objectives of the course are threefold: firstly, it is to help prospective applicants to gain a more thorough knowledge and understanding of the meaning of Australian citizenship; secondly, it is to provide an overview of Australia's history and institutions; and, thirdly, it is to assist AMEP students in applying for Australian citizenship by streamlining the application process.

In 2001 the AMEP Research Centre developed the course syllabus and accompanying teaching materials to reflect the text types and language features of competencies for the curriculum in spoken and written English—CSWE—levels 1, 2 and 3, which is the teaching framework for the AMEP. In late 2005, a pre-CSWE level was introduced to allow participants with lower levels of English proficiency to also undertake the course. 'Let's participate' is divided into six units, each outlining aspects of civics or Australian citizenship. Each is aligned with the words of the Australian citizenship pledge and application processes as set out below. The six parts are in order: firstly, an introduction to Australian citizenship; secondly, Australia and its people; thirdly, democratic government in Australia; fourthly, rights, responsibilities and privileges; fifthly, law and democracy in Australia; and, sixthly, becoming an Australian citizen.

The course takes approximately 20 hours. It is delivered by AMEP service providers and offered as a discrete module. AMEP participants can choose to undertake the course as part of their 510 hours of language teaching entitlement. The course may also be delivered to others outside the AMEP framework, and our paper has a copy of the syllabus attached. A number of teaching resources have been produced to support the course. These include a teachers guide, with information about course units and resources; fact sheets summarising basic information about Australian citizenship, which is available in a variety of languages; a video introducing the topics and providing questions for class discussion; workbooks with text and language practice; audio cassettes containing the spoken text from the workbooks; and, finally, CD-ROM interactive multimedia resources based on the workbooks.

Assessment tasks for the course have recently begun to be developed and trialled. Tasks at the CSWE level 1 are now available and being used by teachers in the AMEP. Assessment tasks for the other levels are anticipated during the course of 2007. Over the last five years almost 25,500 or around 90 per cent of AMEP participants have satisfactorily completed a course and been granted a course certificate.

I now want to touch on the involvement of the Australian Electoral Commission in Australian citizenship ceremonies. Electoral enrolment forms are supplied by the AEC and printed with the details of the name, date of birth, address and certificate details of the applicant by DIMA's printers at the same time as the relevant citizenship certificate is being printed. This is of course for applicants over 18. Applicants then receive the enrolment form when they receive their certificate following the pledge of commitment at their conferral ceremony. They then sign it in front of a suitable witness, have the witness sign the form and either hand the completed form to an AEC staff member where they attend the ceremonies or are advised to post it to the AEC. Councils are asked to facilitate electoral enrolment by notifying the AEC of forthcoming ceremonies and facilitating the presence of AEC staff where they indicate they will be attending. Instructions are often given by the presiding officer at each ceremony as part of the ceremony as to whether the AEC is present and what conferees should do in relation to signing and lodging the form. This forms part of the procedure of the ceremony and it is reflected in the Australian Citizenship Ceremonies Code.

Lastly, I want to touch on the paper: *Beginning a life in Australia*. DIMA has information products that can assist migrants to settle successfully in their new community, including the *Beginning a life in Australia* booklets. These booklets are available online and provide useful national, state, territory and local settlement information for prospective and newly arrived migrants on topics such as what to do after arrival, help with English, emergency services, where to go for help, Australian customs and law, housing, employment, social security, transport, education and child care, the health system, recreation and media, and the Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs. The chapter on Australian customs and law covers responsibilities and values for all Australians, respect for others and the law, loyalty to Australia and our democratic way of life. The booklets are updated twice a year. Each state and territory has its own version of the booklet, which is available in English and the following 24 community languages—Albanian, Amharic, Arabic, Bosnian, Burmese, simplified Chinese, traditional Chinese, Croatian, Dari, Dinka, French, Indonesian, Karen, Khmer, Korean, Persian, Russian, Serbian, Somali, Spanish, Tagalog, Thai, Turkish and Vietnamese.



The *Beginning a life in Australia* booklets in CD-ROM format are also distributed through our network of contractors and community service providers. That is the end of the statement. There is a significant attachment, which covers various aspects of the 'Let's participate' course and the syllabus.

**CHAIR**—Thank you for that. I appreciate that opening statement. The Multicultural Council of Tasmania said to us that migrant resource centres and settlement organisations should be mandated to deliver civics and electoral information as a condition of funding. What would be your advice to the committee on that statement?

**Mr Vardos**—Our principal interaction with migrant resource centres and other community organisations is when they apply for and are successful in getting funding under the Settlement Grants Program, or SGP. In the current financial year, funding is about \$30 million. That funding is all targeted towards specific project proposals that they put to us and we assess with specific milestones and outcomes. The projects themselves are built around identified settlement needs that we also have a role in identifying. The community organisations have a range of programs. They are not just funded by the Commonwealth government through DIMA. They have state government funding and philanthropic funding.

The issue of mandatory instruction in any activity, whether it be in this subject or another, has not been canvassed in the time that I have been working on this program, which is since 2001, or by successive ministers. To be honest, it has never come up as an issue in our community engagement and liaison with these organisations. I do not think the Multicultural Council of Tasmania has ever put that to us. Perhaps it is inappropriate to express personal opinions, but mandating anything as a condition of funding in this area would be a retrograde step. We do have a significant framework that we work around that is all targeted at settlement activities. As I said, through the 'Let's participate' course, which is fairly comprehensive, we capture the bulk of the refugee and humanitarian clients, who would also be clients of those organisations.

**CHAIR**—Do you have a comment, Ms Ellis?

**Ms Ellis**—At the point that clients of those organisations are receiving assistance, many of them are not citizens and would have quite some years to go before they would be eligible for citizenship. One of the issues that would need to be considered is the timing of providing that sort of information to clients. Certainly in their early years of settlement their focus is on other matters.

**CHAIR**—We had evidence from the state government Office of Multicultural Interests in Perth. It talked about the role of ethnic media in providing civics and electoral information. Are you able to provide ethnic media with civics and electoral information, or should that be the role of others?

**Mr Vardos**—We are happy to make the range of information that I have outlined available to anybody who thinks that they can make use of it. We do not specifically target the ethnic media, although we do have, through the Multicultural Affairs Branch of my division, a quite extensive engagement with ethnic media across the country on a range of issues. If the ethnic media are interested in running stories or information items on civics or electoral processes, I cannot see an issue in our providing the already established material to those organisations. Ms Ellis just

pointed out that it depends on what it is that they want. It may be better sourced from the Australian Electoral Commission rather than us.

**CHAIR**—I understand.

**Mr CIOBO**—If you look at the transcript, you will see from the Sydney roundtable with ethnic media that they were highly desirous of having additional civics related material especially in source language or home language—

**Mr Vardos**—Community language.

**Mr CIOBO**—Community language. They indicated that they did not have the resources to translate often, and so to receive something in the community language would be most beneficial. Secondly, like any form of media, they are often looking for new material. Could DIMA, as the gateway to a lot of these ethnic communities, play a role in coordinating or liaising with the AEC in the first instance? A very clear message was given to this committee that they were desirous of such material.

**Mr Vardos**—I would repeat that we do have material in 24 community languages available. The question I have to ask is not confined just to the Australian Electoral Commission; it applies to a range of organisations that deliver services to people, including those of a non-English-speaking background or from Australia's culturally and linguistically diverse communities. Should it be the responsibility of DIMA to cover every Commonwealth government activity for that client group, or should those organisations step up and accept their responsibility to deliver their material, their information and their services to, for example, ethnic media? We are not experts in electoral processes, as we are not experts in a whole range of other services that are delivered by a whole host of government agencies at the federal level.

**Mr CIOBO**—I understand what you are saying. I am tempted to respond, when I get these messages, with: 'I don't care how you do it; just do it.' I understand that from a departmental point of view that may not be entirely—

**Mr Vardos**—I will give you a small anecdote. According to the 2001 Census, 23 per cent of the Australian population is foreign born. You could extrapolate that and say that, for everything to do with the foreign born, DIMA should get 23 per cent of the Commonwealth budget to help do culturally appropriate information on this, this and this. It is an issue of access and equity. Every government agency that delivers a service has a responsibility to make sure that its services are accessible to everybody in the community.

**Mr CIOBO**—For what it is worth, from my point of view: why not give your list of the ethnic media groups to the AEC, and then we will be able to pursue it with the AEC?

**Mr Vardos**—Yes. Clearly, if there is something that we can do with the ethnic media to provide them with the material that we have already developed, we would happily and willingly do that.

**Mr CIOBO**—I would like to explore one other aspect—that is, with respect to citizenship ceremonies, which I know that you have touched on already. Clearly there is a disparity with the

way in which the department has its presence at various ceremonies. You mentioned that you pre-print the forms with names and so on. Often it is mayors who conduct these ceremonies. Are there guidelines such that they must direct attention to the Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs officers that are there, or is it just a case of, 'We've got these forms and, if they happen to do it, great'? It is a bit hit and miss. On the Gold Coast, a very specific and deliberate direction is given to the audience to please enrol here and now—that it is an important part of being a responsible Australian. I get the impression that at a lot of other ceremonies that is often an afterthought.

**Mr Vardos**—I will ask Ms Ellis to provide details. By way of a general comment, I can say that the federal government produces through our division, in Mary-Anne's branch, a citizenship ceremonies guide, which is distributed to every council in Australia. It is not mandatory, although it does contain mandatory elements. It says, 'In doing a ceremony, these are the things you must do,' and then it gives guidance on a whole range of others. Given the number of councils in this country and their spread, it is impossible for DIMA to be present at every council. It is sometimes not as often as we can. I agree with you that there is variability in the way in which ceremonies are conducted. Where issues are brought to our attention, either by unhappy conferees or unhappy members of the conferee's family or by some other observer, in terms of something they did not like about the ceremony, we get communications either direct to the department or through the parliamentary secretary or the minister, and we will pursue that with the relevant council.

**Ms Ellis**—Our staff are generally not at council-managed citizenship ceremonies. As you could imagine, there are many that happen all over Australia throughout the year. The Australian Citizenship Ceremonies Code does advise councils that they should let their local office of the Australian Electoral Commission know when they are having ceremonies so that AEC staff can be there to collect the forms. It is part of the ceremonies code that we ask councils to ensure that conferees are advised of the attendance of the AEC staff, if they are there, so that they can collect the forms.

**Mr CIOBO**—You make a good point. I am sorry; I must confess that I was confusing the two. You are exactly right. It is AEC staff.

**Ms Ellis**—Undoubtedly there would be some ceremonies where the presiding officer, perhaps through inexperience, might forget to refer to the Electoral Commission staff. That is a shame when that happens, but if we were aware of it happening on a regular basis at a council then departmental staff would remind the council of the importance of letting the Electoral Commission know about the ceremony and then letting the conferees know about the Electoral Commission staff that are there. Our state officers have reasonably regular meetings with council staff so that they can keep them up to date and, hopefully as new staff come onto councils, get them across what is required as part of the code.

**Mr Vardos**—Could I just add that the principal responsibility for interface between DIMA and councils is through our state office network.

**Mr CIOBO**—Is it an obligation to advise the AEC or just a recommendation?

**Ms Ellis**—It is part of the guidance in the ceremony's code. It is not an obligation to the extent that there is no legislation that requires them to do that, but certainly the code is something that is issued by the minister pursuant to the provisions in the Citizenship Act.

**Mr CIOBO**—So the recommendation falls upon the council to notify the AEC, not upon the department of immigration.

**Ms Ellis**—Yes, that is correct. The department in many cases would not know when council was having a ceremony. We tend to know after the event when council provides us with a list of people who have taken the pledge—

**Mr CIOBO**—Really? How could the department not know when—

**CHAIR**—That cannot be true.

**Ms Ellis**—Sorry, you are right. We would know in advance because the certificates are printed, but it is—

**Mr CIOBO**—Don't you approve who gets citizenship?

**Ms Ellis**—Yes. Certificates are only printed for those who have been approved and the certificates are then handed over. But it is possible that at times a ceremony might be planned for a particular date and time and that date and time might change.

**Mr CIOBO**—Sure, but in the main the department would be aware of them.

**Ms Ellis**—Yes, you are right.

**Mr CIOBO**—Right.

**Mr Vardos**—Because we have control over the certificates. No-one else gets involved.

**Mr CIOBO**—Is there any reason why you could not be obliged to advise the AEC of all upcoming citizenship ceremonies? I would have thought it would be a fairly straightforward, relatively easy to implement process?

**Mr Vardos**—It may already be happening at the state office level in the citizenship branches in each of those offices, I do not know. That day to day—

**Mr CIOBO**—Let us assume it is not. If we assume it is not, would that be a relatively straightforward exercise?

**Mr Vardos**—I am just thinking out aloud here. I guess once the regular dialogue about printing certificates and matching up the conferees of a particular council, it would be injecting another administrative process for the DIMA state office to then have a communication with the AEC to say that there is a ceremony on such-and-such a date as advised by the council—

**Ms Ellis**—It is more direct communication if it is from the council to the AEC.

**Mr CIOBO**—Sure, but that is not my question.

**Ms Ellis**—And there are more AEC offices than there are DIMA offices. Yes, it would be possible for DIMA to do it. As Mr Vardos says, it is quite possible that in some places—

**Mr CIOBO**—It is happening already.

**Ms Ellis**—there is that close communication between the DIMA office and the AEC office, but as it is set up at the moment within the ceremonies code it requires a direct communication between the council and the AEC—

**Mr CIOBO**—It does not require, it only recommends.

**Ms Ellis**—Recommends, requires—it is something that we ask them to do. I would have to look at the precise wording to see whether it was simply ‘recommend’, or whether it was closer to ‘require’.

**Mr CIOBO**—You told me just five or ten minutes ago that it was only a recommendation, but anyway.

**Mr Vardos**—Unfortunately we did not bring a copy of the code with us.

**Mr CIOBO**—That is all right. I was just using your language.

**CHAIR**—We heard evidence in Perth that the *Beginning a life in Australia* booklets for new arrivals issued by your department includes a list of things migrants should do after arrival—that is, apply for a tax file number, register with Centrelink and Medicare, and so on. But it was noted that nowhere in the document were there guidelines about achieving the right to enrol and to vote. Can you confirm that this is the case and, if so, explain why enrolling to vote has not been included in this publication?

**Mr Vardos**—I would have to take that on notice to give you a comprehensive answer. We have provided a copy of the booklet. I guess one generalised response could be that the material is provided very early in the arrival process and getting to the point of citizenship is some way down the track. But, if it is an issue of concern for the committee then, as I said, the booklets are updated on a regular basis, so we might see if it is appropriate.

**CHAIR**—Could I ask you then to review the booklet to just see if it is appropriate and give your advice back to the committee?

**Mr Vardos**—Yes, we will do that.

**CHAIR**—Thank you for your attendance here today. We appreciate that.

**Proceedings suspended from 11.05 am to 11.14 am**

**KENMAN, Ms Sandra, Executive Officer, Australian Federation of Societies for Studies of Society and Environment**

**CHAIR**—The committee welcomes Ms Kenman, a representative of the Australian Federation of Societies for Studies of Society and the Environment, to today's hearing. We do not require you to give evidence under oath, but these are legal proceedings of the parliament and they attract the respect that proceedings of the parliament have. We have had a written submission from you. Do you want to present any additional submissions or would you like to make a short opening statement to the inquiry?

**Ms Kenman**—Perhaps a short opening statement so that we can focus on the report, but not additional information. The response from AFSSSE acknowledges that a lot of the wonderful work is happening with civics and citizenship education, with resources and passionate teachers, but it also highlights the concern that civics education, or electoral education, may not be producing the outcomes that the citizenship component produces. The report gave some examples of the good work that is being done but also highlighted the need for mechanisms, to put it bluntly, to make schools, teachers, managers and principals take civics education seriously and have more students involved. Within that suggestion there was also a highlighting of the fact that a lot of teachers would not be able to do that. So without the support of parliamentary education officers, the Australian Electoral Commission or an increase in teacher preparation—pre-service teaching—it is unlikely that teachers would feel comfortable with that expanded role.

**CHAIR**—Thank you for that. You have quite a widely representative organisation.

**Ms Kenman**—Yes, we have.

**CHAIR**—It is based here in Canberra?

**Ms Kenman**—No, the office is in Brisbane, but we meet wherever we mostly reside, so we have the five key associations: history, geography, environmental ed and social ed.

**CHAIR**—So are you a Queenslander?

**Ms Kenman**—Yes, I am.

**CHAIR**—Fantastic. So am I. In your submission you said that generally young people do not show too much interest in the electoral system and they think it is something that only affects them in the future, and that most teachers would say that students' knowledge and responsibilities under the electoral system is quite limited. Why would that be, do you think? Is that an indictment on teachers or are there other reasons?

**Ms Kenman**—I think it is the history of schools delivering disciplines, particularly in secondary schools, and crowded curricula. People who have power within the schools would be focusing on their history, their geography or their separate disciplines. There has never, ever been a separate discipline for civics and citizenship; it has never had territory within the school or the curriculum. Historically it has been a fallback area for students who cannot cope with the

more demanding history, geography and social science subjects. It really is terrible that schools are not giving value to civics and citizenship education.

**CHAIR**—You used the words ‘crowded curricula’. Is that just an excuse for teachers not to teach something that they do not feel they want to teach?

**Ms Kenman**—Partly. I think a lot of teachers are not comfortable with teaching civics and citizenship, so if they are given a flexible curriculum, as they are given in a lot of states and territories now, they may not choose civics and citizenship—

**CHAIR**—That is a very insightful answer. We are picking up that teachers do not feel they have the capacity to teach this. Why is that? What should we do about it?

**Ms Kenman**—Teacher training is an expensive exercise. I think universities are autonomous, so to try to change what is happening at universities is a challenge. I do not know whether the teacher registration authorities require it as a prerequisite for teaching or not. Some of this is happening now with vocational education and training. Pre-service teacher programs are acknowledging that that is a big part of what is happening in schools and so it is becoming a mandatory part of the curriculum. I do not know that mandating curriculum necessarily works with the states and territories, and I do not know whether it—

**CHAIR**—You mentioned teacher registration. We have not heard much about that. Who registers teachers?

**Ms Kenman**—It is a state and territory authority that does this, but when teachers finish their degree, or whatever subjects they need to be a teacher, they have to register with a board of teacher registration. They have different names in different states. They have to go undergo their checks.

**CHAIR**—Do the state organisations that do that have the capacity to say, ‘We will not register a teacher unless they have done these elements in their courses’?

**Ms Kenman**—They have the capacity to say, ‘We will not register a teacher if a teacher has a criminal record,’ so the legislation governs their capacity, and it may mean—

**CHAIR**—State legislation?

**Ms Kenman**—Yes. So it would be up to whatever the legislative document says about their capacity, but I believe that in Queensland that has increased significantly over recent years, where they have more power. It may have been driven by the worries about criminal records, paedophiles and inappropriate behaviour, but to push that argument to say, ‘We will also now mandate that you need to have training in these areas’ would probably be a big step.

**CHAIR**—I am just searching for a piece of evidence given earlier in relation to your Queensland connection. DEST has done a national assessment of civics and citizenship education in 2004. The results have not yet been released and we are ready to do the next one in 2007. The reason the results have not been released is that the Queensland government has not

yet signed off on whatever the results were. Have you any idea why that might be? Do you think it is odd that a state government could hold up the release of that information for two years?

**Ms Kenman**—I do not know why that is the case. I have been to the civics conferences in Canberra where the question has been asked repeatedly: what are the official results? Of course, when they are not released there is innuendo: the results must be pretty poor; students do not know much about electoral education. I believe Queensland may have had a big part in working on the project—I do not know.

**CHAIR**—How do you feel about teachers being asked to teach students about the philosophies of the various political parties as part of electoral information? What I mean by that is that, obviously, the Greens, the Labor Party, the Liberal Party, the National Party, Family First, the Socialist Alliance and whatever else there is all have a manifesto. How do you feel about teachers being asked to try to educate the students about why each party exists and what its philosophy is? Do you think teachers can be professional in delivering that without putting a bias on any one party or the other? Does that scare the pants off you? Tell me.

**Ms Kenman**—Teachers probably do that now within civics and citizenship contexts. In history contexts there would be a reliance on evidence and story. I believe teachers have enough opportunity to present all sorts of scenarios so that students can draw their own conclusions. The resources that the federal government has put into civics and citizenship are fairly broad and they give that sort of information as a resource for teachers to use. I do not believe that that is an issue as much as teachers' competence in the electoral system itself. So it is the rule of law and levels of government; a knowledge component is the critical issue.

When we talk about how we might get more teachers to take on board the teaching of civics and citizenship, there is an interesting example in Queensland where the new senior certificate of education is to be delivered at the end of 2008—that will be the students who are going into year 11 next year. One of the components to get that certificate, one of the hurdles to jump, is that you have to have a certain level of literacy and numeracy. So it is not as strict as mandating what you must teach, but it is saying that, regardless of whether or not you have very high achievements in physics, chemistry, history, business or whatever, you are not going to get your certificate of education, which is an entrance to university, unless you demonstrate a basic level of literacy and numeracy. So civics could be that sort of minimum requirement to progress to another level, but it still give the flexibility for states and territories to decide how that would happen. Parents are a very powerful force in selection of school curricula and, if it leads to a certificate, a number or a ranking, then they are interested.

**CHAIR**—In relation to the teaching of civics, many teachers have said to us that they find the most effective way to teach civics is through stories because it engages the students. Examples are the stories of the Eureka Stockade or Gallipoli. Do you agree with that?

**Ms Kenman**—I think there are two steps and it is the second step that is missing. The engagement is done very well. So the stories, the citizenship component, the 'what is it to live in a democracy' component, and demonstrating that through participation is all there, but then, when you try to link that to knowledge of local, state and federal government and the electoral system, that is where the gap is. The gap occurs in the linking. But it is very important to have that engagement to get young people interested and to work from where they are at the moment.



Then the challenge is to take that and move it to the actual knowledge of: what does this mean for our country as far as electoral education goes?

**CHAIR**—Your paper discussed the school age when electoral education should begin. Could you talk to me about that? I have read what is in the paper, but just talk to me in case there is something else I can pick up.

**Ms Kenman**—Again, traditionally the focus of electoral education across Australia is upper primary. We go to visit Canberra year 7 or year 8 students. That has been the practice over the years. We did say in our paper the sooner the better. So, again, in that early first stage of engagement it is about what it is to live in a democratic society, what are rules et cetera. That could start in kindergarten; we have all those resources. The whole Discovering Democracy project starts with lower primary and upper primary through to secondary. I think in upper primary school it is still fairly much focused on, ‘Let’s visit parliament.’ In secondary school it starts moving into disciplines. So, if you choose legal studies, you might learn a little bit more about the processes. If you choose ancient history, you may learn a little bit about the history of democracy, but it will fit within another discipline. Any attempts to build subjects that are very much political studies driven have not been very successful. I think it is the history of what we have done over the past that is hard to overcome. It is very hard to sell another new subject unless it leads to a job.

**CHAIR**—You mentioned visiting Canberra. We have had a fair bit of evidence that, the further you get away from Canberra, the more costly it is to come and the less likely it is that students will ever get the opportunity to come here, but for those who come the teachers say it is the most engaging experience that their students could possibly have. What is your advice about how we might make sure every Australian child has the opportunity to come to Canberra at some time in their school life?

**Ms Kenman**—Our report says that it is expensive because of the size of our country, the costs of getting children away and teachers having to be replaced when they leave their schools. It really is a cost factor. Some people have provided feedback to us on the virtual tour. With technology now, some of that is very good. You can walk through the different buildings. But there is nothing quite like walking through the front door. Whether that be frightening, exciting or whatever, there is nothing quite like that. I believe all teachers would love their students to be able to visit Canberra and Parliament House. Our report did say that some of the visits are not as productive as they could be. Again, it comes back to teachers preparing for what they are going to get out of their visit, being knowledgeable about what happens here and being able to prepare for before and after.

**CHAIR**—You know that subsidies are provided for students to come, but they do not appear to be equitable enough so that you get students from all around the country coming and not feeling disadvantaged because they are further away. Do you believe it is the right of an Australian student to be able to come to Canberra at some time in their school life?

**Ms Kenman**—Yes, I believe it is the right of every student to be in Canberra and come to Parliament House. As to the inequities of where you live, it is not just about where you live geographically but the other isolations as well—whether you have a teacher in that little school in rural New South Wales who knows enough about what is happening to be able to bring you to

Canberra. They probably know the subsidies exist, but it takes a lot more than the subsidy to be able to move the students from one place to another and supervise them while they are here. It is about resourcing, costing and money. The amount of money that has been spent on resources for civics and citizenship education is not small. We have a lot of resources in schools. If money could be put to having students come here, learn, see and walk through the front door, I imagine that would be very welcomed.

**CHAIR**—This may be a bit out of your field of expertise. In a country like the United States the people seem to be fiercely proud of their country, but we do not see that level of pride here in Australia. Is that something that the education system should address?

**Ms Kenman**—It is strange that Australia was the first country in the world to have the secret ballot, the first country in the world to have the eight-hour day legislated and the second country, I think, to have women voting. We have such a wonderful history and yet very few people know about that. You mentioned the fierce pride in your country as in the United States. We can look at the debate that is currently happening with the teaching of Australian history. That is causing a huge debate in the community. Do you say what Australian history should be taught in every state and territory in every school and expect that it will be taught? Because of our diverse culture we have a lot of voices and communities and people worry about whose history should be taught. I think the same issue could arise with the fine line between patriotism and fanaticism. Who do you cut off when you start promoting a certain view? Are you including all voices? I think it is a bigger challenge in Australia because of the diversity, but it is also a sadness that we are not knowledgeable, we are not aware, about the history that we have and that we cannot get people passionate and excited about it.

**CHAIR**—In your submission you have noted that you feel you are well positioned to undertake a small research study to provide a more focused description of civics and electoral education as practised in Australian schools. What experience have you had in conducting similar studies and what resources could you devote to this particular study?

**Ms Kenman**—AFSSSE was very involved in the Discovering Democracy project, which was the federal government's attempt to put resources into schools, and AFSSSE was the voice of teachers. We were fairly blunt in providing information to DEST about the drafts that were written and whether or not teachers would accept them and use them. Our job was to try to provide the voice of teachers. So we held focus groups and we made sure we had the different sectors represented. Then we wrote the feedback and provided the reports, and the materials were rewritten. We had some very dramatic performances of people standing up tearing up first drafts and saying, 'I'm not going to teach this,' and, 'Where is the Indigenous perspective?' Our role was really to be the teachers' voice. That was the biggest project that we had with DEST. At the moment we are involved with an APEC, Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation, project. We are developing materials for the website—the business economic educators. As to what we could contribute, we have our office in Brisbane and we are only a small organisation if we do not have projects to run; we are a very large organisation if we do. Because we have the five peak bodies in Australia and then each of those peak bodies has state and territory subgroups, we have access to thousands of teachers through the consortium.

**CHAIR**—You talked about a whole-of-school approach in your submission. Why do you think some schools do not embrace that approach in this area?

**Ms Kenman**—Some schools are not very democratic.

**CHAIR**—Right. Where is the barrier to implementation?

**Ms Kenman**—I think with civics and citizenship education, particularly the citizenship part, which is often the whole-of-school part—which is about what a democracy is, practising democratic action and practising how rules are made and how they are implemented—it often happens because of leadership within the school, whether it is the principal or the teacher who is passionate about civics and citizenship. So it really is subject to individuals. We almost have this little club in Australia now where these whole-of-school approaches occur and people meet. That grew out of the Discovering Democracy project. But it is still that sort of club mentality. It is not across all schools.

**CHAIR**—I think I have what I need now. Thank you for your attendance. I appreciate your coming down today.

**Ms Kenman**—We are very grateful and we are very keen to be involved in any future projects or actions. AFSSSE was formed for that SOSE component to bring the bigger disciplines together. Thank you.

[11.41 am]

**GUNN, Mr Taylor Alexander Hamilton, Chief Election Officer, Student Vote, Canada**

*Evidence was taken via teleconference—*

**CHAIR**—Good evening, Mr Gunn, and thank you for being with us. Do we have your chief operating officer with us?

**Mr Gunn**—She is on her way, but we usually speak on each other's behalf.

**CHAIR**—I welcome a representative of Student Vote, Canada, to today's hearing. We do not require you to give evidence under oath but these hearings are legal proceedings of the parliament and therefore have the same standing as proceedings for the respective houses. Mr Gunn, I have with me our inquiry secretary, Dr Sonia Palmieri; the committee secretary, Stephen Boyd; and a senior researcher, Justin Baker. They are with me here in Parliament House in Canberra this morning.

**Mr Gunn**—Hello, Sonia and Justin. We have only spoken through email.

**Dr Palmieri**—Hello.

**CHAIR**—Sonia is a lovely person and we all do what she tells us to do. We have not had a written submission from you, of course, but do you want to make a short opening statement to the committee, Mr Gunn?

**Mr Gunn**—I would take the committee's advice on that. Justin has informed me that the website was being used as a backgrounder for the program. If you feel that I could say more than what is on the website, then I will go ahead. But if you want to just go right into the questions or anything else that you have, I would be willing to do whatever you think is best.

**CHAIR**—Okay. Let us just have some questions, because I think we have a pretty good idea of what you are about.

**Mr Gunn**—Okay. I will clarify throughout as well.

**CHAIR**—You seem to have had great success in attracting large numbers of schools in both provincial and federal elections. Can you talk us through the marketing strategies used to involve such a large number of schools? Where do the schools learn about Student Vote? Do you tend to target teachers or students?

**Mr Gunn**—Basically the beginnings of building our numbers and our participation had a lot to do with partnership, and partnerships started for me at one point out of my parents' basement with teachers federations, directors of education and all the members of the education system in Ontario, which is the province that I live in and our biggest province by numbers here in Canada, and then across the country. So we were developing partnerships and developing the trust first.

What that meant is that not only were we reaching out to teachers, schools, principals and school administrators, it was more of their own unions or organisations also assisting in the outreach at the same time.

Generally, when we start to prep for an election, what we will do is we will send out numerous letters. If the committee so cares, we even sign them by hand. If we are sending out 10,000 letters to schools then each one gets a signature. Part of that is just to let people know that there is a personal passion behind our initiative. We will send out letters to three different people in a school. One of the first people will be our past student or team leader. That can be people who have worked with us in the past. Then we will send it out to social studies department heads. I am not as aware as I would like to be at this point of how it works in Australia, but basically, whoever is in the lead of civic literacy or social studies in the school would be one of the best people to reach out to. Then we also reach out to the principals. So that is three letters per school. What we also have are teachers unions doing their own support of the program approved by them. We have directors of education; I am not sure if you have school boards in Australia, but that is the lead administrator in the school board outside of the elected board members. Then we will also partner with the media. The media will do all sorts of wonderful things for us, including free advertising space. So there will be an ad in the paper talking about how to get involved, what it means for your students and that sort of thing.

We will try to do whatever we can so that there is not a possibility of missing someone in the school who would take up something like this. It is less marketing; it is more partnerships and being prepared to work with the teachers. For us, all that we try to do is support the teachers in their instruction of civic literacy and help them do a job that they already do incredibly well if you are in Canada. But we do so by providing all the free materials, the personal support over the phone and through emails. 'Partnerships' I think is the word I would use. If you are looking into having something like this in Australia, hopefully we could come out there and show you how we have done it in person, which was something that I just could not arrange at this time. We could show you how to really do it in a way that understands the value of the teachers' role in an initiative such as this. Marketing is one of the things where it is more selling. We are not selling democracy; we are providing an opportunity for people to participate and practise under the voting age their democratic responsibilities, privileges and rights.

**CHAIR**—Is it your objective to involve all secondary schools?

**Mr Gunn**—I would love to be at the point where we could involve all secondary schools. We think we have done pretty well. For example, in January of last year we had 468,000 students participate across the country. It was a mix of both elementary and secondary schools. This is where the chief operating officer, who is also my girlfriend as well, was smart enough in the beginning to make sure that we did not go out to elementary schools initially because they just could not handle it. But the benefits of involving the younger students in elementary schools is that they go home and they talk about all of this to their parents and they treat it as just a normal part of being a citizen rather than in high schools where we have a little bit more of the social factors—whether voting is cool and all that stuff. We have two goals: we have to engage both the elementary and secondary schools. I would love to get to the point where we had all secondary schools and elementary schools involved in the program. It is just a matter of time.

**CHAIR**—There are some schools you will find difficult to attract. What do you think prevents these schools from participating?

**Mr Gunn**—I hate to say this but, if anything, it is a lack of one of those very special teachers in the school.

**CHAIR**—I understand—yes.

**Mr Gunn**—What we find here in Canada, and I imagine this is so in any first-world country, is that there is always that person in the school who will take up these special initiatives because they understand the value and importance to the students. One of the big challenges I feel our program initiatives face in trying to engage young people in democracy in schools is that if the teachers have lost faith in the democratic process—for example, if they are not even voters themselves, which is very possible and it occurs all the time—then this is the type of thing that can slip through their fingers. That is why our approach in engaging them goes on all sorts of different levels. If it is the social studies teacher who does not get it, then we try to go after the principal. Really, it is about the teachers. If there is something that you could ever look forward to doing in the future if possible, by way of support, it is helping teachers across Australia better understand the values of participation as active citizens.

**CHAIR**—I understand we have had some evidence here in Australia as well along the lines of what you have just said. Ms Palmieri would like to ask you some questions.

**Dr PALMIERI**—I just want to take up the issue of the media. You said earlier that you have media who give you free ad space. I notice that 250 editorials were published about student vote in the national, regional and community newspapers for, I think, the last federal election—

**Mr Gunn**—Yes. It was closer to 500 or 600 actually. That was within a span of about 40 days because it was a longer election.

**Dr PALMIERI**—But the question is: what drives that kind of level of media interest? How is it that you have media who are able to give you free space? What do you think is in it for them?

**Mr Gunn**—There are a couple of things. I will answer your first question: what creates the drive? To be honest and, without selling ourselves or boasting, we go out and build partnerships, personal relationships, with the managing editor of publishers of local newspapers. Then what we offer to them is a way to boost their readership at the same time by participating in the program. To expand on that for a second: for example, I am in Toronto right now and the *Toronto Star* is one of the largest newspapers in North America. In advance of an election, they will run free advertisements for us, whether they are banner ads, like those long horizontal ones that go at the bottom of the page, and sometimes full-page ads—all sorts of things—to help us engage schools. The more schools that we engage the better for both of us because, with the partnering newspapers that we work with, whether we have to fund raise to cover this or whether they provide it on their own, they will provide free newspapers to schools participating in the program as a current affairs resource throughout the election.

Then, as the final catch—for example, with the *Toronto Star*, but we could talk about any regional daily newspaper in Canada for that matter—on the day after the election, just like when

a newspaper normally prints all of the results for the adults, they will also print a page that will cover all of the results for the students. So that provides a final catch to the kids, saying: open up the newspaper and you can see your results. That is incredible for the students because they feel like their participation has been valued, but it is also good for the newspaper because the students start to realise that, if they want this sort of information, this is the paper to go to. It is something to consider with whatever happens with you in Australia in this type of civic literacy initiative. The papers can be one of the greatest partners. As we all know, especially with the politicians on the committee there, TV is not generally the best way to get a message across or engage people. Newspapers are much better; they demand much more of someone reading and thinking. So any time you can use newspapers as a partner I think it helps all of the participants to actually have to read something to understand it.

**Dr PALMIERI**—Would you say that that level of media interest actually impacts on the students' participation in these elections, that they are actually more likely to get on board?

**Mr Gunn**—Absolutely. I do not know the papers there but I can assume they are somewhat the same. For example, with a small regional daily newspaper in a small town, with maybe a distribution or circulation of 20,000 or something, the kids in high school would normally have only the opportunity of reading the sports scores. If instead on the front page they read something about the school-hosted candidates debate—one of the big pushes we have in our program is that the schools run some type of election event on their own—that catches their interest. Part of what that does is show the students that they have to take over the responsibility of contributing to democracy and contributing to active citizenship by running these sorts of events and, if it is covered in the newspaper, it gives them congratulations or lets the public know that what they have done is something important. They can see it in the paper and it continues to empower their participation in the program. As well, obviously, it says to the teachers that this is worth getting in the papers and it is worth their time in doing this and adding this to the existing social studies, civics or politics curriculum.

**CHAIR**—Thank you.

**Mr BAKER**—On your website your program summary states that students 'take over the roles of deputy returning officers and poll clerks'. Is there any training involved for the students?

**Mr Gunn**—This is where each school will operate the program differently. That could be, in some ways, great support from the administration. Just as an interesting aside, one of the biggest criticisms we get from the teachers who participate in the program is nothing about us; it is the lack of support from their school administration. I think this is a very valuable thing to consider if this is the type of thing you want to pursue in the future. We provide a little elections operations manual of how to run the election, with suggestions of how they can do it in school. There are all sorts of different ways to do it. Some schools will take the ballot boxes and walk from class to class. It is a great way to engage all the kids. Whether or not the kids know anything about whom they are voting for and that sort of thing does not bother us too much because at least they get to see a ballot and practise filling it out. If you compare that to the adults and ask them whether or not they know more than the students, I think we are kind of on a par to their understanding. We provide documentation of how they can operate the election. Through the mentorship of their teachers they will then take on the roles of returning officers, poll clerks and all that sort of stuff.

The only thing to consider and remember is that each school will do it differently. It does not matter how they do it; it just matters that it is the students who are running the election. The reason that is so important is that it empowers them to understand that, without their participation in democracy, citizenship would not occur. It also alleviates us from being leaders or having people telling schools how to do it. We have found that the worst thing you could ever do is direct a school to do something in one specific way. Allow them to come up with their own answers and ideas of how they can best operate within their school. Then that creativity is contributing to the entire program.

**CHAIR**—Does Elections Canada play any role in the dissemination of election materials or election training? Who is responsible for producing the ballot papers used in these parallel elections?

**Mr Gunn**—We do it in partnership with the election offices across Canada. For example, the provincial election office we would be working with here in Ontario is Elections Ontario. At the federal level we will work with someone like Elections Canada. Basically we take the list when it is finally built after nominations close and throw it back to a printer, who will print it all up for us and send it back to us. We will then repackage it. This is where it gets quite technical. You really need to care a lot about the program at this point because what you are building is an individual package for each school that is registered to participate. For example, in the last federal election we had 3,200 schools registered. Each school got their own package based on the number of students who they had said were going to participate in the vote and where they are. The writing and all that sort of stuff comes down to the technical operation side of things. With the list, though, we just use the one that is given to us and then go from there. Does that answer all the questions?

**CHAIR**—Yes, it does. Your website makes special note that Student Vote will not provide party platforms or campaign materials to students or schools. Why is it that you choose not to provide party platforms? Have you had difficult experiences in the past?

**Mr Gunn**—This is where the political habits of a country, or a province for that matter, will come into play. Initially we started this program in the 2003 Ontario provincial election. I still do not know how we did it; we had 335,000 students vote on the same day. We have since changed the plan. We now vote in advance. We can make sure we have all the results in. When we were pulling that together one of the biggest criticisms that were hovering behind potential media stories and things like that was a concern of whether or not teachers would teach in a biased manner.

**CHAIR**—But don't you think teachers are professional enough to do it properly?

**Mr Gunn**—I do, absolutely. But whether or not the person who is writing an article for a certain newspaper does is a whole different story. It is very important for us to make sure that, if that person does write a story blaming that on the teachers, we have a proper response. The other thing is with materials, platforms and all that sort of stuff. Depending upon where you live in a city or when you arrive, whether or not you get all the materials from candidates or political parties is quite questionable. One of the things that we wanted to underline to the teachers is that we are not making it easier for your students to choose someone because we have given them all the information; what we are trying to do is help them understand that the responsibility of their



choice comes from themselves. They need to do the research. They need to go to websites. They need to watch the news, all of that sort of stuff. On the other side of that as well is that there were some challenging politics within the school boards about having politicians in the classrooms. When this all started, it was a very sensitive issue: do we have politics in schools, do we have campaigns and that sort of thing? We walked kind of a tightrope getting through that by making sure that we had backups, a balance of funders—we had corporate and we had union—and all this sort of invisible stuff that now we just kind of giggle at. But it means a lot when you are starting off, where people like to pick at these little things to say that you are partisan or biased in some manner. So, by having the students not expect us to provide them with all the information, we met two goals there. One is that we could remain totally non-partisan and in the other is the way we could underline the value, or the importance, to them of being their own citizens. They need to make their own choices and not depend on us to provide the information that they then sort of follow.

**Mr DANBY**—How important is it do you think that students are able to compare their student vote tally with that of other districts? Can you also tell us whether you know if teachers use the results of the poll to continue discussions in the classroom about the role of elections in Canada and the Canadian electoral system?

**Mr Gunn**—The first question was the value of their comparing results with other students across the country; did I get that correctly?

**Mr DANBY**—Yes.

**Mr Gunn**—Okay. Whether or not that actually happens, we cannot guarantee. But what we have done at least is created an opportunity for that to occur. I think sometimes when you look at things like this, it is not that it actually happens after the fact that they say, for example in Canada, ‘How did the young people in Yukon vote compared to people in downtown Toronto?’ Just that we have it there means that they can use it in that way, but by having the national perspective it helps the students, I believe, buy into their participation because they know it is not just something that is happening in their classroom. When we started this program a lot of people said, ‘Why don’t you do it in one school or in one classroom and see how it goes?’ That is great advice, I guess, for people who want to trial programs for the rest of their lives, but we wanted to do something big and broad so that the students could understand that they were working with all of their peers and so that it would be much more of a citizenship activity. Could you remind me of the second question, Mr Danby?

**Mr DANBY**—Do you know whether teachers use the result of the poll to continue discussions in classrooms about the Canadian electoral system?

**Mr Gunn**—Yes, but not so much about our electoral system; it is more about the politics. So what they will do is come back with the results and compare them. Maybe the comparison is not between their peers but more between the students and the adults. What we have found in the five elections that we have done is that the popular vote percentage of the winning part in the adult sphere is always nearly identically mimicked by the students in who they pick. After you get off the winner, it starts to change a little bit. But it is more of a comparison between the young people and the adults, rather than just peer to peer.

**Mr DANBY**—Let me just understand this: this is totally separate from any internal school elections?

**Mr Gunn**—Yes, but you have touched on a very, very important beginning of democracy for young people. When you talk about democracy, it is a word that most people would not even be able to define. It is more of a feeling, like freedom and all that sort of stuff. The first time that most young people get a sense of democracy, or electoral participation in voting, is through their in-school elections. Sometimes it is quite funny because the kids say to us, ‘Oh, that is just a popularity contest.’ We generally turn around and say, ‘If you think politics is different to a popularity contest then you are fooling yourself.’ Where we would like to go eventually is into some sort of mandated structure and expectations of what the in-school council or school student council presidents and all that sort of thing must meet so that there is like a mandate of future responsibilities as a young person. What you picked up on is very important, and it is that a lot of young people get a poor experience from their first time with democracy through their in-school elections. We all know that if we can boost the credibility of that experience for the participants, they will do more to carry on in the future. We have not gotten there yet with our student vote, but we hope to.

**Mr DANBY**—Where does your support come from for your activity? Is it from government, from private sponsors or where?

**Mr Gunn**—It is a mix of all sectors, and we have done that on purpose. In the beginning we suffered without any funding because it was all union based. We knew we just could not absorb the union contributions, which at the time were not terribly grand, but they would have helped even just to pay for staff or food. What we have done is balance out now so that we have education support, media support, corporate support, government support and then union support. What that gives to us, or gives to the public really, is a way to say that we are entirely non-partisan and unbiased and that, just because we get money from a corporation, for example, here in Canada, does not mean that it is a conservative program or that, just because we get money from the unions, does not mean that it is a New Democratic, left party program. We balance all that. It took us a long time to carve that out, but probably from an outside perspective it was one of the most beneficial internal aspects of our program.

I talk about it topically at this point. When you are starting something like this, you cannot have the public classifying you as partisan or biased in some way, because then teachers and school boards will not buy into the program. You have to be very delicate in creating something like this. What it takes is just a lot of hard, personal work in building trust into all the partnerships. One of the things I would suggest is that this type of initiative would not be a government led initiative, that it would be more of a NGO type thing, just so that it does not ever seem partisan or directed by those who are already in power themselves. Rather it should be something of the education system, of people focused on the purpose of civic literacy, or civic engaged participation in democracy.

**Mr DANBY**—How long have you been going?

**Mr Gunn**—I guess maybe four years, but in a span of election time it is from October 2003 to January 2006. So within three years we had more than 1.1 million practice ballots cast through our program.

**CHAIR**—Thank you. That completes our questions. We really appreciate that you have been able to spend some time with us. We are going to send you a copy of the *Hansard* transcript. So, if there are any corrections to grammar or fact, let us know. Can I just finish by saying that, down under here, tomorrow is great. It is Monday morning, 30 degrees with blue skies.

**Mr Gunn**—Thanks for rubbing it in!

**CHAIR**—I do not think it will be quite that warm in your location—and I am not unhappy that we are having summer and you are having winter. So thank you indeed for being with us today. You have a marvellous, wonderful program and that will help us in our committee's deliberations.

**Mr Gunn**—Anything that we can ever provide in terms of helping establish the structure, detailing the partnerships, how those partnerships would fit into this type of initiative, where to build it from, who to build it with—all of those sorts of things, we are happy to provide, because for us this is just a passion. It is about empowering young people to believe that they have the potential to realise whatever dreams they have for their own community. What it really needs is a passing of the power of the program off to the young people and to the teachers and letting it ride on its own. So, if you are very serious about this type of thing, civic literacy and civic engagement in Australia, we would be happy to help, as always, in whatever way we can.

**CHAIR**—Absolutely, thank you. You are welcome in Australia any time.

**Mr Gunn**—I just need to be able to afford a plane ticket and I am there!

**CHAIR**—Well, it is downhill from where you are, so it should not be too hard to get here! Thanks for that, and I wish you a good night.

[12.12 pm]

**GAMBARO, Ms Teresa, Federal Member for Petrie**

**CHAIR**—I now welcome the Hon. Teresa Gambaro MP to today's hearing. You have provided a submission; is that right?

**Ms Gambaro**—I have provided an updated and expanded submission to the one I originally provided to the committee, and I wish to speak to that submission today.

**CHAIR**—Okay. Are you going to make an opening statement?

**Ms Gambaro**—Certainly.

**CHAIR**—Would you please proceed. We are very interested in the Active Civics Program. It looks like a wonderful program from what you have told us already in your submission.

**Ms Gambaro**—Thank you very much. Firstly, to you and the committee members of the Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters, I thank you very much for inviting me to address you today. I must say that I have sat on the other side of the table more frequently, so this is the first time I have given evidence to a parliamentary inquiry. It is my opinion that young people are increasingly becoming isolated from their outside community. Community research undertaken in the year 2005 by a group called Older People Speak Out, which is an action group in Queensland, has confirmed this very situation. We are experiencing some very serious intergenerational breakdowns where youth and the elderly are feeling the impact of a communication barrier. That is why I believe it is imperative now that we alter our national curriculum to combat this growing social problem.

I have come before the committee today to explain the working example that has been developed in my electorate, where students are experiencing increasing connectivity and links to their community. Everton Park State High School hospitality students have been undertaking assessments in the community arena with the assistance and guidance of Stafford and District Meals on Wheels. Students assist community volunteers with meal preparation and other kitchen duties as well as experience the appreciation of Meals on Wheels customers, the elderly residents of our community. The program was added to the school curriculum in April 2006. It has been a huge success through the hard work and dedication of a few key players.

Whilst I am before the committee I really must express my greatest appreciation to Jack Pool of Stafford and District Meals on Wheels and Fiona Begg of the government funded organisation Australian Community Safety and Research Organisation Incorporated for their hard work. I also acknowledge the dedication of students of Everton Park assisting the community in meal preparation and distribution. But, most particularly, I express my appreciation to the Everton Park State High School principal, Leon Livermore, and teacher Mary Findlay, who have contributed an enormous amount of time to work together and deliver this program in a mutually beneficial setting.

With the indulgence of the committee, I might just run through very quickly how the program works. We have year 11 catering or home economics students. I will not go through the whole submission but I will just give brief detail. The students involved, who are largely home economics students and also from the special education unit at the school, are offered an opportunity to participate in the program. So you have students undertaking food studies who receive credit within the curriculum for work undertaken in food preparation. Overall, we have had 20 students from Everton Park State High School participate in the program over three school terms. The students assist with preparing meals in the Meals on Wheels kitchen, cleaning up the kitchen, washing up, serving the meals into prepared trays, packing for delivery and accompanying volunteers to clients' houses to deliver the meals. The time commitment on the part of the students is about four hours each week on one designated day of the week, and Meals on Wheels accommodate the students on three separate days. The students are responsible for getting themselves to the Meals on Wheels centre and for returning to school.

There are some other aspects of it that I will just run through: insurance is covered through the school and it covers all volunteers regardless of age. The school and community organisations have exchanged insurance policies. I have also provided some examples of the agreements that the students have undertaken. They get to sign an agreement and the school also has an insurance policy. So you have that in the submission, along with the details and acceptance of the program. The work links agreement goes through a lot of the obligations of the students in terms of attendance times, things like workers compensation, their responsibility regarding attendance and emergency contacts. The work experience agreement goes through their responsibilities, making sure that they perform to the best of their ability, they attend and they comply with reasonable directions. Also, the parents are brought in for the acceptance of the agreement. The submission goes into those in more detail. I think this is a terrific program. It certainly has parents' commitment and staff commitment.

The volunteers are in awe of the program and the Meals on Wheels coordinator, Jack Pool, is absolutely inspiring. There are improvements that can be made. Because it is in the early stages, we need new resources, such as explanatory brochures for parents and increased advertising in school newsletters, and we need to make sure that we nut out some of the transport issues. But they are not issues that cannot be overcome if more resources are provided.

I put the idea and an evaluation of the program to a community forum that I ran in the electorate, and a large number of people supported that. I also gave an interview on one of the current affairs programs, *Today Tonight*, and viewers were asked to ring in with their acceptance of the program, and some 87 per cent of television viewers were supportive of the program. I feel that we have an incredible opportunity here to expand the Active Civics Program by encouraging young people to take it forward as part of their curriculum. It can be expanded into other areas; if somebody was interested in pursuing a nursing career, for example, they could undertake this as part of a certificate course in the school curriculum. I have also spoken to the minister for education, Julie Bishop, and have provided in-principle support.

Members of the committee, Mr Chairman, you have some positive feedback there that has been received from clients as well as from students. It has been a totally enriching experience and I know that from my own experience: my son participated in a program with the school; he regularly attended and provided breakfast for homeless people. His view of what a homeless person was and where that person came from was totally changed in the experience that he

undertook. He learnt a tremendous amount about the fact that homeless people are in that situation because they have gone through a drug or an alcohol or a financial crisis that has brought these social problems to a head. It is a good program for youth and the elderly. It is very positive, and there is great scope and opportunity to put it on a national curriculum of some form as a part of an Active Civics Program where young people can go out into the community and we all benefit.

As I stated earlier when I first addressed the committee, there is intergenerational connection, and this quote from the Meals on Wheels client says it very well, 'Excellent idea for young people to know that there is a life beyond their normal four walls, CDs and Xboxes.' So I would like to thank you very much for allowing me the opportunity to speak to you about this proposal. I am happy to answer any questions at all. I hope that when you are looking at your very important reference into electoral matters—although it is important to provide education on electoral matters, democracy and general knowledge about how our democracy works—you also look at extending it into providing Active Civics where people are truly engaged into their community. By providing this sort of program and expanding it across Australia, we will be able to provide that connectivity even further. I am pleased to present this updated report to the committee on an Active Civics Program. I congratulate the committee on examining this very important issue of civics and electoral education in its terms of reference and I wish you all very well in your endeavours.

**CHAIR**—Thank you for that. You have covered a lot of the information; it is very comprehensive and very thorough. When you first started with the forum, when did that occur?

**Ms Gambaro**—The first forum that we had was about six months back where I invited members of community organisations to come along. It was an idea that I put to my community because I saw it as a very valuable way of engaging community support, so I invited community organisations from my electorate and members of school communities. I held it in the Redcliffe part of my electorate and they came along. I also asked the principal of Everton Park State High and also the Meals on Wheels coordinator and the students to provide a presentation. It was a good opportunity.

**CHAIR**—At the forum, which sector of the community gave you the greatest support? Is that hard to say?

**Ms Gambaro**—It is hard to quantify that because I had support from a large number of community organisations that came along. It was well represented by school principals who attended, and also organisations like Rotary. We had some young people there. Apart from the young people that were presenting, we had a couple of younger people there. I suppose the majority of support came from the community organisations and from school principals.

**CHAIR**—Has there been any response from the government?

**Ms Gambaro**—At this stage I have written to Julie Bishop and I have spoken to Minister Bishop. She expressed an in-principle support about it. I also canvassed it with my colleagues in a meeting that was held here in this place, and I received a very good response from that. I submitted an article to a parliamentary in-house magazine. My local newspaper also had a large article about the program and members of the community were asked to provide their feedback

to that community newspaper. Overwhelmingly, there is a great deal of support for it. The issue comes down to whether it should be compulsory or not, and I have had different views there. A large majority of the community who wrote to the newspaper agreed with it, but there was a portion that said it should not be compulsory.

**CHAIR**—We have found in this inquiry that linking civics units to community projects is, in fact, a very valuable thing to do and that is what you are doing. What is your prime target age group or don't you have one?

**Ms Gambaro**—This would be most effective in those final two years of school, grades 11 and 12, but I do not see any reason why it could not be commenced earlier, in grade 9 for example. It would be entirely up to the resources of the school. If it was planned as part of the school curriculum, it would be a very valuable contribution. It could start as early as grade 9.

**CHAIR**—In your opening statement you used the words that young people were increasingly isolated. Why do you think this particular generation is at risk of being most disengaged from their local communities?

**Ms Gambaro**—That is a very difficult question to answer. My views here are both as a parent and as a member of parliament. I think that there are fewer opportunities for young people to engage in community activities. In the past you had a greater connection to church communities, church activities and other community organisations. I think technology has given us a generation of young people who are very connected on their mobile phones: they are SMS-ing constantly to their peers and they have computers and MP3 players, but they are not necessarily connected to the general community or their local neighbourhood.

This increase in technology has caused people to communicate indoors rather than out in their community, and we are going to face some very serious consequences—particularly when this Y generation applies for jobs, or has to work with society; they are not able to understand really what drives people. I think that they are the challenges. I mean, we can give people all the technology in the world, but it is really how they connect into their community and what sort of community and world citizens they are that will judge whether we pass or fail as a society.

**Mr DANBY**—Is there any empirical evidence about young people living in cyberspace and how it disengages them from the real world?

**CHAIR**—Good point.

**Mr DANBY**—I have the same anecdotal feelings as you, but people respond to me by saying that it is just a stage they are going through, that they will go grow out of it. I see lots of evidence that that is not true, but I do not know whether my anecdotal feelings have proof anywhere.

**Ms Gambaro**—I do not have any empirical studies. I recently read a book on the X, Y and Z generations. Hugh Mackay does a lot of work in this area, and I think a fellow called Grosse has written a book. I guess what I am relying on is social commentators at the moment and feedback from employers about the type of expectations that young people have in the workforce when they go out there. But, no, I can only point to the fact my ideas are based on being a parent of

teenagers and what other parents say to me, as well as the feeling that I have when I am out in my community as an elected representative. That is my greatest fear.

I did attend a graduation recently where a professor from the Queensland University of Technology had done some work on that. I am happy to put the committee in touch with her. She was speaking about the challenges that young people face. I am happy to give you her contact name and have her provide and furnish you with her research on this.

**CHAIR**—We are just about out of time, but I need to ask you the final question. Your submission canvasses linking community work to educational certificates and perhaps even entrance to university. Are you getting any objection to that or support for it?

**Ms Gambaro**—We can have it incorporated as part of a school subject. There is no question from the teachers I have spoken that this cannot be done. I do not know if the committee has taken evidence from the work that is being done in the United Kingdom and particularly in the US with Active Civics. I do not see any negativity towards it. It would involve some more resources. This is something that we, as a national government, should look at providing more funding and resources for.

I think this would be a very good idea for several reasons. Not only are you making it part of the curriculum, but when students who are studying hospitality go out with Meals on Wheels, for example, they are also focused on having to look at why is the food. Why is it prepared this way? What is the nutritional content of this food? Why are we preparing the food in this manner? They learn it is prepared for older people and it must have nutritional content. So you could certainly incorporate that into a curriculum subject like hospitality studies, for example, and I think that this can be done in other areas as well. Rather than just volunteering or being an Active Civics participant, you are also thinking about what you are doing and what it actually means in relation to your subject.

**CHAIR**—Thank you very much. This is a great program, a really great program.

**Ms Gambaro**—Thank you.

**CHAIR**—I appreciate your giving us your time.

**Ms Gambaro**—Thank you very much for the opportunity.

**CHAIR**—Is it the wish of the committee that the additional submission by the Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs dated 4 September and the additional submission by the Hon. Teresa Gambaro, MP, dated 4 September be accepted as evidence and authorised for publication? There being no objection, it is so ordered.

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

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 12.32 pm**

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