



PARLIAMENT OF AUSTRALIA

From Classroom to Community

Civics education and political participation in Australia

Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters

January 2025

CANBERRA

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Foreword

The strength and stability of Australia's democracy depends on the capacity of our citizens to confidently engage with politics and cast an informed vote. Australia's system of compulsory voting means that all Australians need to be informed to participate in our democracy and elections. This is particularly important at a time when democracies around the world, including Australia, are facing rising disengagement, distrust, and misinformation and disinformation in an increasingly complex online information environment.

Effective civics education in schooling is vital to give young people the tools to be informed and responsible citizens. However, teachers, students and other stakeholders report that the quality of civics education varies considerably between states, territories, and even individual schools. Civics is often given little time or focus, and content can be dry, lack relevance to students' lives, and does not teach practical skills like how to vote. National civics education assessments of students in Years 6 and 10 undeniably demonstrate this. There are gaps in teacher training and confidence, and teachers fear backlash from bringing contemporary issues into the classroom that can be perceived as controversial.

Australia needs a strengthened and standardised approach to formal civics education. The Committee recommends nationally aligned and mandated civics and citizenship content for high-school students, with greater accountability and consistency in how this is implemented, by working more closely with state and territory governments. There are many hard-working and passionate teachers in our schools, but they need to be better supported to deliver quality civics education through improved professional development and high-quality, nationally aligned teaching resources.

While a school trip to Canberra is memorable for some, it is out of reach for many. This report recommends increased resourcing and support so that more students, particularly those living in regional and remote areas, can visit Canberra or access digital learning experiences.

Civic engagement is a lifelong learning process that continues beyond the classroom, but some Australians report never having received any form of civics education, which can result in feelings of alienation and distrust in political processes and institutions. Some groups also face unique challenges that impact their access to education and equal participation, including language and cultural differences, distance from Canberra and urban centres, disability, and socioeconomic barriers. The Australian Government must work more closely with trusted grassroots communities to provide meaningful and culturally appropriate voter education opportunities and materials. Support is also needed for polling stations in regional and remote communities. While many young people are passionate about social issues, diverse youth must be empowered and provided with meaningful opportunities to build their understanding and have their say on formal policies and processes.

Australians are increasingly consuming news on social media and other online platforms, where false narratives and misinformation can proliferate. Evidence to the inquiry highlighted that many of Australia's young people and adults receive very little, poorly suited, or no education to develop media literacy skills, potentially undermining other efforts to strengthen civics education. Voters need the skills to judge the reliability of information when faced with misinformation and disinformation, artificial intelligence, social media algorithms and declining public interest journalism.

The size of the challenge requires a long-term national media and digital literacy strategy with a coordinated approach across education institutions, government, cultural and community organisations. The Committee recommends four parts to this strategy: prioritising media and digital literacy in the Australian Curriculum, working with community organisations to deliver training for vulnerable populations, resourcing for the Australian Electoral Commission to develop factual, translated resources to counteract disinformation, and advancing research on media consumption patterns and recommender systems on social media.

This report would not have been possible without the work of all those who contributed their time and expertise to this inquiry. I particularly wish to thank all the organisations and individuals who provided valuable evidence in more than 130 submissions and at 11 public hearings and five site visits around the country, from Canberra to Maningrida.

The Committee visited schools to hear from students and teachers, was hosted by migrant groups doing on-the-ground work and by First Nations organisations in remote communities. We spoke to members of some of Australia's youth councils and this inquiry was informed by people most affected by the topics we considered – students, teachers and curriculum designers. Another way this inquiry heard from school students, educators and school leavers was through an online survey, and I thank the 959 individuals who participated to help the Committee understand the current state of civics and citizenship in Australian schools.

Senator the Hon Carol Brown

Chair

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Abbreviations

ABC	Australian Broadcasting Corporation
ACARA	Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority
ACER	Australian Council for Educational Research
ACSV	Australian Council for Student Voice
ACT	Australian Capital Territory
ACYP	Advocate for Children and Young People
AEC	Australian Electoral Commission
AFDO	Australian Federation of Disability Organisations
AHRC	Australian Human Rights Commission
AI	artificial intelligence
ALIA	Australian Library and Information Association
AMLA	Australian Media Literacy Alliance
ANTaR	Australians for Native Title and Reconciliation
APTA	Australian Professional Teachers Association
AYAC	Australian Youth Affairs Council
CALD	culturally and linguistically diverse
CCYP	Commissioner for Children and Young People
CEC	Community and Education Centre
CEFA	Constitution Education Fund Australia
CEPOs	Community Electoral Participation Officers
CLC	Central Land Council
CYPEP	Centre for Youth Policy and Education Practice
DPS	Department of Parliamentary Services
DSA	Down Syndrome Australia
Electoral Act	<i>Commonwealth Electoral Act 1918</i>
EU	European Union
FECCA	Federation of Ethnic Communities' Councils of Australia
HASS	Humanities and Social Sciences

MoAD	Museum of Australian Democracy
NAP-CC	National Assessment Program – Civics and Citizenship
NEEC	National Electoral and Education Centre
NESA	NSW Education Standards Authority
NFSA	National Film and Sound Archive of Australia
NLC	Northern Land Council
N&MRC	News and Media Research Centre
NSW	New South Wales
NSWEC	NSW Electoral Commission
NT	Northern Territory
NTEC	Northern Territory Electoral Commission
PACER	Parliament and Civics Education Rebate
PEO	Parliamentary Education Office
PLEAWA	Political and Legal Educators Association of Western Australia
QLD	Queensland
QUT	Queensland University of Technology
SA	South Australia
SBS	Special Broadcasting Service
SCEAA	Social and Citizenship Education Association of Australia
SCOA	Settlement Council of Australia
SEV	Social Education Victoria
SMF	Susan McKinnon Foundation
TAS	Tasmania
VCAA	Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority
VEC	Victorian Electoral Commission
VTHC	Victorian Trades Hall Council
WA	Western Australia
YACSA	Youth Affairs Council of South Australia



Members

Chair

Senator the Hon Carol Brown (<i>from 21 August 2024</i>)	ALP, TAS
Hon Kate Thwaites MP (<i>to 29 July 2024</i>)	Jagajaga, VIC

Deputy Chair

Senator the Hon James McGrath	LNP, QLD
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Members

Senator Ross Cadell	NATS, NSW
Ms Kate Chaney MP	Curtin, WA
Hon Darren Chester MP	Gippsland, VIC
Senator Karen Grogan (<i>to 13 August 2024</i>)	ALP, SA
Ms Tania Lawrence MP	Hasluck, WA
Ms Louise Miller-Frost MP (<i>from 13 August 2024</i>)	Boothby, SA
Hon Shayne Neumann MP	Blair, QLD
Mr Sam Rae MP	Hawke, VIC
Senator the Hon Linda Reynolds CSC	LP, WA
Senator Marielle Smith	ALP, SA
Ms Anne Stanley MP	Werriwa, NSW
Mr James Stevens MP	Sturt, SA
Senator Larissa Waters	AG, QLD



Terms of reference

The Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters (JSCEM) will inquire into and report on civics education, engagement, and participation in Australia. The inquiry will have regard to:

- the effectiveness of formalised civics education throughout Australia and the various approaches taken across jurisdictions through schools and other institutions including electoral commissions, councils, and parliaments; the extent to which all students have equitable access to civics education; and opportunities for improvement;
- the vast array of informal mechanisms through which Australians seek and receive information about Australia’s democracy, electoral events, and voting; and how governments and the community might leverage these mechanisms to improve the quality of information and help Australians be better informed about, and better participate in, the electoral system;
- the mechanisms available to assist voters in understanding the legitimacy of information about electoral matters; the impact of artificial intelligence, foreign interference, social media and mis- and disinformation; and how governments and the community can prevent or limit inaccurate or false information influencing electoral outcomes;
- opportunities for supporting culturally diverse, geographically diverse, and remote communities to access relevant, appropriate, and culturally suitable information about Australian democracy, electoral events, enrolment and voting to promote full electoral participation;
- social, socio-economic, or other barriers that may be preventing electoral participation; and ways governments might address or circumvent these barriers; and
- potential improvements to the operations and structures that deliver electoral events to support full electoral participation.

List of recommendations

Recommendation 1

- 2.148** The Committee recommends that the Department of Education, in consultation with the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) and curriculum authorities in each state and territory, immediately commence investigating the viability of fully implementing and nationally aligning the civics and citizenship curriculum across Australia. This should be done with a view to creating a nationally mandated standalone civics and citizenship curriculum in the next version of the Australian Curriculum.

Recommendation 2

- 2.149** The Committee recommends that the Australian Government, working through National Cabinet, annually collect data from each state and territory outlining how the civics and citizenship component of the Australian Curriculum is being implemented.

Recommendation 3

- 2.154** The Committee recommends that within the enhanced civics and citizenship curriculum, the Australian Government mandate a minimum of 10 hours a year of civics and citizenship education for all students nationally across Years 9 and 10.

Recommendation 4

- 2.159** The Committee recommends that the Australian Government develop a mandatory civics and citizenship course for all Year 11 and 12 students to prepare them to participate in electoral processes. Noting successful programs in some jurisdictions, a minimum of two pilot programs should commence across all states and territories by July 2026, with a view to integrating the programs in the next version of the Australian Curriculum.

Recommendation 5

- 2.164** The Committee recommends that the Australian Government, through a standing item in National Cabinet, work with state and territory governments and teacher associations to develop and disseminate practical, high-quality and nationally aligned teacher professional development resources for the

teaching of civics and citizenship to all Australian students. The new resources should be in place for the next version of the Australian Curriculum and should be reviewed and updated annually.

Recommendation 6

2.165 The Committee recommends that the Australian Government, through National Cabinet, work with state and territory governments and teacher associations, to mandate civics and citizenship, and debate-based education, in all national professional development for Humanities and Social Sciences (HASS) teachers.

Recommendation 7

2.169 The Committee recommends that, to encourage more schools from regional, remote, and very remote areas to visit Canberra, the Australian Government announce the additional loadings to the Parliament and Civics Education Rebate (PACER) program two years in advance to assist schools in these areas to plan a visit.

Recommendation 8

2.170 The Committee recommends that the Australian Government, as part of the Federal Budget process, increase the additional loadings to the PACER program to allow more schools from regional, remote and very remote areas to access trips to Canberra.

Recommendation 9

2.174 The Committee recommends that the Australian Government, as part of the Federal Budget process, increase funding for the Parliamentary Education Office (PEO) at Australian Parliament House to specifically accommodate the increasing number of students visiting Canberra each year and to continue to deliver and expand digital outreach programs to students nationwide.

Recommendation 10

3.117 The Committee recommends that the Australian Government work more closely with culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) grassroots community organisations to develop and deliver civics education programs in community centres across Australia. These programs should be provided in accessible and culturally appropriate formats. The relevant Minister should report annually to Parliament on the progress of key actions.

Recommendation 11

3.118 The Committee recommends that the Australian Electoral Commission (AEC) specifically report on an annual basis on its work with CALD community organisations to co-design and disseminate culturally appropriate and accessible materials to support enrolling and voting at future federal elections. These materials should:

- use a range of formats, including audio, visual, infographic and simple text that can be easily shared across social and ethnic media platforms
- be translated into languages for smaller and emerging migrant groups.

Recommendation 12

3.120 The Committee recommends that the AEC draw on successful models of community engagement conducted by its state and territory counterparts in engaging with CALD communities during the 2025 Federal Election, such as the NSW Electoral Commission's Vote Talk program. The AEC should develop and implement such programs nationally for future elections.

Recommendation 13

3.123 The Committee recommends that the Australian Government work with CALD grassroots community organisations to train trusted members of the community as impartial 'ambassadors' or 'champions' to disseminate information about Australia's democracy, electoral events, and voting.

Recommendation 14

3.127 The Committee recommends that, in order to improve enfranchisement, the AEC be appropriately funded to ensure that polling stations in regional and remote communities provide sufficient time, advance notice and culturally appropriate resources for voters; and specifically report on an annual basis on these measures.

Recommendation 15

3.129 The Committee recommends that, in order to deliver culturally appropriate and translated voter education materials for federal elections, the AEC is appropriately funded to work more closely with the Northern Territory Electoral Commission to leverage its relationships with local First Nations organisations; and specifically report on an annual basis on these measures.

Recommendation 16

3.134 The Committee recommends that the Australian Government work with youth organisations to explore more appropriate and appealing opportunities to engage a wider community of diverse young people in leadership programs that build understanding of democracy and active citizenship, outside of youth advisory groups.

Recommendation 17

3.135 The Committee recommends that, in recognition of the need to prioritise engagement with diverse youth, the Australian Government's Office for Youth should identify ways to increase engagement with the Australian Parliament and to support methods for incorporating diverse youth input into political policy and processes. The Office for Youth should report annually to Parliament on its progress.

Recommendation 18

4.133 The Committee recommends that ACARA draw on successful international models to commence work to prioritise media and digital literacy education in the next version of the Australian Curriculum as a cross-curriculum priority.

Recommendation 19

4.135 The Committee recommends that ACARA, in collaboration with universities and other academics, design media literacy tools for the next version of the Australian Curriculum to support students' critical information processing that are adaptable to a changing online environment.

Recommendation 20

4.138 The Committee recommends that, further to Recommendation 5, ACARA collaborate with state and territory education authorities and teacher associations to develop guidance, resources and tools that support the delivery of education on media and digital literacy. This should cover social media, misinformation and disinformation, and artificial intelligence. Nationally consistent teacher professional development resources should be in place for the new version of the Australian Curriculum.

Recommendation 21

4.142 The Committee recommends that the Australian Government work with grassroots community organisations for CALD people and other vulnerable groups to develop and deliver co-designed media and digital literacy training

to support members of these groups build their skills to critically evaluate information sources and identify misinformation and disinformation.

Recommendation 22

4.146 The Committee recommends that the AEC be appropriately funded to work with state and territory electoral commissions and grassroots community organisations, to develop and disseminate factual, appropriately translated electoral information in a range of formats, including audio, visual, infographic and simple text that can be easily shared across social media platforms.

Recommendation 23

4.148 The Committee recommends that as part of a national media literacy strategy, the Australian Government support research initiatives to gain a better understanding of how all Australians receive and process civics and electoral information on social media. Research should be focused on:

- the role of social media and the impact of recommender systems on democratic processes
- how vulnerable groups, such as CALD communities, receive and consume information to better understand how to combat misinformation and disinformation in these communities.



1. Introduction

Background

- 1.1 A healthy and stable democracy depends on the active participation of informed and engaged citizens. This requires at least a basic level of civic literacy to understand political discourse and legal frameworks that shape our society – skills built through quality lifelong civics education.¹
- 1.2 In Australia, where voting is compulsory, formal participation rates in federal elections exceed 94 per cent.² However, the value of compulsory voting is undermined if voters lack the civics education needed to understand issues and know who they are voting for.³
- 1.3 Civics is more than participating in elections. Beyond voting, civic participation and engagement encompasses a wide range of activities that contribute to public life such as community involvement, public advocacy, collective action and corresponding with elected representatives.⁴ Participation in these activities helps people become familiar with, shape and therefore be more willing to trust democratic processes and institutions.⁵
- 1.4 In addition to civic knowledge, media literacy is vital for a healthy democracy. In an age of misinformation and disinformation, good civics and media literacy education ensures that Australians can critically evaluate news and information they consume, and that public discourse remains grounded in fact.⁶
- 1.5 However, democracies around the world, including Australia, are facing challenges such as foreign interference, rising disinformation and discord online, and polarisation.⁷ Young people are feeling disillusioned and disconnected from civic society and there has been a steady decrease and erosion in public trust in democracy.⁸

¹ Law Council of Australia, *Submission 109*, p. 5; Department of Home Affairs, *Submission 85*, p. 4.

² Australian Electoral Commission, *Submission 330 to the inquiry into the conduct of the 2022 federal election*, p. 12.

³ Law Council of Australia, *Submission 109*, p. 5.

⁴ Department of Home Affairs, *Submission 85*, p. 4.

⁵ Department of Home Affairs, *Submission 85*, p. 4.

⁶ Law Council of Australia, *Submission 109*, p. 5.

⁷ Department of Home Affairs, *Submission 85*, p. 4.

⁸ Australian Historical Association, *Submission 84*, p. 3.

Civics education in Australia

- 1.6 An increased interest in formal civics and citizenship education in Australia has occurred since the 1990s. In 1994, the report of the Civics Expert Group found ‘a national chronic deficit of civic knowledge and concern about the levels of commitment to Australian political institutions’ and argued for a greater emphasis on civics and citizenship education.⁹
- 1.7 In 1997, the Coalition Government introduced the ‘Discovering Democracy’ program following the Keating Government’s Civics Expert Group initiative. The program developed curriculum materials and supported professional learning for teachers in teaching civics.¹⁰
- 1.8 An evaluation of the Discovering Democracy program was conducted in 2003 and despite finding that it ‘produced a substantial amount of very useful, effective resources’,¹¹ the evaluators recommended its termination as implementation ‘was highly variable in schools in terms of expanding student civics and citizenship knowledge, understanding and dispositions’.¹²
- 1.9 In 1999, the *Adelaide Declaration on Educational Directions* was announced and identified the need for civics and citizenship education in schools so that when students leave, they can ‘be active and informed citizens with an understanding and appreciation of Australia’s system of government and civic life’.¹³
- 1.10 In 2008, all state, territory and federal education ministers adopted the *Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians*. The Melbourne Declaration affirmed the importance of education for all young Australians to become successful learners, confident and creative individuals, and active and informed citizens.¹⁴
- 1.11 The Melbourne Declaration led to the establishment of the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) in 2008, and in 2009 the Commonwealth, state and territory governments committed to a national Australian Curriculum.¹⁵

The Australian Curriculum

- 1.12 Under the Constitution, legislating on primary and secondary schooling is not included in the powers of the Commonwealth Parliament. State and territory

⁹ Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER), *Submission 64*, p. 1; Constitution Education Fund Australia (CEFA), *Submission 99*, p. 17.

¹⁰ Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters, *Civics and Electoral Education*, May 2007, p. 31; ACER, *Submission 64*, p. 1.

¹¹ Professor Murray Print, *Exhibit 1a*, ‘The Context of Civics and Citizenship Education in Australia’, p. 12.

¹² Professor Print, *Exhibit 1a*, pages 7-8.

¹³ Professor Print, *Exhibit 1a*, p. 8.

¹⁴ ACER, *Submission 64*, pages 1-2; CEFA, *Submission 99*, p. 19.

¹⁵ Professor Print, *Exhibit 1a*, p. 13.

governments and non-government education authorities are responsible for the management of schools, including implementation of the curriculum.¹⁶

- 1.13 The Australian Curriculum is a national curriculum for primary and secondary schools from Foundation to Year 10. The first version was released in 2010 for English, Mathematics, Science and History, with 'significant revisions' in 2015 and 2021.¹⁷ Civics and Citizenship has been in the Australian Curriculum since 2014 (Version 8.4).¹⁸
- 1.14 The Australian Curriculum is designed as a learning progression and has a three-dimensional design, which comprises:
- Learning areas: including English, Mathematics, Science, Humanities and Social Sciences, the Arts, Technologies, Health and Physical Education, and Languages
 - General capabilities: including the knowledge, skills, behaviours, and dispositions that students need to live and work successfully. There are seven general capabilities, including literacy, critical and creative thinking, ethical understanding, and intercultural understanding
 - Cross-curriculum priorities: which are matters given additional attention across the Curriculum. The cross-curriculum priorities are Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures, Asia and Australia's engagement with Asia, and sustainability.¹⁹
- 1.15 A review of the Australian Curriculum in 2021 led to the current version (Version 9.0) which is 'more stripped-back and teachable' and 'identifies the essential content students should learn'.²⁰
- 1.16 ACARA said that Version 9.0 was informed by Goal 2 of the *Alice Springs (Mparntwe) Education Declaration* made by all state and territory education ministers, that 'all young Australians become confident and creative individuals, successful lifelong learners, and active and informed members of the community'.²¹

Civics and citizenship in the Australian Curriculum Version 9.0

- 1.17 Students are introduced to the discipline of civics and citizenship from Year 3 as a sub-strand of the Humanities and Social Sciences (HASS) curriculum.²² The following concepts are developed with increasing complexity across Years 3 to 6:

¹⁶ Department of Education, *Submission 38*, p. 3.

¹⁷ Law Council of Australia, *Submission 109*, p. 9.

¹⁸ Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA), *Submission 69*, p. 2.

¹⁹ ACARA, 'Australian Curriculum - F-10 Curriculum overview', 2024, <https://v9.australiancurriculum.edu.au/f-10-curriculum/f-10-curriculum-overview#3>, viewed 4 December 2024.

²⁰ Law Council of Australia, *Submission 109*, p. 9.

²¹ ACARA, *Submission 69*, p. 2.

²² Department of Education, *Submission 38*, p. 3.

Identity and diversity: Students understand the factors, including values and traditions, that shape personal and shared identity, and the diversity of Australia as a culturally diverse and multi-faith society.

Democracy and citizenship: Students learn about the key democratic and legal institutions, processes, rights and roles that underpin Australian democracy, and the responsibilities and obligations of citizens in local, regional, national and global communities.²³

1.18 From Years 7 to 8, civics and citizenship becomes a standalone subject among other HASS subjects: Geography, Civics and Citizenship, and Economics and Business.²⁴

1.19 From Years 9 to 10, students' access to civics and citizenship is determined by school authorities or individual schools through the same four subjects.²⁵

1.20 The following civics and citizenship concepts are expected to be developed from Years 7 to 10 with increasing complexity:

Active citizenship: Citizens are entitled to certain rights, privileges and responsibilities; therefore, being an active citizen requires engagement and informed participation in the civic and political activities of society at local, state, national, regional and global levels.

Democracy: Democracy is a system of government where power is vested in the people. The will of the majority is accepted and exercised directly or indirectly through elected representatives, who may remove and replace political leaders and governments in free, fair and regular elections.

Global citizenship: Students recognise that in addition to having rights and responsibilities flowing from our Australian citizenship, we also live in an increasingly interdependent world, where citizens' concerns transcend geographical or political borders, and people can exercise rights and responsibilities at a global level.

Legal systems: Students understand the function of legal systems, the rule of law and its application. They also understand equality before the law, and the importance of judicial independence and objectivity leading to the law being perceived as fair.

Identity and diversity: Identity is a person's sense of who they are, and conception and expression of their individuality or association with a group, culture, state, nation or a region of the world, regardless of their legal citizenship status. Students' understanding of diversity includes acknowledgement of Australia as a culturally diverse, multi-faith and cohesive society.²⁶

²³ ACARA, *Submission 69*, p. 3.

²⁴ ACARA, *Submission 69*, p. 3.

²⁵ ACARA, *Submission 69*, p. 3.

²⁶ ACARA, *Submission 69*, pages 3-4.

- 1.21 Beyond Year 10, senior secondary schooling varies significantly between the states and territories, as well as between individual students within a single school. The Australian Curriculum extends to senior secondary schooling, but is only developed in the areas of English, Mathematics, Biology, Chemistry, Earth and Environmental Science, Physics, Ancient History, Modern History and Geography.²⁷
- 1.22 Within the secondary certificates offered in each state and territory, students are given the opportunity to select subjects of their choosing, such as Legal Studies or Politics, which includes aspects of civics and citizenship.²⁸
- 1.23 ACARA noted that Years 11 and 12 are marked by ‘flexibility for students to choose that pathway and be prepared for that next phase of their life’.²⁹

State and territory adoption of the Australian Curriculum

- 1.24 Each state and territory, and individual schools, can adopt their own specific approach to teaching the Australian Curriculum ‘to meet the needs of their local contexts and students’.³⁰ This means that they can also exercise considerable autonomy in their approach to both curriculum content and delivery.³¹
- 1.25 In the Northern Territory, Queensland, South Australia (SA) and Tasmania, the Australian Curriculum forms the basis of teaching and learning. In the Australian Capital Territory, ‘schools are required to meaningfully incorporate into their curriculum plans and sequential learning programs the three dimensions of the Australian Curriculum’.³²
- 1.26 The SA Government recently announced ‘a nation-leading civics and citizenship learning reform’ where all Year 7 and 8 public school students will undertake a compulsory civics class, and:

Lesson time for years 7 and 8 in Civics and Citizenship will increase from the national average of 32 minutes per week, to the equivalent of a 60-minute lesson per week, with increased opportunities for democratic engagement within each school.³³

²⁷ Professor Lisa Hill, Professor Rodrigo Praino and Ms Isabella Courtney, *Submission 19*, p. 8.

²⁸ Professor Hill et al, *Submission 19*, p. 8.

²⁹ Mr Stephen Gniel, Acting Chief Executive Officer, ACARA, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 23 May 2024, p. 12.

³⁰ Department of Education, *Submission 38*, p. 3.

³¹ Youth Decide Australia, *Submission 80*, p. 2.

³² Law Council of Australia, *Submission 109*, p. 10.

³³ South Australian Government, *Submission 125*, p. 3.

- 1.27 The SA Government said that in this reform it will also work towards ‘having a specialist civics and citizenship educator in every public secondary and birth to Year 12 public school’.³⁴
- 1.28 New South Wales (NSW), Victoria and Western Australia (WA) ‘adopt and adapt’ the Australian Curriculum by repackaging it into a syllabus.³⁵
- 1.29 In NSW, the NSW Education Standards Authority (NESA) is responsible for the Kindergarten to Year 12 curriculum. NESA is currently implementing a major reform of the NSW curriculum by 2027.³⁶ NESA said that the reform has included the redevelopment of syllabuses containing content on civics and citizenship, which will be embedded across the History, Geography and Commerce syllabuses and will allow teachers to teach civics and citizenship-related issues in the context of their subject speciality.³⁷
- 1.30 The reform also includes making some units mandatory, such as ‘Making a Nation’ for Year 9 and 10 students which contains ‘a lot of our civics and citizenship material’ and strengthening the content for teachers who teach Kindergarten to Year 6.³⁸
- 1.31 NESA emphasised that the rationale for this change was to highlight the importance of understanding Australia’s political system:
- The other reality, though, is that, as with literacy and numeracy, we would believe that civics and citizenship is a central learning entitlement for every student in New South Wales. Our aim would be to make sure that students, at least by year 10, had a very good grasp of the essential knowledge in civics and citizenship that they required.³⁹
- 1.32 Victoria uses a curriculum developed by the Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority (VCAA). In June 2024, the VCAA published its new curriculum, which ‘improves upon the Australian Curriculum Version 9.0 by ensuring Civics and Citizenship is its own distinct discipline’ from Years 3 to 6 rather than integrated into other HASS subjects.⁴⁰
- 1.33 In WA, the school curriculum ‘remains broadly consistent with the Australian Curriculum but has been contextualised to make it more suitable for Western Australian students and teachers’.⁴¹

³⁴ South Australian Government, *Submission 125*, p. 3.

³⁵ Law Council of Australia, *Submission 109*, p. 11.

³⁶ NSW Education Standards Authority (NESA), *Submission 25*, p. 1.

³⁷ NESA, *Submission 25*, p. 1.

³⁸ Dr Paul Cahill, Executive Director, Curriculum, NESA, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 3 October 2024, p. 49.

³⁹ Dr Cahill, NESA, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 3 October 2024, p. 46.

⁴⁰ Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority, *Submission 16*, p. 1.

⁴¹ Law Council of Australia, *Submission 109*, p. 11.

Testing of civics and citizenship knowledge

- 1.34 Civics and citizenship knowledge and attitudes amongst school students in Australia have been regularly measured since 2004 via the National Assessment Program – Civics and Citizenship (NAP-CC) sample assessment.⁴² The NAP-CC has been conducted every three years since, with the exception of the most recent assessment, which was conducted in 2019. The COVID-19 pandemic delayed the 2022 assessment to May 2024, and results are expected in early 2025.⁴³
- 1.35 The NAP-CC assesses and reports on students’ knowledge and understanding of Australia’s democracy and system of government, as well as the rights and obligations of citizens and the values that underpin Australian society.⁴⁴ The results are made available to Australia’s education ministers and departments, as well as curriculum authorities, and are publicly available.⁴⁵ The sample reflects students from government, Catholic and independent schools across metropolitan, rural and remote areas.⁴⁶
- 1.36 ACARA told the Committee that there hasn’t been a ‘statistically significant change’ in students’ proficiency in civics and citizenship since the assessment began in 2004, when students received a 50 per cent proficiency and a slightly higher result of 53 per cent in 2019.⁴⁷
- 1.37 Other stakeholders, such as Professor Rosalind Dixon and Rose Vassel described the results as revealing ‘troubling gaps in students’ civics knowledge’.⁴⁸ Professor Murray Print said that the results are clear that ‘young Australians are poorly equipped to participate in Australia’s democracy’.⁴⁹
- 1.38 Table 1.1 provides the percentage of Year 6 and 10 students at or above the proficient standard nationally since 2004.

Table 1.1 Percentage of Year 6 and 10 students at or above the proficient standard nationally on the NAP-CC since 2004

Assessment Year	Year 6 (per cent)	Year 10 (per cent)
2004	50	39
2007	53	42
2010	52	49

⁴² ACARA, *Submission 69*, p. 4.

⁴³ Mr Russell Dyer, Executive Director, and Mr Stephen Gniel, Chief Executive Officer, Assessment and Reporting, ACARA, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 3 October 2024, p. 53; Department of Education, *Submission 38*, p. 11.

⁴⁴ ACARA, *Submission 69*, p. 78.

⁴⁵ Mr Gniel, ACARA, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 23 May 2024, p. 9; Mr Gniel, ACARA, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 3 October 2024, p. 54.

⁴⁶ ACARA, *Submission 69*, p. 5.

⁴⁷ Mr Gniel, ACARA, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 23 May 2024, p. 9.

⁴⁸ Professor Rosalind Dixon and Rose Vassel, *Submission 78*, p. 4.

⁴⁹ Professor Murray Print, *Submission 96*, p. 3.

2013	52	44
2016	55	38
2019	53	38

Source: ACARA, *NAP-CC 2019 Public Report*, 2020, pages 23 and 24.

1.39 Professor Rosalind Dixon and Rose Vassel added that:

Moreover, the attainment of the proficient standard is not evenly distributed across demographic lines – female students, non-Indigenous students and students at metropolitan schools outperform male, Indigenous and rural/regional students respectively. Parental occupation and education were also shown to have a significant impact on outcomes.⁵⁰

1.40 The NAP-CC also includes a survey ‘that gathers information on students’ attitudes towards civics and citizenship issues and their participation in civic activities’.⁵¹ The most recent survey in 2019 found that students who scored higher in the NAP-CC had higher levels of trust in civic institutions and processes and attributed greater importance to civics and citizenship behaviours.⁵²

1.41 Professor Anne Twomey said there is still a falling trust in government (with only 55 per cent of Year 10 students expressing trust in the Commonwealth Parliament), which is consistent with surveys of the general population.⁵³

Why isn’t civics education working?

1.42 A significant theme in this inquiry was that civics education, both formal and informal, is not working. Australians are struggling to fully participate in our democracy because the status quo is fragmented and inequitable.⁵⁴ Both formal and informal education is disjointed and inadequate to not only prepare our young people to cast an informed vote, but to ensure that citizens of all ages can take an active interest in public life.

1.43 Inequitable access to formal civics education can be attributed to several factors, discussed in further detail in Chapter 2 of this report:

- limited time allocated to teaching and learning in a crowded curriculum
- teacher knowledge, training and time to deliver civics content
- school resourcing
- flexibility in curriculums

⁵⁰ Professor Dixon and R Vassel, *Submission 78*, p. 4.

⁵¹ ACARA, *Submission 69*, p. 5.

⁵² ACARA, *NAP-CC 2019 Public Report*, pages 77, 81.

⁵³ Professor Anne Twomey, *Submission 31*, p. 3.

⁵⁴ CEFA, *Submission 99*, p. 1.

- barriers related to social, socio-economic, linguistic and regional and remote disadvantage
 - distance of schools from Canberra as barriers to visiting national cultural institutions.
- 1.44 Engagement in civics is not limited to schooling or to the education of children and youth. Participation in informal civics education, civic activities and targeted initiatives to support and nurture civic capacity and engagement are also important aspects of a healthy and stable democracy for Australians of all ages.
- 1.45 People may experience inequitable participation in civic activities and electoral events for a number of reasons, including, but not limited to:
- socioeconomic factors
 - accessibility due to location, disability or language barriers
 - lack of knowledge
 - confusion due to different electoral systems for federal, state and local governments.
- 1.46 This report also examines the effect of low media literacy on civics education and engagement. Australians with a poor level of media literacy creates a barrier to civic participation and engagement, and the potential to undermine efforts to strengthen civics education if not addressed.
- 1.47 There was strong support for a national strategy for media and digital literacy to better equip Australians with the skills to discern between fact and fiction. This is discussed further in Chapter 4.

Recent inquiries and reviews

- 1.48 Three recent parliamentary inquiries have examined aspects of civics and citizenship education in Australia.
- 1.49 In 2021, the Senate Standing Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs reported on its inquiry into nationhood, national identity and democracy. Among the Committee's recommendations were:
- the teaching of history and active citizenship should be made compulsory in Years 9 and 10, with the time dedicated increased to 30 hours per year and taught by appropriately trained teachers
 - National Cabinet should increase the number of school children accessing trips to democratic and cultural institutions through the Parliamentary and Civics Education Rebate (PACER) program each year
 - the Australian government engage in dialogue with citizens and prospective citizens about their rights and responsibilities, and our shared values, history and national identity

- a national strategy to tackle fake news and misinformation is developed
 - options are developed to ensure greater youth input into political processes of the federal parliament and promote democracy among youth.⁵⁵
- 1.50 The government responded in May 2024 and noted all recommendations but did not provide a substantive response ‘given the passage of time since this report was tabled’.⁵⁶
- 1.51 The Joint Standing Committee on the National Capital and External Territories inquired into Canberra’s national institutions and tabled its report on 3 April 2019. It recommended a program that encourages new migrants to Australia to visit Canberra’s national institutions and a comprehensive review of the PACER program. The Committee also recommended an expansion of the facilities and resourcing of the Parliamentary Education Office and the National Electoral Education Centre to allow the institutions to offer regular programs for the public as well as school groups.⁵⁷
- 1.52 In May 2024, the government noted most recommendations but did not provide a substantive response ‘given the passage of time since this report was tabled’.⁵⁸
- 1.53 The Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters has previously conducted an inquiry into civics and electoral education. It tabled its report on 18 June 2007 and made 17 recommendations addressing young people’s civic engagement and knowledge, and improvements for civics education for First Nations and migrant communities.⁵⁹
- 1.54 One recent parliamentary inquiry examined aspects of media literacy. The Joint Select Committee on Social Media and Australian Society tabled its report on 18 November 2024 and among its 12 recommendations, recommended that a Digital Affairs Ministry be tasked with developing, coordinating and managing funding allocated for education to enhance digital competency and online safety skills.⁶⁰

⁵⁵ Senate Standing Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs, *Nationhood, national identity and democracy*, February 2021, pages ix-x.

⁵⁶ Department of Education, *Australian Government response to the Senate Standing Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs report: Nationhood, national identity and democracy*, May 2024, p. [2].

⁵⁷ Joint Standing Committee on the National Capital and External Territories, *Telling Australia's story - and why it's important*, April 2019, pages xvi-xvii.

⁵⁸ Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications and the Arts, *Australian Government response to the Joint Standing Committee on the National Capital and External Territories report: Telling Australia's story – and why it's important: Report on the inquiry into Canberra's national institutions*, May 2024.

⁵⁹ Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters, *Civics and Electoral Education*, May 2007, pages xv to xviii.

⁶⁰ Joint Select Committee on Social Media and Australian Society, *Social media: the good, the bad, and the ugly*, November 2024, p. xii.

Scope and conduct of the inquiry

- 1.55 The Committee adopted an inquiry into civics education, engagement, and participation in Australia on Wednesday, 27 March 2024, following a referral from the Special Minister of State, Senator the Hon Don Farrell.
- 1.56 The terms of reference for the inquiry are provided in the front pages of this report and are available on the inquiry webpage.
- 1.57 The Committee called for written submissions, addressing one or more of the terms of reference, by Friday, 24 May 2024.
- 1.58 The Committee received 132 submissions, held 11 public hearings and five site visits in Canberra, the Northern Territory, Queensland and Victoria. The list of submissions is provided at Appendix A. The list of public hearings and witnesses is provided at Appendix B.
- 1.59 The Committee also opened three online surveys on Wednesday, 5 June 2024 to seek views on, and experiences of, civics and citizenship education from school students, recent school leavers, and educators.
- 1.60 The surveys closed on Friday, 30 August 2024 and received 590 responses from school students, 314 responses from educators, and 55 responses from school leavers. A summary of the results from each survey is available at Appendix C.
- 1.61 The Committee wishes to thank all the individuals and organisations who contributed their time, experience and expertise in making submissions and appearing at public hearings.

Report structure

- 1.62 Chapter two considers the current state of formal civics education in Australia, the effectiveness of the way civics and citizenship education is taught and how it can be improved. It also considers the role of cultural institutions that offer civics and citizenship education to students as part of the Australian Curriculum.
- 1.63 Chapter three considers the effectiveness and limitations of the methods through which all Australians seek and receive education and information about our democracy, electoral events and voting, beyond the classroom.
- 1.64 Chapter four examines the role of media literacy in shaping civic engagement and participation and how to better empower Australians to detect and avoid misinformation and disinformation and engage in informed debates on democratic issues.



2. Formal civics education in Australia

- 2.1 Democracies are strengthened when citizens are aware of their rights and responsibilities, are informed about matters of policy and understand how government works. The consensus amongst inquiry participants was that civics and citizenship education is vital to the development and maintenance of good democratic systems.
- 2.2 In Australia, formal civics education is largely the responsibility of primary and secondary schools, with civics and citizenship forming part of the Australian Curriculum. Specific details about the Australian Curriculum and the individual curriculums of the states and territories were discussed in Chapter 1 of this report.
- 2.3 In addition to school-based education, several federal institutions provide programs and resources that are directly linked to the civics and citizenship components of the Australian Curriculum.
- 2.4 This chapter discusses civics and citizenship education in formal school education. It discusses several issues raised in evidence concerning how the curriculum is delivered, both at a national level and at the state and territory level. The chapter also covers the role of cultural institutions that offer civics and citizenship education to Australian students.

Improving national consistency and accountability

- 2.5 A strong theme arising from this inquiry was the lack of consistency of state and territory and individual schools' implementation of the Australian Curriculum. Many inquiry participants agreed that what the Australian Curriculum sets out is not necessarily what is implemented in each school – highlighting a gap between policy and practice, with many students not having the same opportunities as their peers in other jurisdictions.¹
- 2.6 There were concerns from stakeholders that the Department of Education and Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) are not utilising their roles to hold jurisdictions accountable for the curriculums they teach, particularly

¹ Ms Laura Newman, Executive Officer, Social Education Victoria (SEV), *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 8 August 2024, p. 28; Ms Christine Williamson, Senior Policy Officer, Central Land Council (CLC), *Committee Hansard*, Maningrida, 24 July 2024, p. 12; Mrs Justine Hanks, Education Manager, Rule of Law Education Centre, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 3 October 2024, p. 28.

after the results from the National Assessment Program – Civics and Citizenship (NAP-CC) present a consistent decline in proficiency levels.

- 2.7 The Central Land Council noted that ‘the reality is quite different’ between the intention of the Australian Curriculum and what is being taught:

Whilst we know that civics education is mandated within the Australian curriculum, what is not so clear is which agency is primarily responsible for the delivery of that and for ensuring that children and young people are provided with opportunities to engage with the current civic education program and what this access and participation looks like. Like many other scenarios, we suspect that, between the intention of the curriculum and what is experienced on the ground, the reality is quite different.²

- 2.8 The Rule of Law Education Centre warned that when civics and citizenship content is embedded in other subjects ‘there's no accountability’.³ It added that although key elements for formalised civics and citizenship education were agreed upon in 2012:

... there has been no method of review or audit of each State or Territory’s curriculums to make sure they contain the minimum civics and citizenship content that was agreed upon.⁴

- 2.9 Many stakeholders agreed that this embeddedness can have a significant impact on teachers as they then find it difficult to make connections across different subjects and plan their content. Resources and materials available for schools and teachers also vary considerably and are dispersed across many sources.⁵

- 2.10 The Social and Citizenship Education Association of Australia (SCEAA) emphasised that while ACARA is responsible for creating the national curriculum, it does not have:

... the responsibility to provide the pedagogy for the teachers and for the schools. They are not a statutory corporation that is charged with providing professional learning.⁶

- 2.11 This means that states and territories work independently to ensure that the curriculum is explicit and clear for their teachers. For example, the NSW Education Standards Authority said that:

What we've tried to do with our work is make sure that we are far more explicit and clear for what teachers need to teach their students. We believe that has made life a lot easier already for teachers. Certainly, the overwhelming feedback we're have receiving is that's the case. As I've said previously, one of the things

² Ms Williamson, CLC, *Committee Hansard*, Maningrida, 24 July 2024, p. 12.

³ Mrs Sally Layson, Chief Executive Officer, Rule of Law Education Centre, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 3 October 2024, p. 25.

⁴ Rule of Law Education Centre, *Submission 39*, p. 5.

⁵ Professor Rosalind Dixon and Rose Vassel, *Submission 78*, p. 4.

⁶ Dr Libby Tudball, *Committee Hansard*, Melbourne, 16 October 2024, p. 15.

that guides our work is to make sure we have the essential content that every student in New South Wales needs to know.⁷

- 2.12 Social Education Victoria told the Committee that although the Department of Education provides guidance and a ‘critical literacy toolkit for the humanities’, teachers can exercise considerable autonomy in their approach:

I've seen lots of teachers trying to improve it, sharing practice and things like that, but it is really inconsistent. There are wildly different ways of thinking about the curriculum, using the curriculum and offering it, or not offering it, to different students.⁸

- 2.13 This results in little opportunity to access ‘practical insights into classroom implementation’, presenting challenges to better understand approaches taken across schools and articulating best practice for teachers.⁹

- 2.14 Variations of the curriculum can also significantly affect barriers that some students are already facing, such as socioeconomic inequalities and geographic location. The results of the NAP-CC illustrate this:

- Students at metropolitan schools scored significantly higher than their peers in regional and remote areas
- The education and occupation of a student’s parents heavily influenced their civic knowledge
- Indigenous students and those speaking a language other than the test language “performed worse in the civic knowledge domain.”¹⁰

- 2.15 To address these issues, many inquiry participants agreed that the curriculum should be mandated, state and territories should be required to fully implement civics and citizenship in their respective curricula, and that there should be a system of transparency and accountability.¹¹ Social Education Victoria said that mandating the curriculum would assist schools and teachers to have ‘clear guidance on what should be taught’.¹²

- 2.16 Many educators who responded to the Committee’s civics education survey also agreed that civics education should be compulsory with mandatory teacher training.¹³ Box 2.1 provides some examples.

⁷ Dr Paul Cahill, Executive Director, Curriculum, New South Wales Education Standards Authority, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 3 October 2024, p. 50.

⁸ Ms Newman, SEV, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 8 August 2024, pages 26-27.

⁹ Political and Legal Educators Association of Western Australia (PLEAWA), *Submission 50*, p. 3; Dr Jia Ying Neoh, President, Social and Citizenship Education Association of Australia (SCEAA), *Committee Hansard*, Melbourne, 16 October 2024, p. 13.

¹⁰ PLEAWA, *Submission 50*, pages 3-4.

¹¹ Ms Newman, SEV, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 8 August 2024, p. 28; Rule of Law Education Centre, *Submission 39*, p. 1; Professor Murray Print, *Submission 96*, p. 2; University of Sydney, *Submission 62*, p. 3.

¹² Ms Newman, SEV, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 8 August 2024, p. 28.

¹³ Committee Survey Results, *Appendix C*.

Box 2.1 Educators responses to the survey question: ‘How should civics education in schools be improved?’

‘It should be COMPULSORY! A mandatory part of primary and secondary curriculum...’
– Regional area, Queensland.

‘Integrated part of compulsory curriculum not a[n] add on option.’ – Private school, major city, NSW.

‘There should be WHOLE staff dedicated PD about civics. Universities need to teach staff adequately, so they come prepared. Civics should be mandatory and taught all the way up to Year 10 to ALL students, not just as an elective in Year 10...’ – Public school, major city, Victoria.

‘Providing training and professional learning.’ – Public school, major city, WA.

‘To be made compulsory.’ – Private school, major city, SA.

‘Make civics a subject. Make it mandatory. Give teacher training.’ – Public school, regional area, NSW.

- 2.17 Most recent school leavers who responded to the Committee’s survey also agreed that civics education should be mandatory. One participant who graduated from a public secondary school in NSW two to three years ago said that civics education should include:

Exactly what a Member of Parliament or Senator does and how exactly the voting system works should be taught as Australia’s voting system seems somewhat unique compared to the rest of the world, e.g. the United Kingdom and the United States of America.¹⁴

- 2.18 The Law Council of Australia suggested that the Department of Education work with the curriculum authorities in each state and territory to better understand how the civics and citizenship content is being taught and consider ‘opportunities for national alignment’.¹⁵ It also recommended that ACARA should include best practice guides on its website to support teachers in delivering civics education and conduct more regular reviews of the Australian Curriculum to ensure ‘it remains fit for purpose’ and reflects contemporary issues.¹⁶
- 2.19 SCEAA suggested the establishment of a national research centre to ‘conduct audits and gather data on teaching practices to ensure that all students receive a robust civics education’.¹⁷ It also advocated for ‘national benchmarks for civics and

¹⁴ Committee Survey Results, *Appendix C*.

¹⁵ Law Council of Australia, *Submission 109*, p. 12.

¹⁶ Law Council of Australia, *Submission 109*, p. 13.

¹⁷ Dr Neoh, SCEAA, *Committee Hansard*, Melbourne, 16 October 2024, p. 13.

citizenship education that are contextually grounded, ensuring that every student, regardless of location, has equitable access to this essential curriculum'.¹⁸

- 2.20 The Rule of Law Education Centre similarly agreed that students should have opportunities to engage with civics education that is consistent with their peers across jurisdictions.¹⁹
- 2.21 The Department of Education acknowledged that because state and territory governments and non-government education authorities are responsible for implementing the curriculum,²⁰ 'we lack a real understanding of how that is played out on the ground and what the difference in approaches results in'.²¹
- 2.22 ACARA told the Committee that bringing the curriculum 'to life' can be different for individual schools as the difference in the context can be quite vast:
- Bringing that to life, of course, is really different in the middle of Melbourne compared to a remote community in Far North Queensland or in Arnhem Land. The closer you get to the classroom, the more the context matters: What are those students experiencing? How do we make that real for them in their world?²²
- 2.23 It added that it is 'not ACARA's role' to require states and territories to report back on how each jurisdiction implements the curriculum, nor does it regulate this.²³ ACARA emphasised that its role is to set the content of the Australian Curriculum and conduct the NAP – results of which are openly accessible and provided to each education minister and education department.²⁴
- 2.24 ACARA added that it does not make recommendations to the relevant minister and instead the purpose of the NAP results is to take them 'into account when we're doing the review of the curriculum'.²⁵
- 2.25 Members of SCEAA also noted that 'there has been no action coming out of the NAP-CC report' and commented that it merely 'exists as a piece of evidence', with suggestions that the report should 'create an opportunity to build better teaching and learning and better opportunities for professional learning'.²⁶

¹⁸ Dr Neoh, SCEAA, *Committee Hansard*, Melbourne, 16 October 2024, p. 13.

¹⁹ Rule of Law Education Centre, *Submission 39*, p. 10.

²⁰ Department of Education, *Submission 38*, p. 3.

²¹ Ms Julie Birmingham, First Assistant Secretary, Teaching and Learning, Department of Education, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 23 May 2024, p. 2.

²² Mr Stephen Gniel, Chief Executive Officer, Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 3 October 2024, p. 54.

²³ Mr Gniel, ACARA, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 3 October 2024, p. 51.

²⁴ Mr Gniel, ACARA, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 3 October 2024, p. 53.

²⁵ Mr Gniel, ACARA, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 3 October 2024, p. 54.

²⁶ Dr Tudball, *Committee Hansard*, Melbourne, 16 October 2024, p. 14; Dr Deborah Green, Secretary, SCEAA, *Committee Hansard*, Melbourne, 16 October 2024, p. 14.

Effectiveness of the civics and citizenship curriculum

2.26 The current implementation of civics and citizenship education through the Australian Curriculum has resulted in significant variation across jurisdictions, resulting in students receiving vastly different content depending on their location. This prevents the development of the knowledge and skills students need to be informed, engaged and responsible citizens who can effectively contribute to democratic processes.

2.27 The South Australian Commissioner for Children and Young People (CCYP) summarised many inquiry participants' views on the civics and citizenship curricula:

We know that the quality, content and timing of school-based civics and citizenship education varies considerably across schools, if it is delivered at all. Civics education is not taken seriously in many schools and time constraints limit the opportunities for young people to develop the knowledge and skills they need to be active citizens.²⁷

2.28 A lack of a standardised approach to civics and citizenship concepts results in varied implementation. This section will examine the issues with implementation at the state and territory level, including:

- limited time allocated to teaching and learning in a crowded curriculum
- teacher knowledge, training and time to deliver civics content
- school resourcing
- flexibility in curriculums
- barriers related to social, socio-economic, linguistic and regional and remote disadvantage.

2.29 Stakeholders, including students, emphasised the importance of civics education and the urgency of strengthening the curriculum. Box 2.2 provides examples of responses from students collected through the Committee's civics education survey.²⁸

Box 2.2 Student responses to the Committee's survey question: 'How important is civics education to you?'

'Civics is an absolutely essential part of the curriculum as it informs us students about our legal system and roles and responsibilities as citizens as well as being educated about the rights we have as individuals as well as the vital role we play in shaping our economy.' – Year 10, public school, very remote, Victoria.

²⁷ South Australian Commissioner for Children and Young People (CCYP), *Submission 26*, p. 1.

²⁸ Committee Survey Results, *Appendix C*.

'I don't want to be fined if I vote wrong and I want to be able to vote for the best party that fit my values, wants and need.' – Year 9, public school, major city, WA.

'I believe civics education is important, however I am not currently able to take part in a civics class. Instead, we have few subjects that touch on it, but not long enough for true understanding.' – Year 9, public school, regional area, Victoria.

'I wish we would be taught all about the government so that I can be more informed and understand politics more.' – Year 10, public school, major city, Victoria.

'You have to vote.' – Year 6, public school, major city, Victoria.

'I think that understanding the basic workings of parliament can help guide better voting of candidates in our electorates.' – Year 12, public school, regional area, Tasmania.

'It's important part to learn about as it is what our democracy and government is about. However, I feel like it's not taught in the school curriculum so many might not think it as important as they have no idea what civic education is.' – Year 12, public school, regional area, NSW.

Insufficient time and place in the curriculum

- 2.30 Stakeholders agreed near-unanimously that a key reason for the low levels of proficiency in civics and citizenship amongst students, particularly at the high school level, is the insufficient time devoted to the topic in the curriculum.
- 2.31 While the Australian Curriculum models how civics and citizenship should be taught nationally, civics teaching is often embedded within other subjects in a crowded curriculum,²⁹ and covered 'in a short, superficial fashion'.³⁰
- 2.32 Dr Libby Tudball, among others,³¹ noted that civics and citizenship education is generally incorporated into larger humanities subjects where it is:
- ... often pushed out by history and geography in the secondary years. There is no doubt that there is evidence amongst the primary years of a more integrated approach and more consistent learning across that area, which may explain the fact that the NAP-CC results for primary young-age students are a little better than for the secondary years.³²
- 2.33 A key reason for the lack of consistency in how the civics and citizenship curriculum is being taught appears to be competition for time and resources. The South

²⁹ Australian Professional Teachers Association (APTA), *Submission 57*, p. 8; Rule of Law Education Centre, *Submission 39*, p. 8.

³⁰ Australian Historical Association, *Submission 84*, p. 4.

³¹ APTA, *Submission 57*, p. 8.

³² Dr Libby Tudball, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 23 May 2024, p. 36.

Australian CCYP found that teachers in South Australia (SA) identified that civics and citizenship was taught sporadically, if at all, and only when time allowed.³³

- 2.34 As Social Education Victoria put it, 'decades of neglect of [civics and citizenship education] has resulted in school timetables often giving minimal time to civics subjects, and it frequently being "lost" in under-resourced integrated subjects'.³⁴
- 2.35 This was supported by a survey of teachers' experience with the Humanities and Social Sciences (HASS) curriculum conducted by the University of Queensland in 2021. It found that 45 per cent of respondents believed that the content of the civics and citizenship curriculum in Years 7 to 10 could be covered in each year.³⁵
- 2.36 Mrs Brooke Byars, teacher and Head of Department for Humanities and Business at Woree State High School highlighted this point too and said that students will only receive one lesson of civics and citizenship a week: 'How are we going to get through the Australian curriculum, how are we going to inspire students, in one lesson?'³⁶ Mrs Byars added:
- The kids love to unpack this—they really do—but, in the grand scheme of things, we've got one lesson. We are making some changes to our timetable next year, in that we can then run civics and citizenship over a period of time. I think that will see success. We'll have some great success stories there from doing that. But, again, it still doesn't have the same weighting as history and geography, where it's probably just as important.³⁷
- 2.37 The Australian Council for Student Voice recommended that the approach to civics and citizenship education across Australia should 'be more consistent, with all jurisdictions encouraged to adopt a genuine application of civics and citizenship learning as a stand-alone subject area'.³⁸
- 2.38 Professor Lisa Hill, Professor Rodrigo Praino and Ms Isabella Courtney argued that Australia's system of compulsory voting means that 'targeted programs that teach the value and mechanics of voting should not only be embedded in all civics curricular but should be a compulsory component taught by trained instructors'.³⁹
- 2.39 The Rule of Law Education Centre argued that the question of whether civics should be taught as part of a general humanities subject or as a standalone course was less important than ensuring that civics is taught formally and explicitly to all students.⁴⁰
- 2.40 Additionally, some witnesses argued that civics education should be mandated for a minimum number of hours. For example, Mr Simon Zulian, a secondary teacher in

³³ South Australian CCYP, *Submission 26*, p. 5.

³⁴ Social Education Victoria, *Submission 17*, p. 1.

³⁵ Mr Matthew Hawkins, *Submission 27*, p. 2.

³⁶ Mrs Byars, Woree State High School, *Committee Hansard*, Cairns, 25 July 2024, p. 1.

³⁷ Mrs Byars, Woree State High School, *Committee Hansard*, Cairns, 25 July 2024, p. 2.

³⁸ Australian Council for Student Voice (ACSV), *Submission 30*, p. 3.

³⁹ Professor Lisa Hill, Professor Rodrigo Praino and Ms Isabella Courtney, *Submission 19*, p. 6.

⁴⁰ Rule of Law Education Centre, *Submission 39*, pages 6-7.

New South Wales (NSW) said that because there is 'no mandated curriculum time allocated specifically to civics education', some schools can ignore that part of the curriculum entirely, and in others:

... a tentative mention of historic events that touch on democratic values or processes is considered sufficient to satisfy the minor civic and citizenship requirements placed upon them.⁴¹

2.41 Mr Zulian recommended that 'civics and citizenship should be a discrete subject within the curriculum, with a specified number of teaching/learning hours allocated to it'.⁴²

2.42 Democracy Matters similarly advocated for a mandated ten hours, but leaving the question of how those hours are delivered to individual schools:

The Commonwealth Government mandates ten hours of civics education in secondary schools for students 14 and 15 years of age (young people can enrol with the AEC from the age of 16). [...] How the mandatory hours are delivered should be a school based decision, eg within a curriculum area, through a program organised by year coordinators, as part of end of year, post exam program or as a school based action research project. Funding should be tied to delivering the ten hours and ACARA should evaluate and report on civics education outcomes.⁴³

2.43 Some states are leading by example, such as SA which recently implemented a compulsory civics class in Years 7 and 8 and increased lesson times for this cohort from 'the national average of 32 minutes per week, to the equivalent of a 60-minute lesson per week, with increased opportunities for democratic engagement within each school'.⁴⁴

Civics and citizenship in the senior curriculum

2.44 A widely supported recommendation was to incorporate civics and citizenship into the senior secondary (Years 11 and 12) curriculum for all students, on the basis that students in those year levels are close to voting age and, for many, will be in their final years of formal education.

2.45 Requirements for senior secondary schooling varies by state and territory, presenting 'obstacles in achieving consistency and coherence in civic education curricula nationwide'.⁴⁵ Each state and territory has its own secondary certificate, none of which have a requirement for any civics and citizenship education.⁴⁶

⁴¹ Mr Simon Zulian, *Submission 40*, p. 2.

⁴² Mr Zulian, *Submission 40*, p. 3.

⁴³ Democracy Matters, *Submission 79*, p. 4.

⁴⁴ South Australian Government, *Submission 125*, p. 3.

⁴⁵ Professor Hill et al, *Submission 19*, p. 7.

⁴⁶ Professor Hill et al, *Submission 19*, p. 8.

2.46 Subjects under the Australian Curriculum for senior secondary schooling include English, Mathematics, Biology, Chemistry, Earth and Environmental Science, Physics, Ancient History, Modern History, and Geography.⁴⁷ ACARA noted that civics and citizenship 'is not one of the agreed Australian Curriculum Senior Secondary subjects'⁴⁸ and emphasised that 'is to maintain the level of flexibility for students to choose that pathway and be prepared for that next phase of their life'.⁴⁹

2.47 Ms Kate Rankine, a Legal Studies teacher in SA highlighted that:

From a civics perspective the timing of this could not be worse. This is the moment when we most want the importance of this material to be given priority as in a few short years we will be expecting these young people to vote in elections and serve on juries.⁵⁰

2.48 While some subjects taught in Years 11 and 12 have a civics component, such as Legal Studies or Politics, these are optional rather than core or compulsory subjects. As the Civic Engagement Youth Advisory Group noted, 'senior secondary subjects like legal studies are not only optional but also very theory focused and of little practical use for a future voter'.⁵¹

2.49 The South Australian Youth Forum made a similar point, highlighting that, for students who don't choose a senior subject like Legal Studies, which not every school offers, 'it's really hard to find unbiased information, particularly online, and also navigate your own way through civics'.⁵²

2.50 More directly, a member of the South Australian Student Representative Council noted: 'I've heard this from friends at other schools as well: if you don't pick legal studies, you will not know anything'.⁵³

2.51 A further reason to expand civics education into the senior years was made by Ms Rankine, who argued that the subject matter of civics classes is too complex for students in earlier school years:

To give an example, a sample of twenty 16 year olds who have chosen to study Legal Studies and are academically above average did not even understand what I meant by the term "civics" when asked about it today.⁵⁴

⁴⁷ Professor Hill et al, *Submission 19*, p. 8.

⁴⁸ Department of Education, *Submission 38.1*, p. 7.

⁴⁹ Mr Gniel, ACARA, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 23 May 2024, p. 12.

⁵⁰ Ms Kate Rankine, *Submission 67*, p. 2.

⁵¹ Mr Kuba Meikle, Civic Engagement Youth Advisory Group, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 19 June 2024, p. 31.

⁵² Ms Amber Brock-Fabel, South Australian Youth Forum, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 19 June 2024, p. 9.

⁵³ Ms Sania Ali, South Australian Student Representative Council, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 19 June 2024, p.14.

⁵⁴ Ms Rankine, *Submission 67*, p. 1.

2.52 One educator who responded to the Committee’s civics education survey agreed that there is more value in teaching civics and citizenship to students in Years 10 to 12:

I think it should be taught to Years 10, 11 and 12, as they will be voting soon. Having it added to a really crowded 7/8 curriculum with students who struggle to read and write is onerous and not as great a value. Students in Years 7 and 8 are not ready to become great citizens! (Private school, Regional area, Tasmania)⁵⁵

2.53 Professor Rosalind Dixon, Professor Murray Print and Dr Sarah Moulds also considered compulsory civics education in the senior curriculum. Professor Dixon said that students in Years 11 and 12 already face challenges and assessment priorities to complete high school, which emphasises that ‘it is even more imperative’ to focus on civics education in Years 7 to 10.⁵⁶

2.54 Professor Print acknowledged that the focus on the end-of-school examination ‘is really bound up very tightly’ but said that not including civics and citizenship in the Years 11 and 12 curriculum was ‘definitely a missed opportunity’.⁵⁷ Professor Print said that it is essential for schools to provide fundamental civics and citizenship education up to Year 12, given the lack of opportunity for democratic learning in non-school contexts.⁵⁸

2.55 Dr Moulds agreed that civics and legal literacy education should be mandated in Years 11 and 12 across all Australian schools, emphasising that children and young people should be treated as ‘citizens now’, rather than ‘citizens in the future’.⁵⁹

2.56 The Australian Youth Affairs Coalition, noting the difficulty of including formal civics education for senior students, suggested instead a refresher class for all Year 12 students.⁶⁰

2.57 The NSW Department of Education said that its public schools offer a ‘Life Ready course’ for students in Years 11 and 12 which covers ‘participation in democratic electoral processes—for example, enrolling to vote and voting in government elections’.⁶¹

2.58 Students who participated in the Committee’s survey also shared suggestions on the timing and integration of civics and citizenship in the current curriculum. A snapshot of these responses is provided at Box 2.3.⁶²

Box 2.3 Student responses to the time and place of civics and citizenship in the curriculum

⁵⁵ Committee Survey Results, *Appendix C*.

⁵⁶ Professor Rosalind Dixon, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 3 October 2024, p. 4.

⁵⁷ Professor Murray Print, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 3 October 2024, p. 4.

⁵⁸ Professor Print, *Submission 96*, p. 1.

⁵⁹ Dr Sarah Moulds, *Submission 116*, p. 3.

⁶⁰ Australian Youth Affairs Coalition (AYAC), *Submission 53*, p. 5.

⁶¹ Ms Megan Kelly, Executive Director, Curriculum and Reform, New South Wales Department of Education, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 3 October 2024, p. 47.

⁶² Committee Survey Results, *Appendix C*.

'Civics education could be improved by moving it to later years of high school rather than primary school, where it is more relevant and more easily understood by students. It should also highlight the amount of change that can be made by just one person accessing civics outside of school and voting.' – Year 12, church school, remote area, Victoria.

'It should be mandatory from the middle of primary school to the middle of high school covering the basics of elections, democracy, and our rights in society, where it then becomes an optional subject that slowly increases in speciality.' – Year 10, public school, major city, SA.

'Currently, civics is a topic barely touched on in high school, there is little mention of it anywhere and the only way young people learn about these issues is through social media, their friends and other sources. In primary school civics was covered somewhat with lessons on the parliamentary system and the separation of powers. Ideally it would be preferable if civics was a topic in mandatory Geography or History, as many concepts are forgotten by students by the end of high school.' – Year 10, public school, major city, NSW.

Challenges for teachers

2.59 The Committee heard that the delivery of formal civics and citizenship education in schools is of mixed effectiveness as it largely depends on a particular teacher's knowledge, training, capacity and confidence, the importance placed on the topic at a broader school level and time pressures.⁶³ The optional and flexible nature of civics in most curricula also allows teachers to spend less time on it, or to 'opt out', to meet time constraints.⁶⁴

2.60 Social Education Victoria highlighted that 'school leadership, timetables, external pressures and resourcing' impact how teachers approach the subject:

It is hard to teach civics if it isn't in the timetable. It's hard to improve a dull civics program when the school leadership isn't prioritising it, and nobody is able to get a replacement teacher to allow them to attend [personal development]. It is hard to collaborate as a learning area or faculty when you have one 45-minute meeting every term. It's hard to teach anything when there is a teaching crisis, and some classes are being taught by casual replacement teachers for months at a time.⁶⁵

Lack of expertise and knowledge

2.61 A significant theme in this inquiry was that many teachers responsible for teaching civics and citizenship to Australian students themselves lack expertise and

⁶³ APTA, *Submission 57*, p. 4; Dr Keith Heggart, *Submission 13*, p. 3; Rule of Law Education Centre, *Submission 39*, pages 10-11.

⁶⁴ Rule of Law Education Centre, *Submission 39*, pages 10-11.

⁶⁵ Ms Newman, SEV, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 8 August 2024, p. 22.

knowledge in the area. Dr Tudball and Dr Keith Heggart argued that the low NAP-CC results is linked to a lack of emphasis on civics and citizenship in teachers continued professional learning.⁶⁶

- 2.62 The Committee was advised that many social science teachers do not study content and curriculum units related to civics and citizenship at university, and do not have opportunities to develop this knowledge in teacher education programs.⁶⁷ There is also no national government funded professional learning programs available to renew teachers' knowledge of civics and citizenship.⁶⁸ Teachers are consequently not well prepared to teach the subject, both at the primary or secondary level.⁶⁹
- 2.63 Box 2.4 provides an example of some of the responses from educators collected through the Committee's civics education survey.⁷⁰

Box 2.4 Educators responses to the survey question: 'Have you received specific training in teaching civics?'

'Through Law and History units at university, yes. In terms of my teaching education (Masters of Teaching) there was none to speak of...' – Public school, regional area, Tasmania.

'Relied on personal knowledge and the textbook and my own research and some support from colleagues.' – Public school, major city, Victoria.

'I have not heard of such training but I would like to.' – Private school, regional area, Tasmania.

'I would gladly take up professional learning if available.' – Public school, major city, NSW.

'I trained as a humanities teacher but have not received specific civics-based training.' – Church school, major city, Victoria.

'Not had any professional development for legal or civics in years though. Can never find any in QLD.' – Public school, regional area, Queensland.

- 2.64 SCEAA highlighted this lack of formal training as leading to 'varied levels of understanding' and 'low levels of confidence' amongst teachers of civics and citizenship classes.⁷¹ As a result, many teachers rely on their own understandings of

⁶⁶ Dr Tudball, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 23 May 2024, p. 36; Dr Keith Heggart, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 23 May 2024, p. 36.

⁶⁷ Social and Citizenship Education Association of Australia (SCEAA), *Submission 14*, p. 3; Associate Professor Deborah Henderson, *Submission 60*, p. 2.

⁶⁸ SCEAA, *Submission 14*, p. 3; National Capital Educational Tourism Project, *Submission 110*, p. 4.

⁶⁹ Dr Keith Heggart, *Submission 13*, p. 3.

⁷⁰ Committee Survey Results, *Appendix C*.

⁷¹ SCEAA, *Submission 14*, p. 4

civics and citizenship, influenced by their personal values and worldviews and students can receive extremely varying levels of education.⁷²

2.65 Mr Zulian made a similar point:

A lack of options for formal teacher training or a pathway for expertise in the subject is problematic. Many teachers often do not feel equipped to address content in this field adequately, leading to a reliance on individual enthusiasm rather than the rigorous structures around a formal syllabus. This creates a patchwork of teachers, many of whom lack confidence to deal with public affairs in an impartial manner in a classroom environment which in turn undermines universal and quality civics education.⁷³

2.66 Many stakeholders agreed that if teachers are not confident to teach an area of content, they will avoid teaching it. For example, SCEAA pointed out that teachers will focus on the subject matter they are most confident with:

If I am a new graduate and I don't have a lot of confidence in teaching civics and citizenship, if I move into an area that is taught under a banner of HASS, I'm going to teach what I'm comfortable with. I'm going to teach the areas, probably, of history and maybe a bit of geography, but I won't necessarily teach civics and citizenship, if that's what I'm not confident with and that's not where I feel that I have the level of self-efficacy that I need.⁷⁴

2.67 The Rule of Law Education Centre similarly noted that the flexibility of the curriculum and syllabuses meant that teachers can choose to focus on a different content area:

If a teacher does not feel equipped and confident to teach an area of content, or if they are disinterested, then they can choose to focus on a different content elaboration contained in the syllabus to meet the teaching hours requirements for that subject area. Inequitable access to civics education is the unfortunate result of teachers choosing their own elaborations and content.⁷⁵

2.68 Many inquiry participants agreed that to address this, strengthened professional learning and reliable, high-quality online resources should be developed for all teachers as a priority.⁷⁶ This should be incorporated as part of their initial training and for professional development throughout their career.⁷⁷

2.69 Professor Print added that the curriculum should be 'clear and unequivocal', and added that:

⁷² SCEAA, *Submission 14*, p. 4.

⁷³ Mr Zulian, *Submission 40*, p. 2.

⁷⁴ Dr Green, SCEAA, *Committee Hansard*, Melbourne, 16 October 2024, p. 16.

⁷⁵ Rule of Law Education Centre, *Submission 39*, p. 11.

⁷⁶ APTA, *Submission 57*, p. 4; Mr Zulian, *Submission 40*, p. 3; Professor Dixon and R Vassel, *Submission 78*, p. 4.

⁷⁷ Rule of Law Education Centre, *Submission 39*, p. 2; AYAC, *Submission 53*, p. 5; Associate Professor Henderson, *Submission 60*, p. 2.

My experience in 30 years of doing these sorts of things has been that teachers are happy to teach it as long as there's a good curriculum, a good base upon which they can teach, resources they can use, and they've got a sufficient background in a nonpartisan sense.⁷⁸

- 2.70 The Rule of Law Education Centre emphasised the need for civics to be both a curriculum priority and a teaching practice priority, with civics becoming a dedicated unit as part of their university education degree and be available for both pre-service and in-service teachers.⁷⁹
- 2.71 The Australian Professional Teachers Association also recommended more government support, including funding for HASS teacher associations to develop and disseminate best-practice approaches for the teaching of civics and citizenship.⁸⁰
- 2.72 The NSW Department of Education told the Committee that as part of its most recent curriculum reform, it is supporting teachers by providing 'useful, practical support' resources which 'are designed to show what good implementation looks like for these syllabuses'.⁸¹
- 2.73 Similarly, in SA's recent curriculum reform it is 'investing in our educators, by working towards having a specialist civics and citizenship educator in every public secondary and birth to year 12 public school'.⁸² The SA Government said that by developing civics and citizenship as a cross curriculum priority, not only will students consistently engage in democratic studies and active citizenship, but teachers will be able to use a 'strengthened curriculum without overcrowding the curriculum'.⁸³
- 2.74 ACARA supported the SA Government's recommendations to consider funding opportunities for 'further professional development for civics and citizenship specialisation in teachers' and more 'support with setting up a network for teachers across Australia' to ensure national consistency.⁸⁴

Discomfort in leading debate about contemporary issues

- 2.75 Civics education is enhanced when students are given the opportunity to contribute to debates and discussion on political and social issues through an 'open classroom climate'.⁸⁵ However, a lack of training and knowledge in civics can lead teachers to lack confidence in leading such debate about contemporary issues.⁸⁶

⁷⁸ Professor Print, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 3 October 2024, p. 5.

⁷⁹ Rule of Law Education Centre, *Submission 39*, p. 12.

⁸⁰ APTA, *Submission 57*, p. 4.

⁸¹ Ms Kelly, New South Wales Department of Education, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 3 October 2024, p. 48.

⁸² South Australian Government, *Submission 125*, p. 3.

⁸³ South Australian Government, *Submission 125*, p. 3.

⁸⁴ South Australian Government, *Submission 125*, p. 4; Mr Gniel, ACARA, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 3 October 2024, p. 55.

⁸⁵ Australian Council for Educational Research, *Submission 64*, p. 18.

⁸⁶ Rule of Law Education Centre, *Submission 39*, p. 11; Dr Simon Knight, *Submission 23*, pages 4-5.

2.76 Teachers have raised concerns that issues can sometimes be controversial in nature as they are aware that there may be parental or media backlash against some topics such as climate change, racism, social justice and global citizenship.⁸⁷

2.77 As Social Education Victoria argues, addressing some controversial topics needs to be understood as an essential part of teaching civics and citizenship:

There needs to be a better understanding that teaching civics and citizenship is political and that it might hit on controversial issues. It would be helpful if decision-makers understood this before publicly criticising teachers who are doing the brave and often thankless work of broaching challenging issues in their classrooms. Such criticisms do have a real chilling effect on teachers' appetite for teaching these sorts of issues.⁸⁸

2.78 Students reported being aware that teachers were uncomfortable discussing political issues. According to the Australian Youth Affairs Coalition, many students said that their experience of civics and citizenship education was:

... limited to a rote-style delivery that focused on the role of key institutions such as electoral and parliamentary systems, rather than creating opportunities for them to engage in meaningful learning that develops critical thinking, awareness of social issues, and preparing them to become active citizens.⁸⁹

2.79 The South Australian Youth Forum made a similar point, highlighting that teacher reluctance to engage in political topics leads to less engagement from students:

We're finding that, at the moment, there's a lot of social aversion, taboo and stigma around having open conversations about civics education and political engagement, especially in classroom and educational settings. Civics education is very centralised around the middle-school Canberra trip and is not very consistent throughout. There isn't necessarily a supportive, positive and open environment, in which young people can engage in genuine conversations and ask genuine questions about politics and civics engagement.⁹⁰

2.80 Teacher Mrs Brooke Byars highlighted this point too: 'I think some teachers probably don't have those conversations, because they're afraid of crossing the line'.⁹¹

2.81 Victorian Trades Hall Council emphasised that teachers 'should be trusted to be able to carry out these debates in a non-partisan manner' and recommended that the curriculum should not just teach political facts, but political policy.⁹²

⁸⁷ Dr Heggart, *Submission 13*, p. 4.

⁸⁸ Ms Newman, SEV, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 8 August 2024, p. 23.

⁸⁹ AYAC, *Submission 53*, p. 1.

⁹⁰ Ms Eleanor Buckham, Member, South Australian Youth Forum, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 19 June 2024, p. 13.

⁹¹ Mrs Byars, Woree State High School, *Committee Hansard*, Cairns, 25 July 2024, p. 3.

⁹² Victorian Trades Hall Council, *Submission 86*, pages 6-7.

2.82 Professor Dixon recommended resourcing for professional development opportunities to allow teachers ‘to see how to do debate based education without straying into partisanship’.⁹³

2.83 Similarly, the Political and Legal Educators Association of Western Australia recommended:

Greater investment in resources and professional learning will enable them to discuss contemporary social, political, and legal issues while facilitating deeper analyses that draw out relevant connections to mechanisms of governance in Australia.⁹⁴

Relevance and practical elements

2.84 A further explanation for the declining proficiency seen through the NAP-CC is that the current curriculum is presented in a way that does not engage students, nor sufficiently prepare them to cast an informed and formal vote.

2.85 Students themselves, from Beaufort Secondary College Middle Years Humanities Class, argued that young people are not engaging with civics in part because the language and methods used are inaccessible to them: ‘A lot of the language used by government cannot be understood by the average teenager’.⁹⁵

2.86 Box 2.5 provides some free text responses from students across Australia, gathered through the Committee’s civics education survey. The responses address questions such as ‘How satisfied are you with the civics education you have received?’ and ‘How should civics education in schools be improved?’.⁹⁶

Box 2.5 Student responses to the way civics is taught in schools

‘...the only 2 things I remember fully from previous years are when we did a court roleplay and when a person came in and did an interactive presentation on types of voting.’ – Year 9, public school, remote area, WA.

‘It should be more practical and engaging, but above all more present!’ – Year 12, public school, major city, NSW.

‘By making it fun and interesting to learn instead of writing paragraphs of information that the students will hate and not remember.’ – Year 10, public school, regional area, Victoria.

‘Talk about real world problems and have debates.’ – Year 10, public school, regional area, Victoria.

‘Mock elections, analysing campaigns.’ – Year 10, private school, major city, WA.

⁹³ Professor Dixon, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 3 October 2024, p. 6.

⁹⁴ PLEAWA, *Submission 50*, p. 2.

⁹⁵ Beaufort Secondary College, *Submission 10*, p. 2.

⁹⁶ Committee Survey Results, *Appendix C*.

'Making it more widely taught. We learn the basics of how to get a job, how to apply for university, but little it taught on how to make a difference in our community by the way we vote and contacting our electorate members on a state and federal level.' – Year 12, public school, regional area, Tasmania.

'More pretend parliament.' – Year 6, public school, major city, Victoria.

- 2.87 According to the South Australian CCYP, students have also described the curriculum as containing too little and being 'either "too early" or "too late" depending on their school and subject choices'.⁹⁷
- 2.88 Mr Matthew Hawkins, a Legal Studies teacher, and Ms Rankine both agreed that the civics and citizenship curriculum requires too much of teachers, and too much of students at too young an age.⁹⁸
- 2.89 Mr Hawkins said that the civics and citizenship curriculum is 'fundamentally uninteresting'.⁹⁹ Additionally, Ms Rankine said that complex content means that students are being prevented from meaningfully engaging with it:
- Complicated and technical concepts are being introduced too soon - the students are not ready from a cognitive or maturity standpoint. Civics content should be introduced when students are receptive to it and this requires them firstly to understand it and secondly to appreciate its immediate relevance in their lives.¹⁰⁰
- 2.90 The Australian Council for Student Voice made a similar point, highlighting that the framing of civics education is difficult to relate to for many students:
- The curriculum emphasises student acquisition of political and historical content knowledge such as the Magna Carta, the history of our Constitution, the operation of Parliament and the structure of the legal system. Students have shared with us that while these topics are important for them to learn, they are difficult to relate to the typical student and fail to contribute to an engaging experience. Research supports the notion that teachers are not necessarily successful in engaging students in these learning experiences.¹⁰¹
- 2.91 Evidence from the Australian Professional Teachers Association supported this point and argued that failing to address contemporary issues 'leaves students ill-prepared to navigate the complexities of modern society and participate meaningfully in public debates and democratic processes'.¹⁰²

⁹⁷ South Australian CCYP, *Submission 26*, p. 3.

⁹⁸ Mr Matthew Hawkins, *Submission 27*, p. 3; Ms Rankine, *Submission 67*, p. 1.

⁹⁹ Mr Hawkins, *Submission 27*, p. 3.

¹⁰⁰ Ms Rankine, *Submission 67*, p. 1.

¹⁰¹ ACSV, *Submission 30*, p. 3.

¹⁰² APTA, *Submission 57*, p. 8.

- 2.92 Many inquiry participants advocated for greater access to practical experiences, and more practical learning in the classroom, so that students can better understand why they're learning particular topics.
- 2.93 The South Australian CCYP warned that there is a significant number of young people making it through years of schooling without knowing about the key systems and democratic processes that affect their lives, including how to cast a valid vote.¹⁰³
- 2.94 Mr Aiden Senaratne highlighted this point too and said that the Cairns Youth Council had heard that because democracy was taught near the end of primary school, many young people had 'forgotten what was learned by the time they reached voting age':

The impact of this was highlighted when one of our fellow youth councillors recalled that both of their older siblings had been fined because they did not enrol to vote after turning 18, likely due to not receiving adequate education. The youth councillors who shared their reflections agreed that, beyond the basics of the democratic system, students were not taught in detail how to vote and did not feel properly equipped to independently evaluate campaign materials or decide who to vote for. Some of us felt there was too much emphasis placed on international political systems and ideologies, with little time spent on Australia's political system, and that maths and science were valued more highly than civics.¹⁰⁴

- 2.95 The Australian Council for Student Voice said that in its discussions with teachers and school leaders it heard that 'particularly those in regional and rural locations, indicated a strong desire for greater access to practical experiences'.¹⁰⁵
- 2.96 The South Australian CCYP and Professor Lisa Hill et al agreed that the content of civics education must be practical enough for students to 'cast an informed and formal vote in a manner that makes voters feel efficacious'.¹⁰⁶
- 2.97 Professor Lisa Hill et al emphasised that in a system where voting is compulsory, such knowledge should be an 'essential part of education':

In a compulsory voting system that is particularly complex, a dedicated teaching module on how ballot papers work and the best way to fill them in so as to gain political representation that reflects an individual's political preferences (we call this 'congruent' voting) should be treated as an essential part of education, not an add-on that may or may not be delivered at the discretion of schools, instructors or even students.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰³ South Australian CCYP, *Submission 26*, p. 3.

¹⁰⁴ Mr Aiden Senaratne, Cairns Youth Council, Foundation for Young Australians, *Committee Hansard*, Cairns, 25 July 2024, p. 7.

¹⁰⁵ ACSV, *Submission 30*, p. 2.

¹⁰⁶ South Australian CCYP, *Submission 26*, p. 3; Professor Hill et al, *Submission 19*, p. 6.

¹⁰⁷ Professor Hill et al, *Submission 19*, pages 9-10.

2.98 Similarly, Professor Dixon argued that civics and citizenship ‘cannot be simply dry book knowledge for students’ and suggested that a reform of the curriculum should ‘involve more applied programs that combine knowledge, student voice and motivation’:

... reform in this area must involve both basic curriculum development and space within the curriculum and school day and year for what we might call applied programs that link student voice, democratic education and motivation to engage with our democracy.¹⁰⁸

2.99 On this point, the Gilbert and Tobin Centre of Public Law is trialling ‘a new, more democracy oriented model of the student representative council’ in some NSW primary schools to give ‘students practical knowledge and experience of civics and an opportunity to create a mindset of engagement and participation’.¹⁰⁹

‘I am very passionate about this issue - there is currently a real opportunity to engage students in more innovative teaching and learning in this area, particularly in middle school (years 9-10) when students become capable of and hungry for more higher-order thinking opportunities. Unfortunately, teacher workloads and shortages, fixed mindsets and the ownership of curriculum through reliance on monopolistic standard textbooks limits innovation. ... More applied learning in this area would deliver excellent outcomes and active citizens. In addition, incursions/excursions to learn more from community groups and active citizens is engaging and empowering.’ – Educator, public school, major city, Victoria.¹¹⁰

Vulnerable students

2.100 Vulnerable cohorts – such as First Nations students, students living in regional and remote Australia and students with disability – experience unique challenges which can affect when and how they receive civics education at school. Limited civics education has lifelong impacts and can result in reduced electoral engagement and participation in the future.

2.101 During the Committee’s visit to Northern Australia, it heard about the barriers that First Nations children and young people face in remote communities such as Maningrida in the Northern Territory. Civics education, and education more generally in Maningrida is ‘very, very poor’,¹¹¹ largely due to low attendance rates and language barriers:

Students’ attendance—because the Western calendar does not meet and collaborate with the Bininj calendar and world, kids were being forced to attend

¹⁰⁸ Professor Dixon, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 3 October 2024, pages 1-2.

¹⁰⁹ Mrs Rose Vassel, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 3 October 2024, p. 2.

¹¹⁰ Committee Survey Results, *Appendix C*.

¹¹¹ Ms Cynthia Brown, Director, Bawinanga Aboriginal Corporation, *Committee Hansard*, Maningrida, 23 July 2024, p. 1.

school a long way from their homes and homelands, living like refugees in Maningrida, or trying to live.¹¹²

- 2.102 The Bawinanga Aboriginal Corporation suggested that civics education outcomes, along with broader academic results, would be improved if the school calendar better reflected the culture and climate of Northern Australia:

School attendance in the wet season is about 89 to 90 per cent, but, as soon as it's dry season, everybody's gone out to homelands, so it drops down to about 23 per cent. We run the Remote School Attendance Strategy, and so our staff do a lot of work trying to get families to take the children, but they're not actually here in Maningrida. So it would probably make more sense to have a different type of school calendar, which we've recommended before, saying, don't have school in dry season, or have school out on the homelands during dry season.¹¹³

- 2.103 Many students with a disability face barriers preventing them from learning about civics education at school too. For example, Down Syndrome Australia (DSA) said that a high number of students with disability 'attend a segregated school in their secondary years' which, anecdotally, significantly impacts their access to curriculum and content matter that students are taught.¹¹⁴
- 2.104 DSA said that HASS subjects are removed or reduced in timetables for students with intellectual disability for other kinds of education, such as life skills and work experience.¹¹⁵ It added that opportunities for students to attend camps or experiential learning away from home such as a trip to Canberra can also be inaccessible for students with disability as they are often overnight. DSA said that this is 'a significant missed opportunity for hands-on education on electoral matters'.¹¹⁶
- 2.105 Deaf Connect said that there is 'a significantly widespread poor level of political literacy by deaf voters'.¹¹⁷ It highlighted the importance of mandating the inclusion of Auslan resources and open captioning on videos to 'ensure the consistency of access to civics education irrespective of deaf students access to inclusive education supports'.¹¹⁸

Cultural institutions as part of formal education

- 2.106 As well as the education delivered in classrooms, a range of cultural institutions offer civics and citizenship education to Australian students, including parliaments, electoral commissions, libraries, museums and galleries.

¹¹² Ms Brown, Bawinanga Aboriginal Corporation, *Committee Hansard*, Maningrida, 23 July 2024, p. 1.

¹¹³ Ms Amanda Ewart, Acting Chief Executive Officer, Bawinanga Aboriginal Corporation, *Committee Hansard*, Maningrida, 23 July 2024, p. 2.

¹¹⁴ Down Syndrome Australia (DSA), *Submission 43*, p. 2.

¹¹⁵ DSA, *Submission 43*, p. 2.

¹¹⁶ DSA, *Submission 43*, p. 2.

¹¹⁷ Deaf Connect, *Submission 105*, p. 4.

¹¹⁸ Deaf Connect, *Submission 105*, p. 4.

- 2.107 The Parliament and Civics Education Rebate (PACER) is a travel subsidy available to schools that conduct trips to Canberra. The PACER program has existed in its current form since 2006 and supports students in Years 4 to 12 to participate in learning experiences in Canberra that complement civics and citizenship education delivered in the classroom.¹¹⁹
- 2.108 To be eligible for the subsidy, schools must participate in programs conducted at three of the four mandatory PACER institutions in Canberra: Australian Parliament House, Museum of Australian Democracy (MoAD), the National Electoral and Education Centre (NEEC) at the Australian Electoral Commission (AEC) and the Australian War Memorial.¹²⁰
- 2.109 The Department of Education said that if schools have difficulty attending the mandatory institutions, for example if bookings are at capacity, there are alternative PACER institutions which also offer a range of civics and citizenship education-related programs. These include Government House, High Court of Australia, National Archives of Australia, National Portrait Gallery, National Museum of Australia, National Capital Authority, National Gallery of Australia, and National Film and Sound Archive.¹²¹
- 2.110 The standard PACER rebate amount is calculated on a per student basis and varies depending on the distance the school is from Canberra. The basic rebate per student ranges from \$20 per student for schools that are between 150km and 499km from Canberra to \$260 for schools that are more than 4,000km from Canberra.¹²² Since its inception, the PACER rebate has been amended to provide an additional \$120 per student rebate for schools on islands or in remote areas.¹²³
- 2.111 In March 2023 the Minister for Education, the Hon Jason Clare MP, announced a new pilot program that further increased the per student rebate. The pilot program is still in place at the time of writing. Under the pilot, the following per student rebates are provided to schools:
- a temporary 50 per cent additional base rebate
 - a new rebate per student of \$5 for schools within 150 km of Canberra
 - additional loadings for low socio-economic schools
 - additional loadings for geographical remoteness for schools located in outer regional, remote or very remote locations.¹²⁴
- 2.112 According to the Department of Education:

Under these settings, a student travelling from a remote, disadvantaged school in NSW (600 kilometres from Canberra), would attract a rebate of \$157.50,

¹¹⁹ Department of Education, *Submission 38.1*, p. 2.

¹²⁰ Department of Education, *Submission 38.1*, p. 2.

¹²¹ Department of Education, *Submission 38.1*, p. 2.

¹²² Department of Education, *Submission 38.1*, p. 2.

¹²³ Department of Education, *Submission 38.1*, p. 2.

¹²⁴ Department of Education, *Submission 38.1*, p. 2.

compared to \$45 under the standard PACER settings. A student from a very remote, disadvantaged school in the NT (3,200 kilometres from Canberra) would attract a rebate of \$2,040 instead of \$510.¹²⁵

- 2.113 Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, approximately 100,000 students visited Canberra each year as part of PACER.¹²⁶
- 2.114 The Parliamentary Education Office (PEO) in Parliament House delivered, in the 2023-24 financial year, tours including role plays of chamber or committee processes to over 96,000 students and expects this to rise to over 120,000 in 2024-25.¹²⁷
- 2.115 The PEO's immersive program focuses on allowing students to explore how laws are made, the roles and responsibilities of Members of Parliament and Senators and how governments are formed and held accountable.¹²⁸
- 2.116 The NEEC also offers in-person programs, focused on Australia's electoral system including voting in House and Senate elections and referendums; as the PEO noted the two programs complement each other with their respective focuses.¹²⁹
- 2.117 Similarly, MoAD offers in-person programs on a range of topics related to civics and political participation.¹³⁰

Access issues

- 2.118 Despite PACER's focus on improving access to Canberra's cultural institutions, for many schools a trip to Canberra remains unviable. The Committee heard that the rebate is 'far from generous and the costs exclude many students' who attend schools in lower socioeconomic or regional and remote areas.¹³¹ This means that many students may miss out on access to practical experiences that can reinforce what they have learnt in the classroom.¹³²
- 2.119 Data provided by the PEO demonstrates this: in 2023, 803 NSW schools visited the PEO, substantially more than the next highest, Victoria (254 schools) and Queensland (138 schools). States and territories further away demonstrate the geographic difficulties schools face in travelling to Canberra:
- Western Australia: 86 schools
 - South Australia: 72 schools
 - Tasmania: 20 schools

¹²⁵ Department of Education, *Submission 38.1*, p. 3.

¹²⁶ Ms Birmingham, Department of Education, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 23 May 2024, p. 3.

¹²⁷ Department of Parliamentary Services (DPS), *Submission 51*, p. 4.

¹²⁸ Parliamentary Education Office (PEO), *Submission 22.1*, p. 7.

¹²⁹ PEO, *Submission 22.1*, pages 7-8.

¹³⁰ Museum of Australian Democracy (MoAD), *Submission 102*, p. 3.

¹³¹ University of Sydney, *Submission 62*, p. 4.

¹³² ACSV, *Submission 30*, p. 2; Professor Murray Print, *Submission 96*, p. 3.

- Northern Territory: 14 schools.¹³³

2.120 Members of the South Australian Youth Forum highlighted the access issues their group had encountered:

Before coming to make these submissions, we did have talks with our young people from many different schools across South Australia about the Canberra trip and what you get taught about voting, and there were such, I guess, disparate answers, with a lot of our regional young people not having the opportunity to either go to parliament or go on the Canberra trip. I think the majority of our group have said that they have no clue about the voting system. We did a massive survey last year on young people's awareness of the political system and had so many responses, such as, 'I'm freaking out, help,' or 'I'm finishing school and I don't know how to vote or what local government is.'¹³⁴

2.121 Echoing the theme that civics education isn't offered at the best time for students, another noted:

... quite often that opportunity [the Canberra trip] occurs when you're too young. Also, some students miss out on that opportunity due to attending regional and marginalised schools, which don't necessarily have the funding or resources to send students on those trips, and that creates limited access and opportunity for all South Australians.¹³⁵

2.122 Participation may also depend on the availability of teachers, parents or carers. The Speaker of the House of Representatives noted that, as well as the travel costs themselves being 'prohibitive' for many schools, many other barriers make a school's visit to Canberra difficult:

It's the fact that normally parents or carers will need to give up time from work to also accompany the students. It's the fact that teachers who may be doing split classes will also have to be taken away, and sometimes there's backfilling for teachers as well. So there is quite a considerable cost. Schools do a lot of fundraising to come here.¹³⁶

2.123 As Dr Heggart pointed out, the impact of this is that students from wealthier schools, or those closer to Canberra, will be able to access these programs to a far higher degree than the students who are already less advantaged.¹³⁷

2.124 Both MoAD and DPS particularly highlighted that the loadings applied to PACER are announced too late in the school year for many schools in regional or remote areas

¹³³ PEO, *Submission 22.1*, pages 11-12.

¹³⁴ Ms Brock-Fabel, South Australian Youth Forum (SAYF), *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 19 June 2024, p. 9.

¹³⁵ Ms Eleanor Buckham, SAYF, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 19 June 2024, p. 10.

¹³⁶ Mr Milton Dick, MP, Speaker of the House of Representatives, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 11 September 2024, p. 3.

¹³⁷ Dr Heggart, *Submission 13*, p. 4.

to plan a trip to Canberra and suggested that rates could be announced two years in advance to assist those schools to better plan their trips.¹³⁸

2.125 The PEO also noted that, as well as these concerns, there is a practical limit:

In calendar year 2023, over 91,000 students participated in an education program, that's both our digital and onsite programs. ... that's about 2½ per cent of the student population. At present, the office has booking capacity to offer 100 programs per week and that's both the onsite and videoconferencing programs. These are consistently fully booked and there is a waiting list which we are actively managing so if we do lose a school we can back fill that spot. The short way to say that is that there's a lot more demand than we are in a position to meet.¹³⁹

Digital and physical outreach

2.126 To address the inability of many schools and students to visit Canberra, many cultural institutions, including the PEO and Australia's electoral commissions, have developed outreach programs. These include online materials available for school use and physical visits to conduct in-person sessions.

2.127 The PEO offers three Australian Curriculum-aligned digital programs to students which contain classroom activities for which all materials are provided online.¹⁴⁰

2.128 Responding to the COVID-19 pandemic, the PEO also expanded its delivery of video-based courses, particularly for those schools unable to travel to Canberra. In 2023, 22 per cent of the digital programs were delivered to students in regional and remote schools.¹⁴¹ These courses have attracted strong demand following the end of travel and in-person restrictions, highlighting that the PEO will have to consider the appropriate balance between on-site and video-enabled programs in their resourcing decisions.¹⁴²

2.129 The PEO argued that, to increase the impact of their work, further expansion of their digital programs would be the best approach – addressing both the access issues and logistical challenges noted above. Currently the PEO hosts 80 in-person and 20 digital programs per week; an additional six educators and one administrative assistant would allow that to increase to 60 digital programs every week.¹⁴³

2.130 Australia's electoral commissions also offer a range of outreach programs. The AEC provided examples of some of the ways it reaches students outside of Canberra:

¹³⁸ MoAD, *Submission 102*, p. 8; DPS, *Submission 51*, p. 2.

¹³⁹ Ms Jackie Morris, Department of the Senate, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 13 September 2024, p. 7.

¹⁴⁰ PEO, *Submission 22*, p. 2.

¹⁴¹ PEO, *Submission 22.1*, p. 4.

¹⁴² Ms Jackie Morris, Department of the Senate, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 13 September 2024, p. 7.

¹⁴³ PEO, *Submission 22.1*, p. 18.

- Get Voting – an outreach program that offers schools free resources to conduct school elections using a preferential voting system.¹⁴⁴
- AEC for Schools website – provides free education resources and programs for teachers to deliver civics and electoral education.¹⁴⁵
- DemocraCity for Schools – AEC commenced its trial in July 2024 to reach schools unable to travel to Canberra, including those in regional and remote areas, and in lower socioeconomic areas. The program provides an immersive 3D electoral education video game which allows ‘students to explore the history of Australian democracy along with key election activities and concepts such as representation and ballot paper formality’.¹⁴⁶

2.131 The Victorian Electoral Commission (VEC) offers a ‘Passport to Democracy’ program which ‘supports the electoral participation of young Victorians by engaging them to achieve positive change on a community issue they care about’.¹⁴⁷ The VEC highlighted that because the program provides teachers with access to resources, teaching tools and in-person support with the preferential count if it is their first time, teachers are more confident to ‘download the lesson plan and teach it within half an hour in the classroom’.¹⁴⁸

2.132 The Northern Territory Electoral Commission (NTEC) said that it delivers an educational program in Darwin and Alice Springs called ‘Democracy Dash’:

This is a scavenger hunt type event where students dash around the city visiting about 10 civic institutions to learn more about their work and therefore democracy. Some of the stops include Parliament House, the local council, court and legal aid. The democracy dash has been running since 2017 and we now run about five or six events across Alice Springs and Darwin every year. That also includes free buses for the attending schools.¹⁴⁹

2.133 The NTEC also provides in-school electoral education sessions linked to the Australian Curriculum in civics and citizenship for different year groups and assistance for running school elections.¹⁵⁰

2.134 In addition to digital programs, the PEO engages with students in remote and regional areas who are unable to travel to Parliament House, focusing on electorates with low visitation rates to Canberra, as well as those with high levels of relative disadvantage. The PEO also provides resources to all MPs and Senators for their

¹⁴⁴ Australian Electoral Commission (AEC), *Submission 15*, p. [3].

¹⁴⁵ AEC, *Submission 15*, p. [3].

¹⁴⁶ AEC, *Submission 15*, p. [4].

¹⁴⁷ Victorian Electoral Commission, *Submission 74, Attachment A*, p. 6.

¹⁴⁸ Ms Sue Lang, Strategic Communications Adviser, Victorian Electoral Commission, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 8 August 2024, pages 30-31.

¹⁴⁹ Ms Karen Parker, Manager Corporate Information and Training, Northern Territory Electoral Commission (NTEC), *Committee Hansard*, Darwin, 24 July 2024, p. 1.

¹⁵⁰ Ms Parker, NTEC, *Committee Hansard*, Darwin, 24 July 2024, p. 1.

use when they visit schools and other groups within their own electorate, as well as directly to teachers.¹⁵¹

- 2.135 In the last three years, the PEO has travelled to Perth (four electorates, 2022), Western Sydney (two electorates, 2023) and the NT (two electorates, 2024) and provided their program to a combined total of just over 1000 students.¹⁵²
- 2.136 Additionally, since 2022, the Speaker of the House of Representatives, the Hon. Milton Dick MP, has implemented a Parliament in Schools program. The Speaker works with local Members to visit schools to make civics education accessible to more students, especially those who can't visit Canberra. Since September 2022, the program has visited over 125 schools across 43 electorates throughout Australia, including remote areas.¹⁵³
- 2.137 However, as the Speaker of the House of Representatives noted, 'while this has proven to be a very positive experience in practical terms, it barely scratches the surface'.¹⁵⁴

Committee comment

- 2.138 In a democracy where voting is compulsory, all Australians must be given equitable opportunities to be informed, engaged and responsible citizens who can effectively contribute to democratic processes.
- 2.139 The Committee heard many examples of stories of the focus and dedication that teachers bring to the classroom, demonstrating their ongoing commitment to improving education and awareness of civics and citizenship for Australian students. However, the current way that civics and citizenship content is taught in Australian schools is fragmented as it varies significantly across jurisdictions and even between schools. It can also depend on a single teacher within a school who is passionate about the subject.
- 2.140 As a result, many young people leave school without the knowledge and skills necessary to actively participate in Australian democracy, engage with civic practices and institutions, or understand basic processes like how to enrol to vote and cast a ballot correctly.
- 2.141 The evidence presented to the Committee identifies several factors contributing to this variability. The most significant issue is the lack of a standardised approach to civics and citizenship. This creates challenges with implementation at the state and territory level, including limited time allocation due to the subject's embeddedness in

¹⁵¹ PEO, *Submission 22*, p. 2.

¹⁵² PEO, *Submission 22.1*, p. 9.

¹⁵³ Speaker of the House of Representatives, *Submission 132*, p. 1.

¹⁵⁴ Mr Milton Dick, MP, Speaker of the House of Representatives, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 11 September 2024, p. 2.

other areas, as well as gaps in teacher training, knowledge, and confidence, relevance and practical issues.

- 2.142 There was overwhelming support from stakeholders to strengthen and nationally align the curriculum. Beyond the advantage this would provide students, teachers would have access to simpler and clearer curriculum content.
- 2.143 The Committee acknowledges that the Australian Curriculum is updated every six years and therefore the following recommendations should be considered for inclusion in the next version in 2027. This timeline should allow the Australian Government enough time to develop, trial and implement all recommendations. The Committee also notes that constitutional responsibilities do not permit the Commonwealth to be overly prescriptive in relation to the teaching of civics and citizenship. However, there is scope for a more robust and consistent approach.
- 2.144 As a first step, the civics and citizenship curriculum should be mandated nationally, requiring all states and territories to fully implement it as a standalone subject in their respective curricula.
- 2.145 The teaching of civics and citizenship in Australian schools remains significantly under-researched compared to other disciplines. This inquiry showed that there is no national body collecting data on how this subject is being delivered across the jurisdictions.
- 2.146 To address the significant gaps in oversight and consistency, ACARA and the Department of Education should be given responsibility to collect data from state and territory curriculum authorities on the implementation of the civics and citizenship curriculum. This process should focus on identifying how the curriculum is being taught, ensuring national alignment and that students are receiving at least the minimum mandatory content across Australia.
- 2.147 Data collection is essential to promote greater transparency and identify and address variations between jurisdictions, with an aim to create a robust, unified framework for a standalone civics and citizenship curriculum in the next version of the Australian Curriculum.

Recommendation 1

- 2.148 The Committee recommends that the Department of Education, in consultation with the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) and curriculum authorities in each state and territory, immediately commence investigating the viability of fully implementing and nationally aligning the civics and citizenship curriculum across Australia. This should be done with a view to creating a nationally mandated standalone civics and citizenship curriculum in the next version of the Australian Curriculum.**

Recommendation 2

- 2.149 The Committee recommends that the Australian Government, working through National Cabinet, annually collect data from each state and territory outlining how the civics and citizenship component of the Australian Curriculum is being implemented.**
- 2.150 Given the uncertain place of civics and citizenship in the Australian Curriculum, students will have very different experiences of being taught it, depending on factors including which jurisdiction they live in, what school they attend and even what teacher they have within that school. This level of variability risks undermining understanding of and engagement with Australia’s universal voting rights and compulsory voting system.
- 2.151 The current system, where significant discretion is left to individual schools and teachers, has coincided with a decline in proficiency levels. To reverse that decline and address the disparities across different school systems and individual schools, the implementation of a mandated curriculum – including a specified number of teaching hours – should be a national priority. Specifically, a minimum of 10 hours per year of civics and citizenship education should be mandated for all students in Years 9 and 10.
- 2.152 A nationally consistent curriculum would not only benefit students, but also provide teachers with a clearer, more detailed and specific curriculum to teach. Appropriately equipping teachers will be further discussed below, but a mandatory and clear curriculum, with defined time allocations, would significantly address teacher uncertainty about teaching civics and citizenship to their students.
- 2.153 The Committee recognises the progress made by some states including NSW, Victoria and SA in mandating civics and citizenship within their curricula. The Committee considers that ACARA and the Department of Education should draw on the experiences and best practices from these states as they work to nationally align the curriculum.

Recommendation 3

- 2.154 The Committee recommends that within the enhanced civics and citizenship curriculum, the Australian Government mandate a minimum of 10 hours a year of civics and citizenship education for all students nationally across Years 9 and 10.**
- 2.155 The current content of the civics and citizenship curriculum was a focus for stakeholders in this inquiry – with many expressing concerns its ‘dry’ and theoretical nature is inadequate for meaningful student engagement. A strong and consistent message from stakeholders was that the curriculum needs to be revised to better teach students both the value and mechanics of voting, as well as the relevance and importance of civics to their everyday lives. Students should be engaged through

more applied programs that integrate knowledge, student voice and motivation to create a more engaging and impactful learning experience.

- 2.156 The Committee acknowledges the flexibility of the senior secondary curriculum, which allows students to prepare for the next stage of their life. However, this stage is also a critical time for exposure to civics and citizenship education, given their proximity to voting age, and noting that for some students it will be their final opportunity for formal education.
- 2.157 The Australian Government should develop a mandatory course for all Year 11 and 12 students, regardless of their school, modelled on NSW's Life Ready course. This course would aim to equip senior students with the knowledge and skills needed to participate effectively in democratic and electoral processes.
- 2.158 To ensure the course is well-designed and effective, at least two pilot programs should be implemented across all state and territories. The findings of these pilots should inform the integration of this course into the next version of the Australian Curriculum, making it a permanent and essential component of senior secondary education.

Recommendation 4

- 2.159 The Committee recommends that the Australian Government develop a mandatory civics and citizenship course for all Year 11 and 12 students to prepare them to participate in electoral processes. Noting successful programs in some jurisdictions, a minimum of two pilot programs should commence across all states and territories by July 2026, with a view to integrating the programs in the next version of the Australian Curriculum.**
- 2.160 Teachers are being overwhelmed by a crowded and challenging curriculum which often results in civics and citizenship being deprioritised in favour of other subjects. In addition, the resources and materials available to teachers are inconsistent and often from disparate sources, making it difficult for them to access what they need.
- 2.161 The Committee heard overwhelming evidence from stakeholders that teachers need a clear and explicit curriculum, and high-quality, nationally aligned resources that provide a strong foundation for teaching civics and citizenship. As well as this, teachers must have the necessary expertise and knowledge to effectively teach this subject to all Australian students.
- 2.162 When a curriculum is mandated and streamlined, it should also become a mandatory element of teacher professional development. Strengthened professional development for teachers must include mandated civics and citizenship training, as well as components focused on debate-based education. Teachers who are confident in teaching civics and citizenship can then be more confident to lead debate on contemporary issues.

- 2.163 The Committee also considers it important that support is given to establishing a national network for teachers to promote consistency and support the sharing of best practices across Australia.

Recommendation 5

- 2.164 The Committee recommends that the Australian Government, through a standing item in National Cabinet, work with state and territory governments and teacher associations to develop and disseminate practical, high-quality and nationally aligned teacher professional development resources for the teaching of civics and citizenship to all Australian students. The new resources should be in place for the next version of the Australian Curriculum and should be reviewed and updated annually.**

Recommendation 6

- 2.165 The Committee recommends that the Australian Government, through National Cabinet, work with state and territory governments and teacher associations, to mandate civics and citizenship, and debate-based education, in all national professional development for Humanities and Social Sciences (HASS) teachers.**

- 2.166 The costs involved with organising school trips to Canberra for civics and citizenship education purposes remains a concern to the Committee, particularly for those located in lower socioeconomic or regional and remote areas. These costs often result in many students missing out on access to practical, experiential learning opportunities that can reinforce what they have learnt in the classroom.

- 2.167 The Committee heard that the additional loadings that are applied to the PACER program are announced too late in the school year for many schools in regional or remote areas to plan a trip to Canberra. In the past two years, these announcements were made in March, for that calendar year.

- 2.168 Announcing the loadings two years in advance would allow schools in regional, remote and very remote areas sufficient time to plan and organise trips to Canberra, ensuring more equitable access to these valuable educational experiences.

Recommendation 7

- 2.169 The Committee recommends that, to encourage more schools from regional, remote, and very remote areas to visit Canberra, the Australian Government announce the additional loadings to the Parliament and Civics Education Rebate (PACER) program two years in advance to assist schools in these areas to plan a visit.**

Recommendation 8

- 2.170 The Committee recommends that the Australian Government, as part of the Federal Budget process, increase the additional loadings to the PACER program to allow more schools from regional, remote and very remote areas to access trips to Canberra.**
- 2.171 With the expansion of the PACER program, Canberra's cultural institutions face increasing pressure to accommodate the growing number of student visitors. Programs are frequently fully booked, meaning that some schools are being turned away.
- 2.172 Despite PACER's focus on improving access to Canberra's cultural institutions, a trip to Canberra remains unviable for many schools due to financial or logistical challenges. For these schools, digital courses developed by cultural institutions, including the PEO at Australian Parliament House and electoral commissions, serve as the only way for students to experience the immersive learning offered.
- 2.173 To meet the high demand for both on-site and digital programs, the Committee recommends increased support for the PEO to expand its capacity to host more schools and to further develop and deliver high-quality, video-enabled programs to students nationwide.

Recommendation 9

- 2.174 The Committee recommends that the Australian Government, as part of the Federal Budget process, increase funding for the Parliamentary Education Office (PEO) at Australian Parliament House to specifically accommodate the increasing number of students visiting Canberra each year and to continue to deliver and expand digital outreach programs to students nationwide.**



3. Civics education and participation beyond the classroom

- 3.1 This chapter considers the effectiveness and limitations of the methods beyond the classroom through which Australians seek and receive education and information about Australia's democracy, electoral events and voting.
- 3.2 These methods include:
- educational resources and programs from federal, state and territory electoral commissions and media organisations
 - cultural and civic institutions including parliaments, museums and libraries
 - support from and participation in grassroots communities, community organisations and community leaders
 - alternative forms of civic and political engagement through social media, online platforms, activism, consumer and lifestyle choices, and in conversation with friends and family
 - community programs like youth parliament and the young mayors program.
- 3.3 Socio-economic status, age, geography and other factors influence the ways that people interact with and access these informal sources. Some current programs and resources support rural and remote communities, culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities, First Nations people, people with a disability and young people.

Reaching populations outside of formal education

- 3.4 There is a range of civic and cultural institutions and media organisations in Australia that provide educational information and experiences about democracy and electoral processes outside of formal schooling.
- 3.5 For example, the Museum of Australian Democracy (MoAD) receives over 200,000 visitors each year 'to participate in a range of programs, events, innovative tours and experiences which promote active citizenship and contribute to building social inclusion'.¹
- 3.6 Additionally, federal, state and territory parliaments and legislative assemblies

¹ Museum of Australian Democracy (MoAD), *Submission 102*, p. 4.

provide tours, events, seminars, education programs and online resources.²

- 3.7 The Australian Electoral Commission (AEC) and some state and territory electoral commissions gave examples of initiatives to support understanding of Australia's electoral system, the importance of voting, enrolment and turnout.³
- 3.8 The AEC undertakes initiatives concentrated in the lead up to and during electoral events, that include:
- informational advertising campaigns for traditional and social media
 - distribution of an official voting guide to households
 - educational and how-to videos on the AEC TV YouTube channel
 - information, a practice voting tool, and community education resources on the AEC website
 - education sessions in some communities
 - direct enrolment of voters to the electoral roll
 - support for a variety of ways to vote including early voting and postal voting.⁴
- 3.9 Australia's public broadcasters also provide news and analysis about Australia's political system across television, radio and online platforms. The Australian Broadcasting Corporation provides 'special broadcast coverage of elections and referendums', and tailored *Politics Explained* articles and videos 'aimed at strengthening and informing participation'.⁵
- 3.10 Some stakeholders highlighted that these sources of informal learning are limited in how effectively they reach some Australians. The Australian Public Service Commission's *Trust and Satisfaction in Australian Democracy Survey 2023* found that 49 per cent of respondents reported not receiving any form of civics education, including informal civics education.⁶
- 3.11 The AEC and NSW Electoral Commission (NSWEC) both said that resourcing levels restrict education, awareness and community engagement activities, particularly outside of electoral events.⁷ The AEC highlighted that while it conducts community

² Northern Territory Legislative Assembly (NTLA), *Submission 20*, pages 5-9; NSW Parliamentary Education and Engagement, *Submission 21*, pages 2-3; Department of Parliamentary Services, *Submission 51*, p. 4; Parliament of South Australia, *Submission 103*, pages 8-10; Clerks of the Legislative Assembly and Council at the Parliament of Victoria, *Submission 115*, p. 2.

³ Australian Electoral Commission (AEC), *Submission 15*, pages 5-15; Victorian Electoral Commission (VEC), *Submission 74, Attachment A*, pages 8-9, 13-15 and 28-40; Ms Karen Parker, Manager Corporate Information and Training, Northern Territory Electoral Commission, *Committee Hansard*, Darwin, 24 July 2024, pages 1-2, 5-6 and 9-11; NSW Electoral Commission (NSWEC), *Submission 100*, pages 4 and 7-9.

⁴ AEC, *Submission 15*, pages 5-15.

⁵ Australian Broadcasting Corporation, *Submission 76*, p. 3.

⁶ Australian Public Service Commission (2023), *Trust and Satisfaction in Australian Democracy 2023*, accessed 1 November 2024, <https://www.aspreform.gov.au/resources/trust-and-satisfaction-australian-democracy-survey-report>.

⁷ AEC, *Submission 15*, p. 19; NSWEC, *Submission 100*, p. 3.

engagement, it 'can only be achieved as much as resourcing will allow'.⁸ The NSWEC said it is 'limited' to conducting these activities during election periods due to its 'event-based funding model'.⁹

- 3.12 The Northern Territory Legislative Assembly said resources for the public 'may not align with best practice for cultural/traditional learning'.¹⁰ For example, the resources about parliament can be 'more formal than the language of most confident English speakers let alone Indigenous Australians and multicultural communities'.¹¹
- 3.13 Chapter 2 discussed ways that students living in rural, regional and remote communities in Australia can have equitable access to civics educational programs, including through outreach by some cultural and civic institutions. MoAD said that it also supports diverse and remote communities beyond formal education by offering online collections, and touring exhibitions on democracy and changemakers.¹²
- 3.14 However, opportunities like these for the broader adult population who live in these areas are limited. As a result, those that miss out on civics education at school can feel disconnected or distanced from democratic institutions.¹³
- 3.15 The Australian Lawyers Alliance and Australians for Native Title and Reconciliation (ANTaR) emphasised the importance of 'generous allocations of time and resources' when raising public awareness of electoral events in remote areas.¹⁴ It added that approaches such as prioritising local involvement, face-to-face education sessions, hands-on activities and tailored materials that include local content and targeted approaches are important 'for best results'.¹⁵
- 3.16 The Victorian Trades Hall Council (VTHC) said that voting booths in rural, regional and remote areas often face closures and are understaffed, leading to some workers 'working a 14-and-a-half-hour day due to hiring issues and/or lack of training given late recruitment'.¹⁶ It recommended that the AEC 'adequately staff booths to prevent oppressive queues and/or the potential of booth closures'.¹⁷

⁸ AEC, *Submission 15*, p. 19.

⁹ NSWEC, *Submission 100*, p. 3.

¹⁰ NTLA, *Submission 20*, p. 4.

¹¹ NTLA, *Submission 20*, p. 4.

¹² MoAD, *Submission 102*, p. 7.

¹³ Dr Sarah Moulds, *Submission 116*, p. 11.

¹⁴ Australian Lawyers Alliance and Australians for Native Title and Reconciliation (ANTaR), *Submission 24*, p. 17.

¹⁵ Australian Lawyers Alliance and ANTaR, *Submission 24*, p. 17.

¹⁶ Victorian Trades Hall Council (VTHC), *Submission 86*, p. 17.

¹⁷ VTHC, *Submission 86*, p. 17.

Barriers to civics education and electoral participation for vulnerable groups

- 3.17 Some groups face greater barriers preventing them from receiving civics education and engaging in political participation, including CALD communities, First Nations people, and people with disability.
- 3.18 This section considers the accessibility and effectiveness of current support available, and how government can better assist these groups outside of formal education.

Culturally and linguistically diverse communities

- 3.19 CALD communities face several barriers to political participation and effectively engaging with civics education materials, including:
- low English proficiency and literacy, which makes accessing English resources and participation more challenging
 - a lack of familiarity with Australia's complex political system, which is often different to migrants' and refugees' previous experiences of government
 - trauma from political engagement in their country of origin or a hesitancy to speak out due to different cultural expectations, political ideologies or experiences
 - economic instability, including unemployment and a lack of housing
 - logistical barriers, such as a lack of transport, inconsistent access to digital devices and the internet, and lack of time due to multiple jobs or family responsibilities.¹⁸
- 3.20 Although CALD populations contribute to Australia's 'national strength and vitality'¹⁹ and make significant contributions to civic life and their communities,²⁰ they tend to record the highest rates of informal votes.²¹

Civics education in grassroots CALD communities

- 3.21 There are a range of federal government programs delivered through community organisations that support migrants and refugees, including for immediate settlement needs, to learn English, and to find employment. Some of these programs include the Humanitarian Settlement Program, the Settlement Engagement and Transition

¹⁸ Department of Home Affairs, *Submission 85*, p. 15; AMES Australia, *Submission 63*, p. 5; Federation of Ethnic Communities' Councils of Australia (FECCA), *Submission 118*, p. 3; Dr Edwin Joseph, President, Multicultural Council of the Northern Territory (MCNT), *Committee Hansard*, Darwin, 24 July 2024, p. 22; Mr Eddie Micallef, Chairperson, Ethnic Communities Council of Victoria, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 8 August 2024, p. 36; Settlement Council of Australia (SCOA), *Submission 98*, p. 8.

¹⁹ Department of Home Affairs, *Submission 85*, p. 3.

²⁰ SCOA, *Submission 98*, p. 4.

²¹ Mr Tom Rogers, Electoral Commissioner, AEC, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 23 May 2024, p. 21.

Support program, the Adult Migrant English Program, and Australia's citizenship program.²²

- 3.22 However, feedback from stakeholders suggests these programs do not deliver focused or consistent civics education or reach all new arrivals.²³ The Settlement Council of Australia (SCOA) emphasised that settlement services are mostly funded to support individuals with early settlement needs.²⁴
- 3.23 SCOA, the Federation of Ethnic Communities' Councils of Australia (FECCA) and Multicultural Council of the Northern Territory agreed that the citizenship test is not the right way to provide civics education in meaningful depth as participants are preoccupied with passing the test.²⁵ FECCA argued that the ideal time for civics education is after participants have been granted citizenship, when they feel inspired and have more capacity to engage.²⁶
- 3.24 Stakeholders called for ongoing and more in-depth civics education for CALD communities, delivered outside of settlement and election time.²⁷ For example, the Chinese Australian Forum described a series of six grant-funded civics education workshops for Chinese migrants.²⁸
- 3.25 There was support for further civics education to be delivered in partnership with CALD community hubs.²⁹ For example, AMES Australia recommended providing information and education in places where communities are 'already engaged', such as multicultural centres and existing services due to 'established trust and understanding of the needs of communities'.³⁰
- 3.26 Similarly, when asked who would be best placed to deliver civics education to communities, Wyndham Community and Education Centre (CEC) said:

It would be good to have a partnership with the AEC, but the delivery by trusted local, place-based organisations is going to cut through better.³¹

²² SCOA, *Submission 98*, p. 8; Department of Home Affairs, *Submission 85*, p. 9.

²³ AMES Australia, *Submission 63*, p. 2; SCOA, *Submission 98*, p. 8; Ms Maria Tsopanis, Senior Manager, Community Development and Social Participation, AMES Australia, *Committee Hansard*, Melbourne, 16 October 2024, p. 34; Mr John Sheen, Deputy Chief Executive Officer, Wyndham Community and Education Centre (CEC), *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 7 August 2024, p. 2; Ms Sandra Elhelw, Chief Executive Officer, SCOA, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 19 June 2024, p. 21.

²⁴ SCOA, *Submission 98*, p. 8.

²⁵ SCOA, *Submission 98*, p. 6; Dr Joseph, MCNT, *Committee Hansard*, Darwin, 24 July 2024, p. 24; Ms Padmapriya Muralidharan, Senior Policy and Projects Officer, Federation of Ethnic Communities' Councils of Australia (FECCA), *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 8 August 2024, pages 37 and 40.

²⁶ Ms Muralidharan, FECCA, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 8 August 2024, pages 37 and 40.

²⁷ SCOA, *Submission 98*, p. 6; AMES Australia, *Submission 63*, p. 2; Dr Fan Yang and Associate Professor Sukhmani Khorana, *Submission 127*, p. 6.

²⁸ Chinese Australian Forum (CAF), *Submission 47*, pages [2]-[3].

²⁹ Youth Decide Australia, *Submission 80*, p. 4; SCOA, *Submission 98*, p. 2; Ms Preethi Vergis, Chief Executive Officer, The Learning Shop, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 7 August 2024, pages 8-9; CAF, *Submission 47*, p. [3].

³⁰ AMES Australia, *Submission 63*, p. 5.

³¹ Mr Sheen, Wyndham CEC, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 7 August 2024, p. 3.

- 3.27 The Parliament of Victoria said that working in partnership with community organisations is often more effective because it can leverage established networks and spread resources ‘across a range of activities’.³²
- 3.28 SCOA told the Committee that information sessions and workshops about civic participation hosted by community and ethnic organisations ‘can be more effective than written materials’ as they allow ‘opportunities for face-to-face learning and discussion’.³³

Providing accessible and culturally suitable information to CALD communities

- 3.29 To support informed participation in electoral processes by CALD communities, civic institutions and public broadcasters provide a range of targeted information and initiatives. For example, the AEC provides ‘information, advertising, and videos in up to 34 international languages’ and in-language community education sessions.³⁴
- 3.30 The Special Broadcasting Service (SBS) said it provides news and educational content in over 60 languages, such as the *Australia Explained* settlement guide that includes weekly articles, podcasts and videos containing advice about life in Australia, including some civics content.³⁵
- 3.31 However, access to appropriate information and education is still a barrier to CALD communities’ civic understanding and engagement.³⁶ A focus group of 32 community leaders from 20 key migrant communities by AMES Australia found that more than 80 per cent believed there are not enough accessible information and education resources about Australia’s electoral system.³⁷
- 3.32 Research by Dr Fan Yang and Associate Professor Sukhmani Khorana on political participation of Chinese and South Asian communities found that information from the AEC is not always ‘linguistically or culturally accessible to new migrants’.³⁸ The academics noted that the ‘primary issue’ with existing information seems to be that it is ‘translated and presented in a formal and rigid manner by authoritative personnel or sources’ that lack familiarity with ‘cultural and linguistic norms’.³⁹
- 3.33 To demonstrate this point, Dr Yang and Associate Professor Khorana described the following example:

... research on the coverage of the 2023 Voice referendum on WeChat revealed that informational text-based content from the AEC and the Australian Government received low engagement from Chinese-speaking voters despite

³² Mr Andres Lomp, Community Engagement Manager, Parliament of Victoria, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 8 August 2024, pages 7-8.

³³ SCOA, *Submission 98*, p. 6.

³⁴ AEC, *Submission 15*, pages 12-13.

³⁵ SBS, *Submission 130*, pages 1, 2 and 9.

³⁶ Dr Yang and Associate Professor Khorana, *Submission 127*, p. 4.

³⁷ AMES Australia, *Exhibit 8*, ‘Community voices: AMES’ ‘Pulse’ community sentiment surveys’, p. 1.

³⁸ Dr Yang and Associate Professor Khorana, *Submission 127*, p. 14.

³⁹ Dr Yang and Associate Professor Khorana, *Submission 127*, p. 15.

being available in Chinese translation. The interview with Carina Garland, MP for Chisholm, and Attorney-General Mark Dreyfus published on WeChat's short video feature through the Victorian Labor Party's account garnered only 25 shares despite having Chinese subtitles. In contrast, a pro-No campaign video in the form of casual conversation produced by a Chinese migrant received 10,000 reposts within 24 hours of publication.⁴⁰

- 3.34 Other barriers faced by some CALD communities include a lack of awareness of resources, difficulties accessing online resources, and shortages of translated materials in-language for smaller or newer migrant groups.⁴¹
- 3.35 Stakeholders recommended the government develop more accessible and culturally appropriate civic resources and distribute them through grassroots community networks and in places where CALD communities are already engaged.⁴²
- 3.36 AMES Australia recommended developing translated materials that can be easily shared on 'multiple media outlets including social media, WhatsApp, ethnic or community radio and newspapers'.⁴³ Materials should be provided in simple audio, visual and infographic formats with less focus placed on written resources.⁴⁴
- 3.37 Similarly, SCOA recommended expanding translated materials for smaller migrant groups, and learning from how governments and communities provided COVID-19 materials in a wider variety of formats: text, image, audio and video.⁴⁵
- 3.38 Dr Yang and Associate Professor Khorana highlighted that government agencies' communication strategies should 'go beyond simple information translation and tokenism'.⁴⁶ Materials should be 'embedded' within the unique and diverse 'social and cultural norms of migrant communities'.⁴⁷
- 3.39 NSWEC provided an example of how it partnered with the Ethnic Communities' Council of NSW for the 2023 NSW State Election. The Vote Talk program consisted of community-led in-language engagement and communication initiatives to increase awareness and strengthen electoral participation of CALD language groups across Western Sydney. It included in-language podcasts, community engagement sessions run by bilingual facilitators and in-language messages on community radio.⁴⁸
- 3.40 Following engagement with the program, NSWEC said that confidence in and knowledge of voting options at the state election increased from 28.6 per cent to 86.7

⁴⁰ Dr Yang and Associate Professor Khorana, *Submission 127*, p. 14.

⁴¹ AMES Australia, *Submission 63*, p. 3; Dr Joseph, MCNT, *Committee Hansard*, Darwin, 24 July 2024, p. 23; VTHC, *Submission 86*, p. 15; SCOA, *Submission 98*, p. 6.

⁴² Law Council of Australia, *Submission 109*, pages 23-24; VTHC, *Submission 86*, p. 15; AMES Australia, *Submission 63*, p. 5; SCOA, *Submission 98*, p. 7.

⁴³ AMES Australia, *Submission 63*, p. 3.

⁴⁴ Ms Tsopanis, AMES Australia, *Committee Hansard*, Melbourne, 16 October 2024, p. 30.

⁴⁵ SCOA, *Submission 98*, p. 7.

⁴⁶ Dr Yang and Associate Professor Khorana, *Submission 127*, p. 5.

⁴⁷ Dr Yang and Associate Professor Khorana, *Submission 127*, p. 5.

⁴⁸ NSWEC, *Submission 100*, pages 7-8.

per cent.⁴⁹ Of 13 targeted districts with high CALD populations, voter turnout was improved or maintained in seven districts.⁵⁰

- 3.41 NSWEC emphasised the importance of community-led engagement ‘in addressing the barriers CALD voters face during election periods’.⁵¹ It undertook another community partnership for the 2024 NSW Local Government elections.⁵²

The role of grassroots leaders in the community

- 3.42 For members of many CALD communities, particularly new arrivals, their community leaders and networks are trusted sources of information and avenues to participate in civic life.⁵³
- 3.43 The AEC said it engages with and upskills multicultural community leaders in electoral processes, with 95 per cent of community leaders it engaged with then sharing materials with their communities.⁵⁴
- 3.44 As a result of this success, the AEC said it will pilot deploying Multicultural Community Electoral Participation Officers (CEPOs) to deliver culturally suitable education and outreach to CALD communities with persistently low formality and low voter turnout for the 2025 Federal Election.⁵⁵
- 3.45 While stakeholders welcomed AEC’s pilot of Multicultural CEPOs, they also emphasised the importance of co-designing resources with community leaders to produce culturally appropriate materials.⁵⁶ FECCA said that involving trusted community leaders will ensure that programs ‘fully understand, reflect and serve the diverse needs of multicultural communities’.⁵⁷
- 3.46 In October 2024, the Committee visited multicultural groups in Melton, Victoria to learn more about political participation of CALD communities. These groups similarly reported that working with grassroots community leaders and organisations is an effective way to build the knowledge of CALD communities.
- 3.47 AMES Australia recommended an ‘Ambassador or Champion’ model to provide first language support to CALD community members prior to voting time as the model has previously been successful in ‘other sensitive settings’.⁵⁸ It also suggested:

Building the capacity of community and religious leaders to be a conduit to provide culturally diverse communities with accurate and impartial information, or

⁴⁹ NSWEC, *Submission 100*, p. 8.

⁵⁰ NSWEC, *Submission 100*, p. 5.

⁵¹ NSWEC, *Submission 100*, pages 7-8.

⁵² NSWEC, *Submission 100*, p. 8.

⁵³ FECCA, *Submission 118*, pages 4-5.; SCOA, *Submission 98*, pages 4 and 6.

⁵⁴ AEC, *Submission 15*, p. 11.

⁵⁵ AEC, *Submission 15*, p. 13.

⁵⁶ Ms Muralidharan, FECCA, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 8 August 2024, p. 37; Queensland University of Technology, *Submission 36*, p. [7]; SCOA, *Submission 98*, p. 7.

⁵⁷ FECCA, *Submission 118*, pages 3-5.

⁵⁸ AMES Australia, *Submission 63*, p. 6.

ways to access sources of information about democracy, electoral events, and voting.⁵⁹

3.48 Wyndham CEC said that it has an ambassador-style program for leaders from local multicultural communities ‘to learn through experience how to navigate civic systems’ in partnership with government agencies and services.⁶⁰ Wyndham CEC added:

... this idea of experiential learning, identifying spokespeople, community leaders, and giving them an opportunity to experience the mainstream services and then forming a community of practice to actually take those learnings back to their own communities is, I think, a very powerful way to actually engage with Australian mainstream services, whether it's civics and the electoral system or it's around justice, health and education.⁶¹

First Nations communities

3.49 Poor educational outcomes can significantly impact political engagement and lead to feelings of disenfranchisement. This is especially significant for First Nations people, particularly those living in remote communities.⁶²

3.50 Stakeholders to the inquiry identified several barriers that limit First Nations people’s access to adequate civics education and participation in electoral events. These barriers include:

- historical disadvantage
- culturally inappropriate education
- language barriers
- socio-economic barriers such as poverty, job insecurity, poor housing and stability
- ongoing systemic discrimination
- negative experiences with and distrust of government
- feelings of exclusion from the political system.⁶³

3.51 During the inquiry, the Committee travelled to Northern Australia to hear directly from First Nations communities in remote areas such as Maningrida in the Northern Territory (NT). Formal education in the NT was discussed in Chapter 2 of this report.

⁵⁹ AMES Australia, *Submission 63*, p. 3.

⁶⁰ Mr Sheen, Wyndham CEC, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 7 August 2024, p. 1.

⁶¹ Mr Sheen, Wyndham CEC, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 7 August 2024, p. 2.

⁶² Tauondi Aboriginal Corporation (Tauondi Aboriginal College), *Submission 71*, p. 3; Law Council of Australia, *Submission 109*, p. 17; Australian Lawyers Alliance and ANTaR, *Submission 24*, p. 8; Australian Human Rights Commission (AHRC), *Submission 117*, p. 18.

⁶³ Tauondi Aboriginal Corporation (Tauondi Aboriginal College), *Submission 71*, p. 4; AHRC, *Submission 117*, p. 18.

- 3.52 In contrast to many other Australian jurisdictions, most First Nations people in the NT live in remote or very remote areas.⁶⁴ Stakeholders in Maningrida raised that the distance and isolation of these communities as well as language barriers, can make it challenging for First Nations people to feel a meaningful connection to government and parliament.
- 3.53 For example, when asked about awareness of Canberra and our democratic system, Bawinanga Aboriginal Corporation said that ‘they’re just not concepts that make any sense here’:
- And the culture—people are speaking language; they don't speak a lot of English. The older age group does, but the younger age group doesn't. And it's very difficult for them to understand concepts—or what happens outside of Maningrida. There's very little knowledge of what the rest of the real world is.⁶⁵
- 3.54 Nja-Marleya Cultural Leaders and Justice Group said that across Arnhem Land there are 280 languages, and for some First Nations people, English is their fifth language, making cultural liaison and translating ‘a big job’.⁶⁶
- 3.55 The Australian Human Rights Commission (AHRC) emphasised that information key to decision-making should not only be made physically accessible ‘but also in an appropriate language and format’.⁶⁷
- 3.56 Young adult residents in Maningrida also face barriers receiving information and education on civics if they miss out on those subjects at school. Bawinanga Aboriginal Corporation said that more assistance is needed to educate the broader community:
- ... there are no registered training providers in Maningrida. If we're going to tackle young adults and help educate them or give them information, we really need more assistance in the community to provide some community awareness and education, because there's only a small group that go to school regularly and get that information, and if they miss those subjects then that's it. For the rest of their lives they're not going to get that information.⁶⁸
- 3.57 When it comes time to vote in electoral events, First Nations living in remote communities face additional barriers to participating. There is a disproportionately high number of people who are ‘highly mobile’, meaning that they do not have access to a fixed address, reliable internet or mobile connectivity. Cultural obligations, such

⁶⁴ Mr David Astalosh, Interim Governance, Strategy and Communications General Manager, Northern Land Council (NLC), *Committee Hansard*, Darwin, 24 July 2024, p. 14.

⁶⁵ Ms Amanda Ewart, Acting Chief Executive Officer, Bawinanga Aboriginal Corporation, *Committee Hansard*, Maningrida, 23 July 2024, p. 2.

⁶⁶ Mr Garth Malwurja Doolan, Deputy Chair, Nja-Marleya Cultural Leaders and Justice Group, *Committee Hansard*, Maningrida, 23 July 2024, pages 4 and 6.

⁶⁷ AHRC, *Submission 117*, p. 18.

⁶⁸ Ms Ewart, Bawinanga Aboriginal Corporation, *Committee Hansard*, Maningrida, 23 July 2024, p. 5.

as funerals and not being able to leave the house, often take priority. This means that many people may often miss out on voting during elections.⁶⁹

- 3.58 The Central Land Council (CLC) said that to ensure that voter turnout is higher, there needs to be ‘a considered approach to supporting remote communities to learn and engage with civics education, political processes and community engagement activities’.⁷⁰ CLC pointed to some examples:

... studies that have drawn a correlation between when the federal government abolished the Aboriginal electoral engagement program in 1996 and the steady decline that occurred in voter turnout in remote communities from that point in time. Another example was when ATSIC undertook their 2002 elections. They ran an educational campaign in parallel with that, called ‘The Right to Be Heard’, and voter turnout in Central Australia increased by 11.1 per cent. Also, CLC ran an education and advocacy campaign regarding the 2023 Voice referendum, and voter turnout improved to 73 per cent, compared to 66.8 per cent at the 2022 federal election. So we know that, when those things are run in parallel—an education campaign—voter turnout increases.⁷¹

- 3.59 Many stakeholders, including the Mala’la Health Service Aboriginal Corporation and Nja-Marleya Cultural Leaders and Justice Group, agreed that the AEC should visit earlier and invest time in remote communities to talk to community leaders and local grassroots organisations about upcoming elections.⁷²
- 3.60 VTHC said that AEC funding cuts has meant that staff are sometimes ‘only present for as little as two hours during an entire election period’ in Lingiari.⁷³ It emphasised that this ‘would never occur in an urban or regional setting where voters have weeks to cast their vote’.⁷⁴
- 3.61 AEC said that in remote polling places it provides a short explanatory video in 22 First Nations languages and ‘temporary election workers at polling places that reflect the diversity of the local community’.⁷⁵ The AEC also described its targeted education initiatives including local electoral education sessions, the employment of local

⁶⁹ AHRC, *Submission 117*, p. 18; Mr Malwurja Doolan, Nja-Marleya Cultural Leaders and Justice Group, *Committee Hansard*, Maningrida, 23 July 2024, p. 3; Australian Lawyers Alliance and ANTaR, *Submission 24*, p. 19.

⁷⁰ Ms Christine Williamson, Senior Policy Officer, Central Land Council (CLC), *Committee Hansard*, Darwin, 24 July 2024, p. 12.

⁷¹ Ms Williamson, CLC, *Committee Hansard*, Darwin, 24 July 2024, p. 12.

⁷² Ms Valda Bokmakarray, Board Member, Mala’la Health Service Aboriginal Corporation, *Committee Hansard*, Maningrida, 23 July 2024, p. 3; Seide Ramadani, Chief Executive Officer, Nja-Marleya Cultural Leaders and Justice Group, *Committee Hansard*, Maningrida, 23 July 2024, p. 7; Mr Astalosh, NLC, *Committee Hansard*, Darwin, 24 July 2024, p. 17; VTHC, *Submission 86*, p. 16; Australian Lawyers Alliance and ANTaR, *Submission 24*, p. 19.

⁷³ VTHC, *Submission 86*, p. 16.

⁷⁴ VTHC, *Submission 86*, p. 16.

⁷⁵ AEC, *Submission 15*, p. 11.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander CEPOs, and plans to deliver a new research-informed electoral education program for the 2025 Federal Election.⁷⁶

- 3.62 The NT Electoral Commission (NTEC) said that engagement for the election runs over a 19-week period and is delivered in over 70 remote communities. NTEC added that:

While in community, our teams check and update voter enrolments. We provide information about the election and voting processes. We are meeting with local organisations and stakeholders to seek their assistance in engaging voters at election time when we return to the community and we are consulting with the community members to improve the delivery of voting services, including the best location for voting centres and how best to communicate election information. We also try to recruit local election assistants to work with remote voting teams when they return, particularly for in-language support.⁷⁷

- 3.63 CLC praised the NTEC for its ‘commitment to producing online resources in Aboriginal people’s first languages’,⁷⁸ stating that ‘these are important steps in a range of measures that need to be pursued to enhance engagement with electoral processes’.⁷⁹
- 3.64 However, the Committee is aware that the responsibility for this work in remote communities shouldn’t rest solely on local organisations. For example, Bawinanga Aboriginal Corporation said that it was disappointed that the expectation was ‘back on the corporation that somehow it’s our responsibility to go out and tell people and get everyone to vote, when we’ve got enough to do’.⁸⁰
- 3.65 Many stakeholders emphasised the importance of tailored voting assistance for First Nations people.⁸¹ VTHC recommended ‘more stringent practices for remote polling booths to ensure the most vulnerable electorates, especially in the NT, are receiving ample time, notice and resources to be able to vote’.⁸²
- 3.66 The Australian Lawyers Alliance and ANTaR similarly recommended the establishment of “roaming” mobile polling booths in remote and very remote areas that are available for longer periods during the day to ensure maximum accessibility’.⁸³
- 3.67 First Nations people may often feel reluctant to vote because they feel that parliament and government do not truly address or represent the needs of their

⁷⁶ AEC, *Submission 15*, pages 8-9.

⁷⁷ Ms Parker, NTEC, *Committee Hansard*, Darwin, 24 July 2024, pages 1-2.

⁷⁸ Central Land Council (CLC), *Submission 129*, p. 2.

⁷⁹ CLC, *Submission 129*, p. 2.

⁸⁰ Ms Ewart, Bawinanga Aboriginal Corporation, *Committee Hansard*, Maningrida, 23 July 2024, p. 4.

⁸¹ Law Council of Australia, *Submission 109*, p. 24; Australian Lawyers Alliance and ANTaR, *Submission 24*, p. 20; VTHC, *Submission 86*, p. 16.

⁸² VTHC, *Submission 86*, p. 16.

⁸³ Australian Lawyers Alliance and ANTaR, *Submission 24*, p. 20.

communities.⁸⁴ First Nations people may also feel that their influence within the electoral system is limited.⁸⁵

- 3.68 CLC, among others, emphasised that a holistic approach to addressing system problems needs to be taken, as committed to in the National Agreement on Closing the Gap.⁸⁶ CLC said:

There exists a role for government not only to work alongside land councils and other Aboriginal community controlled organisations to support civics education but also to work in genuine partnership that fosters shared decision-making, as per the government's commitment to closing the gap.⁸⁷

- 3.69 Stakeholders to the inquiry also discussed pathways to better encourage civic engagement among First Nations youth. The Australian Youth Affairs Coalition (AYAC) said that it is important to consider the context that young people from First Nations backgrounds are facing:

Research indicates that young people from CALD and First Nations backgrounds continue to face frequent racism and discrimination, impacting experiences of belonging and citizenship.⁸⁸

- 3.70 AYAC said that multicultural youth leadership programs are a positive way to engage diverse young people as they are 'more likely to possess a sense of responsibility and civic involvement in their immediate communities and family networks'.⁸⁹ It recommended funding should be increased to youth leadership programs for diverse youth, particularly in areas with low voter turnout.⁹⁰

- 3.71 The Australian Lawyers Alliance and ANTaR also noted the importance of community-based civics education delivered through 'community hubs, youth organisations, festivals, sporting events, community events and other relevant locations that young people frequent'.⁹¹

People with disability

- 3.72 People with disability face many barriers preventing them from engaging with and participating in the electoral process such as the assumption they do not have capacity, a lack of support to vote, low expectations from family or disability

⁸⁴ AHRC, *Submission 117*, p. 18; The Y, *Submission 104*, p. 9.

⁸⁵ AHRC, *Submission 117*, p. 18; Mr Astalosh, NLC, *Committee Hansard*, Darwin, 24 July 2024, p. 19.

⁸⁶ Ms Williamson, CLC, *Committee Hansard*, Darwin, 24 July 2024, p. 13; Australian Lawyers Alliance and ANTaR, *Submission 24*, p. 22; Tauondi Aboriginal Corporation (Tauondi Aboriginal College), *Submission 71*, pages 5-6.

⁸⁷ Ms Williamson, CLC, *Committee Hansard*, Darwin, 24 July 2024, p. 13.

⁸⁸ Australian Youth Affairs Coalition (AYAC), *Submission 53*, p. 8.

⁸⁹ AYAC, *Submission 53*, p. 8.

⁹⁰ AYAC, *Submission 53*, p. 9.

⁹¹ Australian Lawyers Alliance and ANTaR, *Submission 24*, p. 14.

organisation staff, transport issues and a lack of accessible information to support their decision making.⁹²

- 3.73 Removal from the electoral roll also continues to be a barrier for some people with disability. Section 93 of the *Commonwealth Electoral Act 1918* (Electoral Act) prevents the enrolment or right to vote to ‘a person who, by reason of being of unsound mind, is incapable of understanding the nature and significance of enrolment and voting’.⁹³
- 3.74 The Australian Federation of Disability Organisations (AFDO) said that due to this provision, many people with disability, particularly those with intellectual disability or cognitive impairments, may be ‘unjustly [denied] the fundamental right to vote’.⁹⁴
- 3.75 Down Syndrome Australia said that once removed, ‘it can be complicated to return to the electoral roll’.⁹⁵
- 3.76 Data from the AEC revealed that in the five years from 2019 to 2024, almost 81,000 people were removed from the electoral roll under the ‘unsound mind’ provision.⁹⁶ It added that 91 per cent of those people were aged 70 and over.⁹⁷
- 3.77 The Committee’s *Inquiry into the conduct of the 2022 federal election and other matters* considered this issue and made a recommendation to repeal the relevant sections in the Electoral Act accordingly.⁹⁸ The Committee also made a number of recommendations to better support people with disability to vote.⁹⁹
- 3.78 The AEC and NSWEC told the Committee about ways that they make enrolling and voting more accessible for people with disability. For example, the AEC said it offers the following support:
- Easy Read guides on how to enrol and vote
 - ReadSpeaker on the AEC website, which allows people to listen to information including information on how to vote
 - videos which focus on oral explanation of topics such as what to expect at a polling place, how to access a postal vote, and ballot paper formality
 - an education program for people who have a learning disability
 - flipbooks at polling places

⁹² Down Syndrome Australia (DSA), *Submission 43*, p. 3; Australian Federation of Disability Organisations (AFDO), *Submission 107*, p. 14.

⁹³ *Commonwealth Electoral Act 1918*, s. 93(8)(a).

⁹⁴ AFDO, *Submission 107*, pages 5-6.

⁹⁵ DSA, *Submission 43*, p. 3.

⁹⁶ AEC, *Submission 15.3*, p. 1.

⁹⁷ AEC, *Submission 15.3*, p. 1.

⁹⁸ Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters, *Conduct of the 2022 federal election and other matters, Final report*, November 2023, p. 105.

⁹⁹ Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters, *Conduct of the 2022 federal election and other matters, Final report*, November 2023, pages 105-107.

- Auslan video on the importance of enrolling to vote
 - telephone voting for people who are blind or have low vision
 - an Official Guide sent to every household prior to a referendum or election, which is available in large print, e-text, MP3 audio files/CD, DAISY and Braille.¹⁰⁰
- 3.79 The NSWEC provides resources including an Auslan election video series, audio description opening messages for awareness videos, easy-read guides and a 'Your right to vote' video.¹⁰¹
- 3.80 AFDO said that the Victorian Electoral Commission (VEC) implemented a capacity building initiative to upskill staff in two disability organisations to increase their awareness of voting and assist them to support people with an intellectual disability to vote. The initiative led to an increase in the number of people who had enrolled and voted.¹⁰²

Young people

- 3.81 Young people in Australia are increasingly disengaged and distrustful of formal political institutions.¹⁰³ While their enrolment rates remain lower than the average enrolment rate across all age groups, young people demonstrate strong motivation to engage with political issues that resonate with them personally.¹⁰⁴
- 3.82 Young peoples' civic participation often takes place through informal and non-traditional avenues which are frequently overlooked or undervalued. This is despite serving as important alternative pathways to engage with civic issues and ultimately driving their electoral participation.¹⁰⁵
- 3.83 This section examines how young people can be better supported to develop not just the knowledge for informed civic participation, but an appreciation for democratic values and institutions.

¹⁰⁰ AEC, *Submission 15.2*, pages 1-2.

¹⁰¹ NSWEC, *Submission 100*, p. 8.

¹⁰² AFDO, *Submission 107*, pages 14-15.

¹⁰³ The Y, *Submission 104*, p. 9; Youth Decide Australia, *Submission 80*, p. 1; Australian Historical Association, *Submission 84*, p. 3; South Australian Commissioner for Children and Young People (CCYP), *Submission 26*, pages 10-11; Curtin Youth, *Submission 93*, p. 5; Law Council of Australia, *Submission 109*, p. 20.

¹⁰⁴ AEC, *Submission 15.1*, p. 1; The Y, *Submission 104*, p. 4; AYAC, *Submission 53*, p. 3; Monash University Centre for Youth Policy and Education Practice (CYPEP), *Submission 42*, p. 7.

¹⁰⁵ AYAC, *Submission 53*, p. 3; The Y, *Submission 104*, p. 11; Youth Affairs Council of South Australia (YACSA), *Submission 88*, pages 3-4; Curtin Youth, *Submission 93*, pages 5 and 7; Run For It, *Submission 56*, p. 4.

Political participation and learning

Box 3.1 Student responses to the survey question: ‘What part of civics do you think are important?’

‘Civics education is currently generally confined (in my experience) to the internal procedures of government, so I think it would be greatly beneficial to expand this to include students engagement with politicians on issues that matter to them (on an individual level, both within and outside of school). Ideally, civics education creates informed young Australians who are aware of the mechanisms available to them to hold politicians accountable.’ – Year 12, public school, major city, NSW.

‘You are focusing too much on the professional landscape of civics, not at the social and current events or happenings in our political landscape.’ – Year 10, public school, regional area, WA.

‘All these things can be seen as boring to most students, but they are important to know, and should be taught in an interesting way. even though high school students are older, they are still just kids. you wouldn't teach a two-year-old the alphabet by getting him to write it off a PowerPoint or whiteboard, you would do it in an engaging way...’ – Year 10, public school, regional area, WA.

- 3.84 While showing signs of disengagement and distrust, young people remain motivated about political issues that are relevant or important to them by taking part in, and learning through, alternative forms of civic and political engagement.¹⁰⁶ These expressions of civic engagement include discussions through social media or with friends and family, participating in protests and campaigns such as boycotts or petitions, or joining interest groups.¹⁰⁷
- 3.85 The Australian Council for Student Voice highlighted an example of recent civic participation by young people:
- Young people have both an interest in, and a commitment to participatory democracy. You only have to look at collective actions such as the School Strike 4 Climate to see evidence of students mobilising in civic action.¹⁰⁸
- 3.86 Results from the National Assessment Program – Civics and Citizenship (NAP-CC) assessment cycle in 2019 also found that Year 10 students place importance on social-movement citizenship actions.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁶ AYAC, *Submission 53*, p. 3; The Y, *Submission 104*, p. 4; CYPEP, *Submission 42*, pages 3 and 6-7; Next25, *Submission 65*, p. 3; South Australian CCYP, *Submission 26*, p. 11.

¹⁰⁷ AYAC, *Submission 53*, p. 7; The Y, *Submission 104*, p. 11; Run For It, *Submission 56*, p. 4; Mr Aiden Senaratne, Cairns Youth Council, Foundation for Young Australians (FYA), *Committee Hansard*, Cairns, 25 July 2024, p. 7; Civic Engagement Youth Advisory Group, *Submission 44*, p. [5]; Advocate for Children and Young People (ACYP), *Submission 75*, p. [5]; Curtin Youth, *Submission 93*, p. 7; CYPEP, *Submission 42*, pages 7 and 9; VEC, *Submission 74, Attachment A*, p. 5.

¹⁰⁸ Australian Council for Student Voice (ACSV), *Submission 30*, p. 1.

¹⁰⁹ Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority, *NAP-CC 2019 Public Report*, p. 74.

3.87 Many stakeholders emphasised it is important to value young people's different forms of and motivations for civic engagement, and that government should seek to engage them through these methods.¹¹⁰ The Monash University Centre for Youth Policy and Education Practice (CYPEP) argued:

Young people are not apathetic nor disengaged. Rather, their particular relationships with civic and political participation should be acknowledged. For example, rather than asking why young people are not enrolling to vote, we should be asking what young people do care about. Such an understanding can be used to better communicate with and engage young people, by connecting civic processes to the issues that matter to them.¹¹¹

3.88 There was strong support for approaches that encouraged active participation among diverse young people, extending opportunities beyond the usual groups who are typically engaged in these initiatives.¹¹²

3.89 Dr Sarah Moulds called for 'accessible, inclusive and empowering' engagement strategies that 'go beyond the 'usual suspects', and that experiment with new ways of presenting information'.¹¹³ Examples include facilitating youth access to public inquiries, and a 'Parliament Week' event series that brings the parliament to the people by holding local events.¹¹⁴

3.90 Both CYPEP and the South Australian (SA) Commissioner for Children and Young People (CCYP) emphasised that young people are more likely to value project-based, active citizenship,¹¹⁵ with the South Australian CCYP recommending engagement outside of 'existing governance structures of councils, advisory groups and committees'.¹¹⁶

3.91 Curtin Youth recommended providing 'more appropriate and appealing opportunities' for young people to engage in civics like participatory budgeting, citizens' juries and government-led youth volunteer projects.¹¹⁷

3.92 Dr Moulds and the Law Council of Australia also called for evidence-based programs that are driven by research about how to better reach young people whose perspectives are not being heard.¹¹⁸ Dr Moulds highlighted the consequences of not doing this:

... it remains unclear whether these systems are addressing or entrenching the social divides that are contributing to marginalisation and exclusion. Without this

¹¹⁰ South Australian CCYP, *Submission 26*, pages 2 and 12-23; CYPEP, *Submission 42*, pages 4 and 7-10; AYAC, *Submission 53*, p. 3.

¹¹¹ CYPEP, *Submission 42*, p. 7.

¹¹² The Y, *Submission 104*, p. 5; South Australian CCYP, *Submission 26*, pages 12-14; CYPEP, *Submission 42*, pages 13-14.

¹¹³ Dr Moulds, *Submission 116*, p. 2.

¹¹⁴ Dr Moulds, *Submission 116*, pages 3 and 17.

¹¹⁵ CYPEP, *Submission 42*, p. 7; South Australian CCYP *Submission 26*, p. 13.

¹¹⁶ South Australian CCYP, *Submission 26*, p. 13.

¹¹⁷ Curtin Youth, *Submission 93*, pages 9-10.

¹¹⁸ Dr Moulds, *Submission 116*, p. 4; Law Council of Australia, *Submission 109*, p. 21.

knowledge, we risk misallocating resources towards privileged voices, whilst distancing those who are losing trust in our public institutions. This is why further research is needed to explore whether current democratic engagement systems address or entrench existing social divides.¹¹⁹

- 3.93 Stakeholders emphasised the effectiveness of programs that develop young people's understanding of democracy and active citizenship through practical civic engagement, leadership and advocacy on issues important to them.¹²⁰ A variety of these programs exist in Australia.
- 3.94 For example, The Y's Youth Parliament is a long-standing program that engages young people aged 15 to 25 in the development and debate of bills, followed by the sharing of these bills with decision-makers. To date, 10,000 young people have participated in the program, which currently operates in all jurisdictions except the ACT.¹²¹
- 3.95 Similarly, the Foundation for Young Australians' Young Mayors program provides an opportunity for young people aged 11 to 17 to participate in democratically elected youth councils and implement strategies and projects for their communities. Youth council members are elected by young people in their local government areas in formal elections modelled on council election processes, with polling places set up in schools and community spaces. The program has been piloted across four councils, where 7,000 young people turned out to cast their vote.¹²²
- 3.96 Participants reported gaining understanding, confidence and increased ability to engage in civic life and democracy from participating in these programs.¹²³ There were calls from stakeholders to expand these youth programs, with general additional funding, funding dedicated to reaching new diverse youth, or by increasing participation of young people.¹²⁴
- 3.97 However, activities outside the classroom tend to attract students who are already interested enough to get involved.¹²⁵ One young person said:

I have been involved in Youth Parliament and UN Youth, wonderful programs which have provided me with greater civic knowledge. However, only young

¹¹⁹ Dr Moulds, *Submission 116*, p. 14.

¹²⁰ YACSA, *Submission 88*, pages 5-6; ACSV, *Submission 30*, p. 4; AYAC, *Submission 53*, pages 2 and 5-7; Department of Home Affairs, *Submission 85*, p. 8.

¹²¹ The Y, *Submission 104*, pages 16-17.

¹²² Foundation for Young Australians, *Submission 90*, pages [2]-[5].

¹²³ Civic Engagement Youth Advisory Group, *Submission 44*, p. [2]; The Y, *Submission 104*, p. 18; Ms Sofia Hoorn, Deputy Secretary, Cairns Youth Council, FYA, *Committee Hansard*, Cairns, 25 July 2024, p. 8.

¹²⁴ AYAC, *Submission 53*, pages 2 and 7; Dr Moulds, *Submission 116*, p. 4; The Y, *Submission 104*, pages 19-21; Run For It, *Submission 56*, pages 4-6; Mr Antonije Dimitrijevic, Mayor, Cairns Youth Council, FYA, *Committee Hansard*, Cairns, 25 July 2024, p. 8.

¹²⁵ Civic Engagement Youth Advisory Group, *Submission 44*, pages [2]-[3]; Mr Senaratne, FYA, *Committee Hansard*, Cairns, 25 July 2024, p. 8.

people already engaged in the political process attend these events, and they do not engage or inform those without existing knowledge.¹²⁶

Considering youth perspectives in policy development

- 3.98 One reason why young people are increasingly disengaging from formal political involvement is that they believe that their perspectives and the issues they care about are ignored and devalued.¹²⁷ The UN Youth Australia annual Listening Tour found that 53 per cent of young participants did not feel represented in politics and 47 per cent felt their needs were not reflected in the decision-making process.¹²⁸
- 3.99 In the same way that understanding young people's political engagement often fails to appreciate their preferred means of being involved, the consensus among inquiry participants was that current government approaches to consulting young people and considering their interests in policy development are inadequate.¹²⁹
- 3.100 Young people face many barriers preventing them from engaging with formal politics and policy making, such as feeling that their input would not be welcomed or would have no impact; lack of awareness about options to be involved; programs not designed for young people or utilising outdated platforms; and logistical barriers including a shortage of time, transport or resources to participate.¹³⁰
- 3.101 Many young people reported that they would like to have additional opportunities to contribute their views on public policy,¹³¹ with The Y arguing that this is 'vital to see a cultural shift'.¹³² Stakeholders also highlighted that as a signatory to the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child*, governments have a duty to actively engage and consider the views of Australia's young people when developing legislation and policy that will affect their lives.¹³³
- 3.102 The Committee heard about efforts to engage young people in policy making through youth advisory groups, representative councils, online platforms, surveys or

¹²⁶ Civic Engagement Youth Advisory Group, *Submission 44*, p. [2].

¹²⁷ The Y, *Submission 104*, p. 9; Civic Engagement Youth Advisory Group, *Submission 44*, p. [9]; Next25, *Submission 65*, p. 3; South Australian CCYP, *Submission 26*, pages 10-11; Law Council of Australia, *Submission 109*, p. 20.

¹²⁸ UN Youth, *Submission 81*, p. [8].

¹²⁹ AYAC, *Submission 53*, p. 3; YACSA, *Submission 88*, pages 1-2; Law Council of Australia, *Submission 109*, p. 20; CYPEP, *Submission 42*, p. 13; The Y, *Submission 104*, pages 10-11.

¹³⁰ Curtin Youth, *Submission 93*, p. 4; South Australian CCYP, *Submission 26*, pages 9-10; YACSA, *Submission 88*, p. 5; CYPEP, *Submission 42*, pages 10-11; Law Council of Australia, *Submission 109*, p. 20.

¹³¹ UN Youth, *Submission 81*, p. [3]; Curtin Youth, *Submission 93*, p. 6.

¹³² The Y, *Submission 104*, p. 7.

¹³³ AHRC, *Submission 117*, pages 6-7; Commissioner for Children and Young People (CCYP) Tasmania, *Submission 70*, pages 2-3; AYAC, *Submission 53*, p. 9.

forums.¹³⁴ Stakeholders advocated for more genuine, empowering, accessible, innovative and inclusive opportunities for youth to influence policy.¹³⁵

3.103 The Y said that current programs across government are inconsistent and inaccessible:

Commitment to youth participation in policymaking across Federal, state and local governments remains haphazard, inconsistent across portfolios and settings, and generally in the form of formal, structured consultative measure[s] that reinforce existing power relations and limits the possibilities of youth involvement.¹³⁶

3.104 Similarly, Mr Joshua Patrick summarised many inquiry participants' views on the sometimes 'tokenistic' nature of youth advisory groups and other consultative initiatives:

The increase in the number and scope of Minister-led youth advisory groups, youth parliaments and other consultative initiatives is an extremely positive shift. However, many such groups are largely tokenistic, and serve to make state and federal Ministers and governments be seen to be responding to the repeated pleas by young people to be empowered and consulted on political youth-related priorities. These youth councils far too often stop at the 'talking' stage, and, even then, frequently are facilitated by individuals with pre-determined topics and goals around which agendas and meeting discussions are centred, thus limiting the communication of original ideas or the full potential impact of participants' reference to their unique lived experience. Furthermore, often these advisory councils have only a one- or two-year term, during which appropriate actions are not yet implemented or even planned.¹³⁷

3.105 Tasmania's Commissioner for Children and Young People emphasised the need to better support young people to participate through 'information, support and an environment that enables participation'.¹³⁸

3.106 Some stakeholders commended the Australian Government's Office for Youth's initiatives to improve methods of engaging with young people.¹³⁹ However, The Y recommended that the Office should work alongside the youth sector to ensure

¹³⁴ Ms Simone Saunders, Chief Executive Officer, City of Darwin, *Committee Hansard*, Darwin, 24 July 2024, p. 6; Mr David Reynolds, Chief Executive, Local Government NSW, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 3 October 2024, p. 33; South Australian CCYP, *Submission 26*, pages 2 and 16; CCYP Tasmania, *Submission 70*, pages 4-5; ACYP *Submission 75*, p. 1; Mr Andres Lomp, Community Engagement Manager, Parliament of Victoria, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 8 August 2024, p. 6.

¹³⁵ Law Council of Australia, *Submission 109*, pages 20-21; Dr Moulds, *Submission 116*, pages 1-2 and 16-18; AYAC, *Submission 53*, p. 3; South Australian CCYP, *Submission 26*, pages 2 and 12-14; Curtin Youth, *Submission 93*, p. 4, Professor Emeritus Alan Reid, *Submission 122*, p. [4].

¹³⁶ The Y, *Submission 104*, p. 10.

¹³⁷ Mr Joshua Patrick, *Submission 77*, p. [1].

¹³⁸ CCYP Tasmania, *Submission 70*, p. 3.

¹³⁹ CYPEP, *Submission 42*, p. 2.

engagement of diverse young people, otherwise initiatives may only reach ‘an existing, captured audience’.¹⁴⁰

Cultural and civic institutions beyond the classroom

- 3.107 In addition to supporting young people to learn about civics within formal schooling, cultural and civic institutions also play a role in engaging young people through exhibitions, tours and other creative experiences. For example, MoAD has a range of interactive exhibitions and programs aimed at youth, young children and families.¹⁴¹
- 3.108 Parliament of Victoria runs youth engagement programs for 18- to 30-year-olds, co-designed with young people. The programs aim to engage youth in the work of parliament through materials and events created by young people such as forums, social media and digital content, a podcast and other community engagement projects.¹⁴²
- 3.109 The AEC and some state and territory electoral commissions also have initiatives to encourage young people to participate in electoral events. VEC, NSWEC and NTEC provided examples of previous election advertising awareness campaigns targeted towards priority groups including young people.¹⁴³
- 3.110 NTEC explained their approach to engage young voters for the 2024 NT elections:
- We’re advertising on social media platforms like YouTube, Facebook, Instagram and TikTok. We’re advertising on Spotify. We’re advertising on TV streaming services like Kayo Sports and 9Now. We’re engaging with schools and youth organisations to distribute tailored communication resources. We’ve got different stakeholder packs for different cohorts of voters, including young voters. We’re attending youth events. We’ve got pop-up stalls at shopping centres on the weekends. And we’re including young people in our advertising designs.¹⁴⁴

Committee comment

- 3.111 Barriers to accessing adequate civics education and electoral information prevent many Australians from fully participating in our democratic processes. This is particularly true for people from CALD communities, First Nations people, people with disability, those living in regional, rural and remote areas, and young people. These barriers leave them feeling disempowered and disengaged, and can result in underrepresentation in political decision-making and policy development.
- 3.112 Electoral commissions, the media, cultural institutions, and community organisations all play key roles in providing educational resources and programs about Australia’s

¹⁴⁰ The Y, *Submission 104*, pages 10-11.

¹⁴¹ MoAD, *Submission 102*, pages 4-5.

¹⁴² Clerks of the Legislative Assembly and Council at the Parliament of Victoria, *Submission 115.1*, p. 2.

¹⁴³ VEC, *Submission 74, Attachment A*, pages 13-15; NSWEC, *Submission 100*, p. 4.

¹⁴⁴ Ms Parker, NTEC, *Committee Hansard*, Darwin, 24 July 2024, p. 2.

democracy, electoral events and voting. However, there are limitations in how effectively these informal mechanisms reach wide audiences and resonate with some groups. Many Australians report having never received any form of civics education and having low engagement with news and current affairs.

- 3.113 There are opportunities to improve methods of both informal education and information dissemination for vulnerable groups. CALD communities often face linguistic, cultural and socioeconomic barriers that limit their access to civic information and hinder their participation in Australia's complex system of democracy. Further, there is a significant lack of accessible information and education resources tailored to CALD communities.
- 3.114 While the Committee acknowledges the work of electoral commissions and other organisations to provide in-language information, simply translating information is not enough to effectively reach or resonate with Australia's diverse CALD audiences.
- 3.115 CALD communities should be provided information in formats suitable for sharing on social and ethnic media; moving beyond rigid, text-heavy official materials, and offered in a wider range of languages. The Committee considers that the AEC should work more closely with grassroots organisations and community leaders to co-design civics education workshops and electoral participation materials that can offer more meaningful engagement.
- 3.116 While there is a range of government-supported, community-run programs focused on settlement and citizenship, in-depth and ongoing civics education should be provided to CALD communities outside of electoral events and after initial settlement. The Committee accepts evidence that suggests that during this period, some participants are primarily occupied with passing the citizenship test and that the ideal time for civics education is after citizenship has been granted, when they feel inspired and have more capacity to engage. Civics education should also be delivered in spaces where CALD communities are already engaged, and where they feel culturally safe.

Recommendation 10

- 3.117 The Committee recommends that the Australian Government work more closely with culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) grassroots community organisations to develop and deliver civics education programs in community centres across Australia. These programs should be provided in accessible and culturally appropriate formats. The relevant Minister should report annually to Parliament on the progress of key actions.**

Recommendation 11

- 3.118 The Committee recommends that the Australian Electoral Commission (AEC) specifically report on an annual basis on its work with CALD community organisations to co-design and disseminate culturally appropriate and**

accessible materials to support enrolling and voting at future federal elections. These materials should:

- **use a range of formats, including audio, visual, infographic and simple text that can be easily shared across social and ethnic media platforms**
- **be translated into languages for smaller and emerging migrant groups.**

3.119 In the development of culturally appropriate electoral materials, the AEC should look to successful models of community engagement that can be adapted to enhance engagement of CALD voters, particularly in areas of low voter turnout and high vote informality. The NSWEC's Vote Talk program is an example of a community-led, partnership approach to better engage CALD communities and distribute educational information that reaches target populations.

Recommendation 12

3.120 The Committee recommends that the AEC draw on successful models of community engagement conducted by its state and territory counterparts in engaging with CALD communities during the 2025 Federal Election, such as the NSW Electoral Commission's Vote Talk program. The AEC should develop and implement such programs nationally for future elections.

3.121 Leveraging grassroots communities and increasing the capacity of trusted and embedded members of CALD communities can create important pathways to share official and civic information.

3.122 Following the 2025 Federal Election, the AEC should report on the outcomes of its pilot of Multicultural Community Electoral Participation Officers. The Australian Government should support the capacity building of appropriate CALD community members in the lead up to future electoral events, informed by learnings from the pilot.

Recommendation 13

3.123 The Committee recommends that the Australian Government work with CALD grassroots community organisations to train trusted members of the community as impartial 'ambassadors' or 'champions' to disseminate information about Australia's democracy, electoral events, and voting.

3.124 First Nations people, particularly those living in remote communities, experience unique challenges significantly impacting their civic and political engagement. These communities need to be better supported to learn and engage with civics education, political processes and community engagement activities.

3.125 Remote electorates must also receive sufficient time, advance notice and culturally appropriate resources to be able to participate fully in elections. While there is no one solution to improving civics engagement and electoral outcomes for First Nations people, the Committee considers that this must start with closer engagement with

community leaders and local grassroots organisations. Further, a holistic approach to addressing system problems needs to be taken, as committed to in the National Agreement on Closing the Gap.

- 3.126 Resources available to the AEC can disproportionately impact rural and remote communities, affecting many First Nations people. The Committee is concerned that changes in funding have had serious negative impacts in those communities. The reductions of availability of permanent staff, for example, has resulted in some voters in remote areas having small windows to cast their vote, compared to weeks for those living in urban or regional settings. Funding for the AEC must be sufficient to ensure that full participation in elections is possible in regional and remote communities; to limit that access effectively risks removing the franchise to those citizens.

Recommendation 14

- 3.127 The Committee recommends that, in order to improve enfranchisement, the AEC be appropriately funded to ensure that polling stations in regional and remote communities provide sufficient time, advance notice and culturally appropriate resources for voters; and specifically report on an annual basis on these measures.**

- 3.128 The AEC and NTEC work hard to deliver one of Australia's biggest logistical events where there may be significant costs involved. To improve voter education through culturally appropriate and translated materials, closer collaboration should be explored.

Recommendation 15

- 3.129 The Committee recommends that, in order to deliver culturally appropriate and translated voter education materials for federal elections, the AEC is appropriately funded to work more closely with the Northern Territory Electoral Commission to leverage its relationships with local First Nations organisations; and specifically report on an annual basis on these measures.**

- 3.130 While many young people are politically engaged in a range of ways, they increasingly report distrust in and disengagement from formal political processes and institutions.

- 3.131 The Committee acknowledges that while the Australian Government has made recent efforts to better consult with young people through the establishment of the Office for Youth, these approaches tend to involve young people who are already engaged, or they don't result in implementation of ideas and policy changes.

- 3.132 There is a need for methods that engage young people outside of formal consultation processes and youth advisory groups. These methods should involve innovative, active and project-based participation about issues important to young people, delivered through platforms and networks where they already interact. In delivering

these initiatives, consideration and support should be given to common barriers to youth engagement, ensuring young people feel welcomed, and are provided with information and support to engage.

- 3.133 Further, the Committee sees merit in the Australian Government's Office for Youth to identify ways to increase young people's involvement with Parliament. This should include leveraging existing pathways to ensure diverse youth input into political policy and processes. The Office for Youth should report annually to Parliament on progress and key actions.

Recommendation 16

- 3.134 The Committee recommends that the Australian Government work with youth organisations to explore more appropriate and appealing opportunities to engage a wider community of diverse young people in leadership programs that build understanding of democracy and active citizenship, outside of youth advisory groups.**

Recommendation 17

- 3.135 The Committee recommends that, in recognition of the need to prioritise engagement with diverse youth, the Australian Government's Office for Youth should identify ways to increase engagement with the Australian Parliament and to support methods for incorporating diverse youth input into political policy and processes. The Office for Youth should report annually to Parliament on its progress.**



4. Media literacy and civic engagement

- 4.1 Australians are increasingly consuming news online more than through any other form of media. The rise of misinformation and disinformation, artificial intelligence and social media algorithms, compounded by low levels of media literacy, has found to be closely linked to a growing distrust in public institutions and a decline in public interest journalism.¹ This can weaken democratic engagement as citizens begin to feel disillusioned and disconnected from political processes.²
- 4.2 Media literacy therefore plays an important role in shaping civic engagement and participation. Australians who are media literate are empowered to detect and avoid misinformation and disinformation and engage in informed debates on democratic issues.³
- 4.3 This chapter examines the importance and integration of media literacy for civics education, engagement and participation to empower citizens with the skills needed to fully participate in civic life.

Impact of misinformation and disinformation on civics and electoral participation

- 4.4 Media literacy is the ability to critically engage with media through analysis, evaluation and reflection.⁴ Citizens who are media literate are empowered to participate fully in society, including social and democratic processes, and are able to detect and avoid misinformation and disinformation, and seek out higher quality information.⁵
- 4.5 Associate Professor Tanya Notley, Professor Michael Dezuanni, and Professor Sora Park said that ‘citizens need to be able to investigate media sources to make informed decisions about which sources can be trusted’.⁶

¹ Susan McKinnon Foundation (SMF), *Submission 49*, p. 8; Australian Human Rights Commission (AHRC), *Submission 117*, pages 24-25.

² SMF, *Submission 49*, p. 13.

³ Associate Professor Tanya Notley, Professor Michael Dezuanni, and Professor Sora Park, *Submission 9*, p. 2; Australian Media Literacy Alliance (AMLA), *Submission 89*, p. 1.

⁴ Associate Professor Tanya Notley et al, *Submission 9*, pages 3-4.

⁵ Associate Professor Tanya Notley et al, *Submission 9*, pages 3-4; National Film and Sound Archive of Australia (NFSA), *Submission 59*, p. 1; SMF, *Submission 49*, p. 9; Ms Patricia Hepworth, Member, AMLA, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 23 May 2024, p. 17.

⁶ Associate Professor Tanya Notley et al, *Submission 9*, p. 3.

- 4.6 Evidence to the inquiry highlighted that there is a poor level of media literacy in Australia, creating a barrier to civic participation and engagement, and the potential to undermine efforts to strengthen civics education if not addressed.⁷
- 4.7 An increasing reliance on social media and other online platforms as a primary source of news and information has amplified the reach of misinformation and disinformation.⁸ Misinformation is ‘false information that is spread due to ignorance, or by error or mistake, without the intent to deceive’.⁹ Disinformation can be defined as ‘knowingly false information designed to deliberately mislead and influence public opinion or obscure the truth for malicious or deceptive purposes’.¹⁰
- 4.8 Disinformation can be a ‘serious threat’ as it can be used to ‘undermine democratic institutions and processes (such as elections) by preventing people from making informed decisions’.¹¹ Associate Professor Notley et al added that ‘disinformation can also polarise societies by pitting communities against each other’.¹²
- 4.9 The News and Media Research Centre at the University of Canberra (N&MRC) provided recent examples of the effects of disinformation:
- ... threats to public health via the spread of disinformation around COVID-19 vaccination, which hindered the adoption of basic safety measures; the targeting of Australian public servants, e.g. Australian Electoral Commission staff during elections or the Voice referendum; disinformation about climate change; attempts to worsen religious/ethnic divisions in society; and other attempts to increase distrust in institutions.¹³
- 4.10 The Susan McKinnon Foundation (SMF) said that when people distrust public institutions and processes, they begin to feel ‘uninformed about important issues, and potentially powerless to make a difference’.¹⁴ SMF added that:
- [People] can then withdraw from civic life or even actively oppose democracy, meaning that addressing each of the points in this cycle will be an important part of bolstering up civic engagement and trust.¹⁵
- 4.11 The University of Melbourne highlighted that misinformation and disinformation are ‘growing areas of research’ and said that ongoing investment into this research is needed to ‘adequately identify and understand the problem, build cross-disciplinary theories, and develop evaluation tools which can help inform policy responses’.¹⁶

⁷ Ms Anita Planchon, Chair, AMLA, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 23 May 2024, p. 16.

⁸ University of Melbourne, *Submission 41*, p. 2.

⁹ AHRC, *Submission 117*, p. 4.

¹⁰ AHRC, *Submission 117*, p. 4.

¹¹ Associate Professor Tanya Notley et al, *Submission 9*, p. 1.

¹² Associate Professor Tanya Notley et al, *Submission 9*, p. 1.

¹³ News and Media Research Centre (N&MRC), University of Canberra, *Submission 28*, p. 3.

¹⁴ SMF, *Submission 49*, p. 13.

¹⁵ SMF, *Submission 49*, p. 13.

¹⁶ University of Melbourne, *Submission 41*, p. 6.

Social media platforms

4.12 Social media platforms and messaging services such as WhatsApp and WeChat, can rapidly spread misinformation and disinformation during electoral events, making it more difficult for people to know who and what to believe.¹⁷

4.13 Professor Anne Twomey summarised the effect of social media:

But now anyone, hiding behind an anonymous profile, can make any statements, no matter how baseless or irresponsible, with no accountability or loss of reputation, to a very wide audience. Indeed, the more outrageous or extreme the statement, the more attention it is likely to garner and the greater the following that is achieved.¹⁸

4.14 Due to the way information is presented on social media, individuals can fall trap to the cognitive shortcuts that are often taken to assess the reliability of information. The University of Melbourne found that people on social media tend to fall for false news that has a high number of 'likes' or 'shares', and are more likely to believe:

- news in agreement with their beliefs, and more likely to share things that elicit strong emotions
- information provided by someone they trust
- information if they come across it more frequently, which is problematic when algorithms or bots present something multiple times.¹⁹

4.15 The University of Melbourne added that 'straightforward narratives, including those supported by deepfakes, are the most believable'.²⁰

4.16 Stakeholders to the inquiry highlighted the risks of the use of algorithms such as recommender systems on social media, which have the potential to 'amplify misinformation and extreme views' as well as hide 'different viewpoints or valuable ideas that are not aligned with a person's existing opinions or understanding'.²¹

4.17 The Australian Human Rights Commission (AHRC) said that:

News websites, mobile apps, and social media platforms all make unilateral decisions about what content is shown to you. These decisions can be made by editors and journalists or by computer algorithms analysing information about other content you have consumed, or based on what you and your friends share and interact with on social media.²²

¹⁷ Department of Home Affairs, *Submission 85*, p. 13.

¹⁸ Professor Anne Twomey, *Submission 31*, p. 2.

¹⁹ University of Melbourne, *Submission 41*, p. 3.

²⁰ University of Melbourne, *Submission 41*, p. 3.

²¹ AHRC, *Submission 117*, p. 29.

²² AHRC, *Submission 117*, p. 28.

- 4.18 Recommender systems can create ‘echo chambers’ where people are only served information or opinions which reflect and reinforce their existing beliefs or biases.²³ SMF described it as a ‘vicious cycle that can be hard to break out of’ and added:

As discourse becomes more polarised and people’s sources of information less reliable and diverse, it can make them less willing to consider opposing views and engage with other media, further isolating them and leading to a wider decline in trust for public institutions or anything ‘mainstream’ that may counter the narratives they have come to accept ...²⁴

- 4.19 Meta, owner of social media platforms Facebook, Instagram, Threads and WhatsApp, told the Committee that the algorithms used on its social media sites arranges:

... posts from friends, Groups and Pages you follow to show you what matters most to you at the top of your feed. Our ranking algorithms use thousands of signals to rank posts for each person’s Feed with this goal in mind. As a result, each person’s Feed is highly personalised and specific to them.²⁵

- 4.20 Recent state and territory elections, and the 2023 First Nations Voice to Parliament referendum revealed the scale of misinformation and disinformation²⁶ and their ‘potential to weaken social cohesion and breed distrust’.²⁷ According to several inquiry participants, this electoral event highlighted how insufficient civics and media literacy education can contribute to widespread confusion and allow a surge of misinformation and disinformation about the proposed constitutional amendments to spread rapidly on digital platforms.²⁸

- 4.21 For example, Dr Joe McIntyre and Jacqueline Charles said that bad faith actors were able to easily leverage online platforms to spread disinformation, even when it violated the technology company’s guidelines.²⁹

- 4.22 Meta said that it implemented a ‘comprehensive strategy’ in the lead-up to the Voice Referendum, ‘to proactively detect and remove content that breached our services, combat misinformation and harmful content, and promote civil participation’.³⁰

- 4.23 However, the Committee heard that Facebook’s policies were ‘poorly enforced though the campaign’.³¹ A report by Reset Tech Australia examining the levels of

²³ SMF, *Submission 49*, p. 13; AHRC, *Submission 117*, p. 29; Professor Twomey, *Submission 31*, p. 2.

²⁴ SMF, *Submission 49*, p. 13.

²⁵ Meta, *Submission 111*, p. 8.

²⁶ University of Melbourne, *Submission 41*, p. 7; Australian Lawyers Alliance and Australians for Native Title and Reconciliation, *Submission 24*, pages 22-23; Ms Philippa Brandon, Director of Communications, New South Wales Electoral Commission, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 3 October 2024, p. 41.

²⁷ University of Melbourne, *Submission 41*, p. 7.

²⁸ Law Council of Australia, *Submission 109*, p. 5; University of Melbourne, *Submission 41*, p. 7; Dr Joe McIntyre and Jacqueline Charles, *Submission 92*, p. 22; Professor George Williams AO, *Submission 1*, p. 2.

²⁹ Dr McIntyre and J Charles, *Submission 92*, p. 23.

³⁰ Meta, *Submission 111*, p. 24.

³¹ Dr McIntyre and J Charles, *Submission 92*, p. 22.

content moderation across TikTok, Facebook and X to see whether misinformation was adequately responded to, found:

... substantial under-moderation of misleading content regarding electoral processes, and even after these posts were reported, little action appeared to be taken – meaning misinformation was left up and continued to grow in reach.³²

4.24 SMF said that Reset Tech Australia tested the processes designed to stop misinformation appearing in paid-for advertising by creating fake advertisements and found that the processes were ‘inadequate’ as 70 to 100 per cent of the ads they submitted were approved.³³

4.25 There was agreement among stakeholders that having a better understanding of how algorithms and recommender systems on social media work would help to combat the spread of misinformation and disinformation.

4.26 The Australian Media Literacy Alliance (AMLA) emphasised that media literacy not only includes the ability to critically engage with news stories, but also understanding the algorithms.³⁴

4.27 Similarly, SMF said that ‘effective regulation of social media, or increased transparency in how they operate, is important’ as recommender systems ‘could play a role in dividing Australian political discourse’.³⁵ SMF added that:

It is clear that without the help of social media platforms themselves, any efforts to tackle misinformation will have limited impact because no one else can identify and respond to harmful misinformation as quickly, and we are largely at the mercy of their algorithms as to what information we see online and how far this spreads.³⁶

4.28 SMF further explained that current efforts in the European Union and United Kingdom are ‘showing promise in highlighting potential regulatory avenues to pursue’.³⁷

4.29 AHRC recommended that independent research is conducted into ‘the nature and impact of recommender systems on democratic processes and improve social media platforms’ transparency around the management and operation of recommender systems’.³⁸

³² SMF, *Submission 49*, p. 13.

³³ SMF, *Submission 49*, p. 13.

³⁴ Ms Hepworth, AMLA, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 23 May 2024, p. 17.

³⁵ SMF, *Submission 49*, p. 13.

³⁶ SMF, *Submission 49*, p. 10.

³⁷ SMF, *Submission 49*, p. 10.

³⁸ AHRC, *Submission 117*, p. 30.

Artificial intelligence

- 4.30 Artificial intelligence (AI) can have a powerful influence on democratic processes through the circulation of realistic misinformation and disinformation content.³⁹
- 4.31 The Department of Home Affairs provided examples of how AI can be used during electoral processes:
- ... political ads and campaigns that utilise AI to generate false content can spread narratives that sway public perception of candidates and their positions on certain issues. AI capabilities can also be used to interfere in the voting process, such as circulating realistic disinformation about where and how to vote, or to discourage voters from showing up to polling locations. If left unchecked, the use of AI could gain prominence in political and electoral advertising and have a significant impact on Australian voters' ability to make reliably informed decisions in an electoral context.⁴⁰
- 4.32 AHRC similarly said that AI can be used to 'generate cheap, persuasive, and personalised content for harmful purposes' and such content may 'harm several human rights'.⁴¹
- 4.33 It is becoming increasingly difficult to identify AI generated content, with evidence to the inquiry emphasising the need for all Australians to be media literate to recognise credible and trustworthy information.⁴²
- 4.34 The University of Melbourne warned that the cues that individuals usually use to detect misinformation and disinformation, for example by checking if the 'English looks poor', are evolving as AI-generated content becomes more realistic.⁴³ Professor Jeannie Marie Paterson, Director at the Centre for AI and Digital Ethics at the University of Melbourne said:
- Particularly around scams, we'd be saying, 'Look at the URL,' and, 'Look at whether the English looks poor,' if it's written work; and, if it's an image, we'd say, 'Look at whether the image is inaccurate,' such as whether it has extra fingers, famously. The problem is—this is the influence of AI—that those things now are no longer indications of misinformation because, of course, AI corrects language; it can tone the language to the recipient's interests, proclivities and even language capabilities; and the images themselves are becoming problematic.⁴⁴
- 4.35 Meta said that it is taking steps to increase transparency around the use of AI on its social media platforms, such as:

³⁹ Department of Home Affairs, *Submission 85*, p. 13.

⁴⁰ Department of Home Affairs, *Submission 85*, p. 12.

⁴¹ AHRC, *Submission 117*, pages 24 and 25.

⁴² Ms Planchon, AMLA, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 23 May 2024, p. 16.

⁴³ Professor Jeannie Marie Paterson, Director, Centre for AI and Digital Ethics, University of Melbourne, *Committee Hansard*, Melbourne, 16 October 2024, p. 2.

⁴⁴ Professor Paterson, University of Melbourne, *Committee Hansard*, Melbourne, 16 October 2024, p. 2.

... “Made with AI” labels on AI-generated video, audio and images, based on our detection of industry-shared signals of AI images or people self-disclosing that they’re uploading AI-generated content.⁴⁵

- 4.36 The Australian Electoral Commission (AEC) warned that due to the increase in AI-generated content, election management bodies and isolated electoral campaigns ‘no longer suffice’ in ‘delivering impartial and independent elections’.⁴⁶ The AEC said it supports a national digital literacy campaign and suggested watermarking and self-declarations of material that have been generated or altered by AI.⁴⁷
- 4.37 AMLA similarly stated that the risks from generative AI tools highlights the urgency for all citizens to be ‘capable of identifying, using and creating credible and trustworthy information, and critically reflecting on the media they engage with’.⁴⁸
- 4.38 The AHRC said that there is a need for ‘further research about the prevalence and impact of synthetic content spread by foreign actors and how that adversely impacts Australian democracy’.⁴⁹ It recommended that the government ‘build capacity to counter social media interference campaigns by supporting independent research’.⁵⁰

Barriers to media literacy for vulnerable groups

- 4.39 Australians with higher media literacy are more likely to engage in civic activities.⁵¹ However, marginalised groups often face unique barriers to media literacy, therefore limiting their civic participation.⁵² These priority groups include:
- people living in low-income households
 - people with a low level of education and/or with low literacy
 - people living with a disability
 - people living in rural, regional and remote Australia
 - older Australians
 - First Nations
 - culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) Australians.⁵³
- 4.40 Associate Professor Notley et al explained that these groups experience broader challenges due to:

⁴⁵ Meta, *Submission 111*, p. 15.

⁴⁶ Mr Tom Rogers, Australian Electoral Commission (AEC), *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 23 May 2024, p. 20.

⁴⁷ Mr Rogers, AEC, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 23 May 2024, p. 20.

⁴⁸ Ms Planchon, AMLA, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 23 May 2024, p. 16.

⁴⁹ AHRC, *Submission 117*, p. 28.

⁵⁰ AHRC, *Submission 117*, p. 28.

⁵¹ Associate Professor Notley et al, *Submission 9*, p. 2.

⁵² Ms Hepworth, AMLA, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 23 May 2024, p. 17; Associate Professor Notley et al, *Submission 9*, pages 2-3.

⁵³ AMLA, *Submission 89*, p. 2.

... inadequate access to devices and the internet, insufficient access to trusted sources of information, a lack of understanding of the needs and experiences of these groups within the broader public, attitudinal barriers to using media and technology and having no one to turn to for media and technology support.⁵⁴

- 4.41 Individuals with lower media literacy can be particularly vulnerable to the algorithms on social media. For example, the AHRC said that recommender systems have the ‘ability to “micro target” certain parts of an electorate’ to ‘[push] specific political agendas’.⁵⁵ It added that ‘this is particularly harmful for more vulnerable demographics, such as older individuals’.⁵⁶
- 4.42 The professors said that news engagement and media literacy support should be targeted to meet the needs of these groups, and it is ‘critical that policies recognise existing inequalities and inequities when it comes to people’s ability to be media literate’.⁵⁷
- 4.43 This section will examine the effects of misinformation and disinformation on CALD groups, including migrant communities.

Culturally and linguistically diverse communities

- 4.44 Chapter 3 explored how members of the CALD community receive information during electoral events and in broader civics education. The Committee heard that these groups are particularly vulnerable to misinformation and disinformation which can quickly spread on social media platforms popular within migrant communities such as Facebook, WhatsApp and WeChat.⁵⁸
- 4.45 Migrant communities often face barriers to accessing the information they need in their native languages and therefore rely on social media channels. The Settlement Council of Australia explained that this may be because ‘most translated materials in Australia are embedded within English-language websites, necessitating English literacy skills to access them’.⁵⁹
- 4.46 Research by Dr Fan Yang and Associate Professor Sukhmani Khorana on media literacy in Chinese and South Asian communities in Australia found that translated voting information on official government websites such as the AEC is not ‘communicated in a way that fits into the everyday language norm’ and misleading information can sometimes be circulated due to mistranslation.⁶⁰ Dr Yang said:

... many non-English speaking migrants find official translations from public agencies to be awkward and funny, because they don't necessarily follow norms

⁵⁴ Associate Professor Notley et al, *Submission 9*, p. 3.

⁵⁵ AHRC, *Submission 117*, p. 30.

⁵⁶ AHRC, *Submission 117*, p. 30.

⁵⁷ Associate Professor Notley et al, *Submission 9*, pages 2-3.

⁵⁸ Settlement Council of Australia (SCOA), *Submission 98*, p. 9; Dr Fan Yang and Associate Professor Sukhmani Khorana, *Submission 127*, p. 7.

⁵⁹ SCOA, *Submission 98*, p. 9.

⁶⁰ Dr Fan Yang, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 3 October 2024, pages 20 and 21.

of everyday use of language. This also leads to the suspicion that these agencies are using translation machines, which can cause trust in government agencies to drop in our migrant communities as well.⁶¹

- 4.47 While social media channels are valuable for information sharing within these communities, they are also 'rife with false or misleading content that can distort perceptions of the electoral process'.⁶² The Settlement Council of Australia said that 'socially marginalised groups are a common target' for such misinformation.⁶³
- 4.48 Dr Yang and Associate Professor Khorana added that 'the limited visibility and closed nature of these interpersonal communications' could make these communities more vulnerable to 'political exploitation'.⁶⁴
- 4.49 Stakeholders to the inquiry highlighted the spread and harms of misinformation and disinformation campaigns during the Voice Referendum in 2023, with major political events of this kind often amplifying such messaging.⁶⁵
- 4.50 The University of Melbourne said that the referendum campaign showed that:
... migrants from diverse socio-cultural backgrounds possess varying levels of literacy regarding Indigenous affairs, highlighting the need to craft messages that are linguistically accessible and adapted to the information consumption habits of migrant communities.⁶⁶
- 4.51 AMES Australia said it worked closely with the AEC and the Social Policy Group to deliver in-language information about the referendum but found challenges due to the different style of voting for the referendum. It said that there was also 'lots of misinformation going around', with the presenters having to counter these.⁶⁷
- 4.52 Dr Yang said that often the burden falls onto family members, community members or ethnic journalists to voluntarily 'take the responsibility of debunking and countering false information' which can be emotionally exhausting.⁶⁸ Dr Yang added:
Women and young family members are more likely to face pushback or criticism when they try to correct misinformation, disinformation within your family or simply being silenced.⁶⁹

⁶¹ Dr Yang, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 3 October 2024, p. 20.

⁶² SCOA, *Submission 98*, pages 9-10.

⁶³ SCOA, *Submission 98*, pages 9-10.

⁶⁴ Dr Yang and Associate Professor Khorana, *Submission 127*, p. 7.

⁶⁵ Dr Yang, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 3 October 2024, p. 21.

⁶⁶ University of Melbourne, *Submission 41*, p. 7.

⁶⁷ Ms Maria Tsopanis, Senior Manager, Community Development and Social Participation, AMES Australia, *Committee Hansard*, Melbourne, 16 October 2024, p. 32.

⁶⁸ Dr Yang, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 3 October 2024, p. 21.

⁶⁹ Dr Yang, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 3 October 2024, p. 21.

4.53 There was support for building media literacy capacity for both migrant and broader CALD communities, and within government institutions to engage with these communities to build long-term relationships of trust.⁷⁰

4.54 The Settlement Council of Australia (SCOA) said that 'providing digital literacy training to migrants and refugees can empower them to access reliable information and participate in online civic discussions'.⁷¹ It said that the Australian Government should also be responsible for creating 'easily accessible sources of verified information to counteract false narratives'.⁷²

4.55 Similarly, the Queensland University of Technology recommended targeted media literacy support for vulnerable groups and added that 'targeted campaigns will risk low engagement if not co-designed with the people with the most barriers to participation'.⁷³

4.56 There was support for translated resources to counteract disinformation. SCOA highlighted that access to accurate information in-language empowers these communities to discern between fact and fiction:

Within migrant and refugee communities, the challenge is that when disinformation and misinformation spreads there's not necessarily equal access to the accurate information. The misinformation might be readily available in other languages. It can also come from overseas. For example, individuals might actually consume their news on many topics from sources overseas and not necessarily local sources. There's a lot more access to misinformation because it's more readily available in languages other than English.⁷⁴

4.57 In October 2024, the Committee visited multicultural groups in Melton, Victoria to learn more about political participation and media literacy of CALD communities. It heard a strong view that grassroots advocacy is the best way to reach and engage with these communities.

4.58 SCOA reflected this and said:

... public awareness campaigns should be conducted to educate voters on recognising and reporting false information. These efforts must include community leaders to help disseminate accurate information and build trust within their communities.⁷⁵

⁷⁰ Associate Professor Sukhmani Khorana, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 3 October 2024, p. 21; SCOA, *Submission 98*, p. 9; Queensland University of Technology (QUT), *Submission 36*, p. 7.

⁷¹ SCOA, *Submission 98*, p. 9.

⁷² SCOA, *Submission 98*, p. 10.

⁷³ QUT, *Submission 36*, p. 7.

⁷⁴ Ms Sandra Elhelw, Chief Executive Officer, Settlement Council of Australia, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 19 June 2024, p. 22.

⁷⁵ SCOA, *Submission 98*, p. 10.

4.59 The University of Melbourne raised that more research needs to be conducted into how CALD communities receive information and how to combat misinformation.⁷⁶

4.60 Associate Professor Khorana warned that while well-intentioned, a fact-checking sheet 'is probably not going to do the trick' and suggested a multipronged approach to countering misinformation and disinformation:

... most of the misinformation and disinformation is not text based. It's to do with media. It's image based, video based and audio based. I think the efforts to counter it or the efforts to prebunk it really, again, need to be aware of those cultural and linguistic norms ... especially in these communities where the communicative norms are just different.⁷⁷

Initiatives by electoral commissions

4.61 Misinformation and disinformation can significantly amplify during federal, state and territory and local government elections making it more difficult for Australians to identify legitimate information online. False information about elections can also 'undermine confidence in the integrity of democratic processes'.⁷⁸

4.62 The Committee heard from the AEC and some state and territory electoral commissions about measures implemented during the delivery of electoral events to combat misinformation and disinformation.

4.63 The AEC runs various measures to ensure that it maintains 'levels of trust and satisfaction' including:

- Stop and Consider campaign – encourages voters to think critically about sources of electoral information and supports public understanding of electoral processes.
- Social media – maintaining an awareness of evolving information, domestic and international environments, and changing community and stakeholder expectations. Proactively posting information to AEC social media channels, including AEC TV on YouTube to debunk misinformation or disinformation online.
- Defending Democracy Unit – 'pre-bunking' misinformation builds voter resilience prior to exposure.
- Electoral Integrity Assurance Taskforce – includes relevant agencies across government, working together to provide information and advice to the Electoral Commissioner on matters such as cyber or physical security incidents, mis- or disinformation campaigns, and foreign interference in electoral processes.

⁷⁶ Associate Professor Piers Howe, Associate Professor of Cognitive Science, School of Psychological Sciences, University of Melbourne, *Committee Hansard*, Melbourne, 16 October 2024, p. 3.

⁷⁷ Associate Professor Khorana, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 3 October 2024, p. 22.

⁷⁸ NSW Electoral Commission (NSWEC), *Submission 100.1*, p. 4.

- Disinformation Register – established prior to the 2022 federal election, the register lists prominent pieces of disinformation regarding the electoral process, alongside the correct, fact-based information.⁷⁹
- 4.64 Democracy Matters told the Committee that the AEC’s measures ‘are to be applauded’ as they ‘safeguard Australian elections against deliberate efforts to mislead members of the public at key decision making moments’.⁸⁰ It emphasised that these mechanisms ‘must be underpinned by media literacy education based in formal education institutions across Australia’.⁸¹
- 4.65 Similarly, the University of Melbourne said that:
- ... the AEC is very well respected in Australia and around the world. It's doing a very good job of protecting and countering election misinformation, but it has a very narrow remit.⁸²
- 4.66 State and territory electoral commissions also run similar measures. For example, the NSW, Victorian and Northern Territory electoral commissions said that they have disinformation registers to help manage the negative impacts of false information posted online about electoral processes.⁸³
- 4.67 The NSW Electoral Commission (NSWEC) also ran a Stop and Consider campaign based on the AEC campaign during the 2023 state election. This was delivered across a range of digital and print media, and translated in Cantonese, Vietnamese, Mandarin, Arabic, Greek, Italian and Korean.⁸⁴ The NSWEC said that post-campaign research found that those with very high disinformation belief had a higher recall of the campaign, ‘indicating it was well targeted’.⁸⁵

Media literacy education

- 4.68 Media literacy education plays a critical role for all Australians to be able to discern between fact and fiction, be empowered to participate meaningfully in civic life and engage in debates on important issues.⁸⁶ Media literate citizens are also protected against misleading content online and actively seek out higher quality information.⁸⁷

⁷⁹ Australian Electoral Commission (AEC), *Submission 15*, p. 16; Mr Tom Rogers, Electoral Commissioner, AEC, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 13 September 2024, p. 35.

⁸⁰ Democracy Matters, *Submission 79*, p. 6.

⁸¹ Democracy Matters, *Submission 79*, p. 6.

⁸² Associate Professor Howe, University of Melbourne, *Committee Hansard*, Melbourne, 16 October 2024, p. 4.

⁸³ NSWEC, *Submission 100.1*, p. 4; Mr Sven Bluemmel, Electoral Commissioner, Victorian Electoral Commission, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 8 August 2024, p. 35; Ms Karen Parker, Manager Corporate Information and Training, Northern Territory Electoral Commission, *Committee Hansard*, Darwin, 24 July 2024, p. 8.

⁸⁴ NSWEC, *Submission 100*, p. 5.

⁸⁵ NSWEC, *Submission 100*, p. 6.

⁸⁶ University of Melbourne, *Submission 41*, p. 7; Law Council of Australia, *Submission 109*, p. 23.

⁸⁷ SMF, *Submission 49*, p. 9.

- 4.69 However, most Australians have received very little or no media literacy education at school and 30 per cent of adults have never received any form of media literacy support across their lifetime.⁸⁸ There is also currently no comprehensive Australian national resources to support adult media literacy.⁸⁹
- 4.70 This section will explore the effectiveness of media literacy education in schools and opportunities to boost education for Australians of all ages.

Media literacy in school

- 4.71 Young people's trust in traditional forms of media is declining, with an increasing preference for social media as a key source of information and avenue for political engagement and expression.⁹⁰
- 4.72 Schools have an important role to play in building media literacy and critical thinking skills from the earliest stage and throughout schooling.⁹¹ However, most young people in Australia are not receiving regular media literacy lessons in school and are therefore not confident that they can identify misinformation and disinformation. Young people are also unlikely to check the legitimacy of news sources.⁹²
- 4.73 For example, a survey of 1,069 Australian school children conducted by Western Sydney University found that 24 per cent of students aged 8 to 16 years had received lessons at school in the past year to help them judge the trustworthiness of news stories.⁹³ Recent research found that awareness of algorithms on social media among Australians aged 13 to 16 is low.⁹⁴
- 4.74 The Committee's civics education survey also found that most educators surveyed were unsure that their students can work out whether information about politics and social issues is reliable. Only 14 out of the 224 educators who answered the question said that they were 'very sure' that their students can find information about politics and social issues.⁹⁵ Box 4.1 provides examples of some educators' responses collected through the Committee's survey.

Box 4.1 Educators' responses to the Committee's survey on whether their students can find and assess information about politics and social issues

'Unfortunately, there are a lot of misconceptions about civics and how the governments/nation is run. I spend 20% of the unit correcting misconceptions ...

⁸⁸ Associate Professor Notley et al, *Submission 9*, p. 4.

⁸⁹ Associate Professor Notley et al, *Submission 9*, p. 4.

⁹⁰ The Y, *Submission 104*, p. 26.

⁹¹ AMLA, *Submission 89*, p. 1; Professor Murray Print, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 3 October 2024, p. 8.

⁹² AMLA, *Submission 89*, p. 2; Australian Youth Affairs Coalition, *Submission 53*, p. 7.

⁹³ N&MRC, University of Canberra, *Submission 28*, p. 3. See also: Notley, T., Chambers, S., Zhong, H.F., Park, S., Lee, J. and Dezuanni, M. (2023) *News and Young Australians in 2023: How children and teens access, perceive and are affected by news media*, Research Report, Western Sydney University.

⁹⁴ The Y, *Submission 104*, p. 26.

⁹⁵ Committee Survey Results, *Appendix C*.

because of unregulated media spreading misinformation.’ – Public school, major city, Victoria.

‘Often no attempt is even made to check the reliability of information. It’s a concept that is not immediately obvious to young people without having explicit instruction.’ – Public school, regional area, NSW.

‘There is a vast difference in the quality of information and the sources that provide it. For example, most students consider that our courts system is the US system; they frequently confuse the notion of Prime Minister and President and they generally have a very poor notion of what government can do.’ – Education Department, major area, Victoria.

‘I find students are often influenced by ‘fake news’ or ill-informed by biased reporting or second-hand knowledge...’ – Public school, regional area, Tasmania.

- 4.75 While lessons in online safety and information literacy are currently embedded in the Australian Curriculum, Professor Rosalind Dixon said that education on misinformation is taught ‘inconsistently and without sufficient support and guidance’.⁹⁶
- 4.76 The University of Melbourne agreed that media and information literacy lessons vary from school to school and are ‘inadequate and much behind places like Finland’ as ‘it is still very limited in scope’.⁹⁷
- 4.77 Similarly, the N&MRC said that ‘when information literacy is on a school’s curriculum, implementations vary widely between states, territories, and private / public schools’.⁹⁸
- 4.78 The N&MRC added that in any case, the lessons that students receive ‘are poorly suited to deal with the toxic information environment’.⁹⁹ For example, a commonly used information-checking methodology in Australian education presents students with a checklist of website design clues, including: ‘Are there ads? Is it a .com or a .org? Is there scientific language? Does it use footnotes?’¹⁰⁰ However, the N&MRC said that this can be ‘problematic’ as these questions ‘no longer lead to proof of reliability’ because ‘anyone can design a professional-looking webpage, or use spellcheck’.¹⁰¹
- 4.79 Stakeholders overwhelmingly supported strengthening media literacy education in the Australian Curriculum, as well as ensuring it is regularly updated in an evolving digital landscape.¹⁰²

⁹⁶ Professor Rosalind Dixon, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 3 October 2024, p. 8.

⁹⁷ Associate Professor Piers Howe, Associate Professor of Cognitive Science, School of Psychological Sciences, University of Melbourne, *Committee Hansard*, Melbourne, 16 October 2024, p. 5.

⁹⁸ N&MRC, University of Canberra, *Submission 28*, p. 3.

⁹⁹ N&MRC, *Submission 28*, p. 3.

¹⁰⁰ N&MRC, *Submission 28*, p. 4.

¹⁰¹ N&MRC, *Submission 28*, p. 4.

¹⁰² Democracy Matters, *Submission 79*, p. 3; University of Melbourne, *Submission 41*, p. 7; Law Council of Australia, *Submission 109*, p. 22; SMF, *Submission 49*, p. 9.

- 4.80 Democracy Matters emphasised that media literacy needs to be a ‘core skill’ that is:
 ... taught from early primary to upper secondary years of schooling, so that individuals can critique the merits and veracity of the vast array of mechanisms available regarding Australia’s democracy, electoral events, and voting.¹⁰³
- 4.81 The Law Council of Australia said that education on civics and citizenship ‘should be accompanied by more general education aimed at building media literacy skills, including about how to critically assess the factual accuracy and general credibility of content’.¹⁰⁴ It added that this should be ‘made a cross-curriculum priority’ as it develops critical thinking skills, equips students with media literacy skills and increases civic engagement.¹⁰⁵
- 4.82 The Australian Youth Affairs Coalition also supported the prioritisation of digital media literacy in the curriculum and encouraged ‘engagement with the eSafety Commissioner’s youth advisory group to receive input and direction on these issues directly’.¹⁰⁶
- 4.83 The Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) told the Committee that it is trying to balance the Australian Curriculum between ensuring that it is ‘contemporary, relevant and up to date’, but ‘not changing it all the time’ considering the workload and fatigue that creates for teachers.¹⁰⁷
- 4.84 There was some support for investment in resources outside of the school curriculum, such as youth-led media outlets and platforms, to ensure that young people have ‘readily available access to quality, reliable and digestible news and information on social issues’.¹⁰⁸
- 4.85 The Y said that young people prefer using social media as an outlet for information because they ‘do not feel that mainstream news media portrays them in a fair and equitable way, nor do they have confidence that their interests and concerns are understood by media’.¹⁰⁹ As such, it recommended that investment should be targeted towards:
 ... increasing collaboration between youth-led media outlets and platforms (such as WhyNot ...) that young people trust and feel represented by, and resources, such as the ABC Fact Check, who provide high-quality, nonpartisan and transparent fact-checking.¹¹⁰

¹⁰³ Democracy Matters, *Submission 79*, p. 5.

¹⁰⁴ Law Council of Australia, *Submission 109*, p. 22.

¹⁰⁵ Law Council of Australia, *Submission 109*, pages 22-23.

¹⁰⁶ Australian Youth Affairs Coalition, *Submission 53*, p. 2.

¹⁰⁷ Mr Stephen Gniel, Acting Chief Executive Officer, Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 23 May 2024, p. 14.

¹⁰⁸ The Y, *Submission 104*, p. 27.

¹⁰⁹ The Y, *Submission 104*, p. 27.

¹¹⁰ The Y, *Submission 104*, pages 27-28.

4.86 Associate Professor Notley et al similarly said that there are a 'suite of high-quality curriculum aligned news literacy resources by public institutions' that are 'well used by teachers' that should be supported by government.¹¹¹ It said that this includes:

ABC Education, the Museum of Australian Democracy and the National Film and Sound Archive of Australia as well as commercial enterprises such as Squizkids' NewsHounds program (designed for primary school students).¹¹²

Support for teachers

4.87 The Committee heard in Chapter 2 that some teachers do not feel comfortable discussing and teaching contemporary topics and controversial issues in the classroom. Stakeholders to the inquiry raised that teachers need more support to teach media literacy skills, including issues relating to social media and AI.

4.88 For example, one respondent to the Committee's civics education survey who teaches at a public school in NSW said:

We have to teach students that Wikipedia is problematic, much less try to come to terms with emerging AI issues. Similarly, we are cautioned about bringing political issues and the like into the classroom that I just don't because I know there are some parents who would lodge a complaint about "indoctrination" while I was simply trying to use a contemporary example to illustrate the skills. (Public school, Major city, NSW)¹¹³

4.89 AMLA told the Committee that Version 9.0 of the Australian Curriculum includes media literacy as a multidisciplinary subject so that the development of these skills is guided 'throughout the delivery of a number of other elements'.¹¹⁴ However, it said that there is a 'gap of whether there are sufficient supportive resources for teachers to know how to take that forward'.¹¹⁵

4.90 Associate Professor Deborah Henderson similarly said that:

Teachers need professional learning opportunities as to how they can teach through and about forms of social media and effectively guide their students to utilise digital technologies to gather information about their world and their place in it.¹¹⁶

4.91 The University of Melbourne said that media and information literacy education should start in primary school and 'include additional support for school teachers, such as relevant professional development, to ensure they can confidently deliver

¹¹¹ Associate Professor Notley et al, *Submission 9*, p. 4.

¹¹² Associate Professor Notley et al, *Submission 9*, p. 4.

¹¹³ Committee Survey Results, *Appendix C*.

¹¹⁴ Ms Planchon, AMLA, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 23 May 2024, p. 19.

¹¹⁵ Ms Planchon, AMLA, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 23 May 2024, p. 19.

¹¹⁶ Associate Professor Deborah Henderson, *Submission 60*, p. 6.

this education'.¹¹⁷ It emphasised, however, that responsibility is often placed on schools when media literacy should be a 'whole-of-life journey':

Technology is changing quickly in terms of the information that is available to people. We tend to put a lot of responsibility on schools: 'Schools will fix that.' Schools are part of the piece, but it is difficult even for teachers and schools to keep up with changes in technology and changes in political discourses. This has to be a whole-of-life journey and not: 'We'll fix this in a school system.' The conversation starts there but, by the time children finish primary school, the technology they are responding to in their interactions with social media will have changed.¹¹⁸

- 4.92 ACARA told the Committee that it currently provides resources to teachers on cybersecurity and privacy of data, in particular AI and large language models. This is provided through a 'curriculum connection document' that shows teachers how to embed the information into learning areas.¹¹⁹ ACARA said that the document includes information on:

... how AI can be used to change people's perspectives on things and the messaging. ... we also have areas such as critical and creative thinking that we expect students are developing as well. That's an important part of understanding the materials that we're being presented with. And, as I said, also these issues of privacy and cybersecurity play a part. When we're talking about educating the whole child, we understand that this is going to be covering quite a number of areas that we want students to develop. We also have an area of the curriculum around media literacy.¹²⁰

Cultural institutions

- 4.93 As discussed in Chapter 2, cultural institutions, particularly those which are part of the Parliamentary and Civics Education Rebate (PACER) program within the formal curriculum, play a role in teaching students and teachers about media literacy. Cultural institutions such as libraries also contribute to promoting media literacy among the broader population.
- 4.94 For example, the Museum of Australian Democracy (MoAD) at Old Parliament House offers programs for students to 'explore the role of media and support students to be empowered, informed digital citizens'.¹²¹
- 4.95 MoAD said that as part of its collaboration with AMLA it has implemented a media literacy framework into its education programs, workshops and teacher professional

¹¹⁷ University of Melbourne, *Submission 41*, p. 6.

¹¹⁸ Professor Jeannie Marie Paterson, Director, Centre for AI and Digital Ethics, University of Melbourne, *Committee Hansard*, Melbourne, 16 October 2024, p. 5.

¹¹⁹ Ms Sharon Foster, Executive Director, Curriculum, Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA), *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 23 May 2024, pages 14-15.

¹²⁰ Ms Foster, ACARA, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 23 May 2024, p. 15.

¹²¹ Museum of Australian Democracy (MoAD), *Submission 102*, p. 3.

development to support 'students of all ages to develop questioning techniques to assist in identifying mis and dis information in media'.¹²²

4.96 The National Film and Sound Archive of Australia (NFSA) provides PACER alternative learning programs and said that in 2023 it engaged with more than 11,000 teachers and students through structured media literacy activities.¹²³

4.97 National and State Libraries Australasia said that its member libraries 'provide digital resources, accessible to anyone in the world, that promote diligent enquiry into the legitimacy of information consumed'.¹²⁴

4.98 AMLA highlighted the importance of ensuring that these institutions are 'suitably resourced', stating that:

Along with building media literacy comes the obligation to ensure that trusted, publicly funded institutions are suitably resourced to provide the information needed by the population to be well-informed, so that citizens who have become media literate and are looking for credible sources, can actually find them. This requires adequate funding of ... national cultural institutions and libraries that play a crucial role in providing free access to information.¹²⁵

4.99 The Australian Library and Information Association (ALIA) told the Committee that teacher librarians in schools are responsible for 'whole school information literacy programs' and the decline of qualified school library staff in public schools:

... places students in these schools at risk of significant disadvantage in obtaining the necessary information and media literacy skills. This threatens a growing divide between schools who are well resourced and those where students have less support.¹²⁶

4.100 ALIA recommended more support for every Australian school having a well-resourced school library run by qualified staff.¹²⁷

Public broadcasters

4.101 Public broadcasters, such as the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) and Special Broadcasting Service (SBS) provide free access to information for all Australians to ensure that election information and coverage is 'accessible and

¹²² MoAD, *Submission 102*, pages 7-8.

¹²³ NCETP and PACER Alternative Attractions, *Submission 94*, p. 6.

¹²⁴ National and State Libraries Australasia, *Submission 34*, p. 3.

¹²⁵ AMLA, *Submission 89*, p. 3.

¹²⁶ Australian Library and Information Association (ALIA), *Submission 46*, p. 3.

¹²⁷ ALIA, *Submission 46*, p. 4.

trustworthy'.¹²⁸ ABC and SBS are favoured news sources for CALD communities¹²⁹ and 'are the most trusted news sources in Australia'.¹³⁰

4.102 ABC said that in partnership with the AEC, it delivers 'media literacy workshops for young Australians living in rural and remote areas' that are mapped to the Australian Curriculum.¹³¹

4.103 The Y told the Committee that more funding should be targeted towards resources that 'young people trust and feel represented by' such as the ABC Fact Check.¹³²

4.104 The *SBS Examines* service provides 'culturally appropriate explainers' in-language to counterbalance the proliferation of misinformation and disinformation, including through AI or foreign interference.¹³³ SBS explained:

Launched in July 2024, SBS Examines provides additional, culturally appropriate explainers and in-depth reporting in more than 40 languages including English, Arabic, Dari, Hindi, Mandarin, Pashto, Persian, Hindi, Punjabi, Russian, Ukrainian. They focus on issues affecting social cohesion in Australia and addressing misinformation circulating in one or more communities, through articles, podcasts and videos available across SBS platforms and third parties' including YouTube and social media (Instagram, X, Weibo, WeChat, and TikTok).¹³⁴

4.105 SBS said that the team develops the pieces by consulting with its multilingual staff 'who are in touch with their communities' and 'see the news that circulates online'.¹³⁵

4.106 AMLA and Victorian Trades Hall Council (VTHC) recommended more funding to these public news sources,¹³⁶ with the VTHC stating that 'public interest journalism which the ABC and SBS provide is fundamental to the upholding of our democracy and social cohesion'.¹³⁷

A national strategy for media literacy

4.107 Stakeholders expressed strong support for the development of a national strategy for media literacy, aimed at empowering students and citizens of all ages to engage

¹²⁸ Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC), *Submission 76*, p. 4.

¹²⁹ Dr Yang and Associate Professor Khorana, *Submission 127*, p. 18.

¹³⁰ Victorian Trades Hall Council (VTHC), *Submission 86*, p. 12.

¹³¹ ABC, *Submission 76*, p. 6.

¹³² The Y, *Submission 104*, pages 27-28. The Committee notes that the ABC Fact Check closed on 28 June 2024: Australian Broadcasting Corporation, 'Fact Check signs off today after 11 years at the ABC. Here's our guide to being your own fact checker', 28 June 2024, www.abc.net.au/news/2024-06-28/fact-check-final-wrap-11-years/104033004.

¹³³ SBS, *Submission 130*, p. 8.

¹³⁴ SBS, *Submission 130*, pages 8-9.

¹³⁵ Ms Pamela Cook, Acting Director of Audio and Language Content, Special Broadcasting Service, *Committee Hansard*, Melbourne, 16 October 2024, p. 26.

¹³⁶ AMLA, *Submission 89*, p. 3; VTHC, *Submission 86*, pages 12-13.

¹³⁷ VTHC, *Submission 86*, pages 12-13.

actively in social and democratic processes within a rapidly evolving media landscape.¹³⁸

4.108 AMLA said that it has done 'substantial work to support the development of a national strategy' and has identified that a strategy should:

- provide direction for educators and curriculum development
- raise awareness and encourage a whole-of-community response
- ensure all Australian citizens can access the support they need to benefit from diverse forms of media and avoid media harms.¹³⁹

4.109 NFSA added that an 'ongoing, comprehensive, and coherent national strategy for media literacy' should deliver media literacy education that is appropriate for and co-designed with diverse groups and communities.¹⁴⁰

4.110 Similarly, the AEC said it supports 'any efforts from government and civil society to invest in a national digital literacy campaign' as 'electoral management bodies cannot do it alone and isolated electoral campaigns no longer suffice' in the face of changing community and stakeholder needs.¹⁴¹

4.111 AMLA said that in addition to a national strategy, there are immediate actions that can be taken to improve media literacy levels in Australia, including resources for libraries and museums, and 'a grant scheme to support grassroots organisations that are best placed to support media literacy education within high needs communities'.¹⁴²

4.112 Associate Professor Notley et al described the leadership role taken by trusted public institutions:

In all other international jurisdictions where media literacy has been successfully implemented on a wide scale, government policy has promoted and enabled media literacy initiatives through policy and funding. In many European countries, public cultural institutions lead national media literacy efforts in recognition of the strength, capacity and public trust these institutions have.¹⁴³

4.113 The University of Melbourne said that a concerted effort across government, the private sector and academia should be regularly evaluated through 'robust mechanisms' to 'ensure that strategies evolve in line with the changing landscape of information dissemination'.¹⁴⁴

¹³⁸ AMLA, *Submission 89*, pages 2-3; Associate Professor Tanya Notley et al, *Submission 9*, p. 4; AEC, *Submission 15*, p. 19; NFSA, *Submission 59*, p. 1; MoAD, *Submission 102*, p. 8; The Y, *Submission 104*, p. 4.

¹³⁹ AMLA, *Submission 89*, p. 3.

¹⁴⁰ NFSA, *Submission 59*, p. 5.

¹⁴¹ AEC, *Submission 15*, p. 19.

¹⁴² AMLA, *Submission 89*, p. 3.

¹⁴³ Associate Professor Tanya Notley et al, *Submission 9*, p. 5.

¹⁴⁴ University of Melbourne, *Submission 41*, p. 2.

4.114 Some inquiry participants noted the importance of the development of media literacy tools to support individuals process information and that moves beyond reliance on fact-checking websites as 'this may not be sufficient on its own'.¹⁴⁵

4.115 The University of Melbourne warned that without tools that an individual can use to discern fact from fiction, it can be difficult to correct misinformation or disinformation that accords with their world views.¹⁴⁶ It said that people should have the tools to decide this for themselves:

That kind of thing, going hand in hand with information literacy, is probably much more effective than trying to say, 'Someone is going to decide whether something is true or false,' because it also adapts on the ground to new information.¹⁴⁷

4.116 N&MRC provided an example of a four-pronged information literacy tool to assist an individual to assess a claim being made:

- 1 Evaluating the information environment – did the claim arise from a library source or the internet, social media or TV?
- 2 Choosing a reading strategy – Vertical (deep, critical engagement with ideas) or Lateral (open another tab, do a search, check what trusted sources say)
- 3 Checking trusted sources – encyclopedias, ABC, SBS, BBC, New York Times
- 4 Reflecting on the emotional impact – Are triggers such as music, images, words, ad hominem attacks, being used? Why are they trying to make you angry or sad?¹⁴⁸

4.117 N&MRC said such a tool should be distributed through public information campaigns, libraries and public service induction programs,¹⁴⁹ and included in the Australian Curriculum in the form of a 'mandatory Civic Literacy Certificate'.¹⁵⁰

International media literacy initiatives to combat disinformation

4.118 The Committee heard that Australia is lagging behind other advanced democracies, including countries in Europe, Africa and Latin America, which have successfully established media literacy policies and programs.¹⁵¹ Some inquiry participants agreed that approaches to media literacy education overseas are good sources of best practice for Australia to draw on.

¹⁴⁵ University of Melbourne, *Submission 41*, p. 5.

¹⁴⁶ University of Melbourne, *Submission 41*, p. 5.

¹⁴⁷ Professor Andrew Perfors, Director, Complex Human Data Hub, University of Melbourne, *Committee Hansard*, Melbourne, 16 October 2024, p. 2.

¹⁴⁸ N&MRC, University of Canberra, *Submission 28*, p. 2.

¹⁴⁹ N&MRC, University of Canberra, *Submission 28*, p. 6.

¹⁵⁰ N&MRC, University of Canberra, *Submission 28*, pages 9 and 10.

¹⁵¹ Associate Professor Tanya Notley et al, *Submission 9*, p. 5.

4.119 The European Union (EU) recognised that media literacy supports free and fair elections and introduced legislation to strengthen the role of media literacy and the provision of frameworks and guidelines.¹⁵² EU member countries are now 'required to regularly report on what they are doing to develop media literacy' and share best practices through the European Media and Information Fund.¹⁵³

4.120 NFSA said that countries such as Finland, Sweden and Ireland have demonstrated that education 'remains the key component for populations to withstand the negative impact of fake news and misinformation'.¹⁵⁴ It added that these countries 'are recognised as having some of the most literate populations in the world'.¹⁵⁵

4.121 Finland has been recently rated as the EU's 'most resistant nation to disinformation'.¹⁵⁶ VTHC said that information literacy and strong critical thinking are core components of Finland's national curriculum and 'are taught across a variety of subjects':

Ways to identify and understand misinformation and disinformation are taught across a variety of subjects including, maths where pupils are taught statistics can be used to lie to you, art, where they learn how images and their meaning can be manipulated, and in Finnish language they are taught how words can be used to confuse, mislead and deceive.¹⁵⁷

4.122 Democracy Matters added that in Finland, the Kavi Institute not only trains teachers and students, but also journalists and public servants 'on how to identify and respond to mis and disinformation as well as where to find verifiable and reliable information'.¹⁵⁸ It said that the New Literacies Development Program for pre-primary and primary school education is 'the most significant single media education investment in Finland'.¹⁵⁹

4.123 According to VTHC, in Germany, online platforms face significant fines of up to 1.25 million Euros if illegal content is not removed within 24 hours.¹⁶⁰

4.124 ABC said that governments around the world are regulating social media platforms 'more effectively':

For example, the European Union has introduced the Digital Service Act (DSA), the Digital Market Act (DMA) and the Artificial Intelligence Act (AI Act). These measures oblige online and social media platforms to proactively fight

¹⁵² Associate Professor Tanya Notley et al, *Submission 9*, p. 5; NFSA, *Submission 59*, p. 5.

¹⁵³ Associate Professor Tanya Notley et al, *Submission 9*, p. 5; NFSA, *Submission 59*, p. 5; VTHC, *Submission 86*, p. 9.

¹⁵⁴ NFSA, *Submission 59*, p. 3.

¹⁵⁵ NFSA, *Submission 59*, p. 3.

¹⁵⁶ VTHC, *Submission 86*, p. 9.

¹⁵⁷ VTHC, *Submission 86*, p. 9.

¹⁵⁸ Democracy Matters, *Submission 79*, p. 3.

¹⁵⁹ Democracy Matters, *Submission 79*, p. 3.

¹⁶⁰ VTHC, *Submission 86*, p. 10.

disinformation, ensure transparency in relation to the algorithms used to prioritise content, and warrant online safety.¹⁶¹

- 4.125 VTHC similarly said that like governments such as the UK, Canada and France, the Australian Government should ‘collaborate with Australian unions, NGOs and fact-checkers who act as independent and trusted voices to better understand the sources, spread and impact of disinformation in Australia’.¹⁶²

Committee comment

- 4.126 Australians face an increasingly complex online information ecosystem which can be rife with misinformation and disinformation. Low levels of media literacy pose a significant barrier to civic engagement and, if left unaddressed, threaten to undermine ongoing efforts to enhance civics education and democratic participation. There is an urgent need for a whole-of-life approach to civics education and media literacy.
- 4.127 The Committee notes that while legislative responses to misinformation and disinformation are important steps, regulation alone is insufficient to fully address this issue. A key aspect lies in fostering critical thinking skills to help individuals recognise and resist false information. A long-term commitment to media literacy will prepare future generations to navigate an increasingly complex online information environment.
- 4.128 A national media and digital literacy strategy with a coordinated approach across educational institutions, government agencies, cultural organisations and communities is needed. The strategy should be designed to empower Australians and encourage them to evaluate the credibility of information, take an active role in shaping their communities and hold their leaders accountable.
- 4.129 The national strategy for media and digital literacy should adopt a four-part approach incorporating both immediate and longer-term actions:
- Strengthening media and digital literacy in the Australian Curriculum
 - Expanding media literacy support for adults, with a focus on vulnerable groups
 - Enhancing development and access to reliable, translated resources to counteract disinformation
 - Advancing research on media consumption patterns and recommender systems on social media
- 4.130 Current education in Australian schools on digital literacy is taught inconsistently and without sufficient support and guidance for teachers. A priority of the national strategy

¹⁶¹ ABC, *Submission 76*, p. 5.

¹⁶² VTHC, *Submission 86*, p. 11.

should be to embed media and digital literacy more deeply within the Australian Curriculum across multiple subject areas.

- 4.131 Stakeholders pointed to Finland as a model of best practice, described as the EU's most resistant nation to disinformation, where information literacy and strong critical thinking are key components of the national curriculum and taught across multiple subjects such as maths, art and language studies.
- 4.132 The Committee recommends that ACARA draw on successful international models to prioritise media and digital literacy in the next version of the Australian Curriculum. This should be implemented as a cross-curriculum priority to equip students with the skills to critically assess information sources across several subjects.

Recommendation 18

- 4.133 The Committee recommends that ACARA draw on successful international models to commence work to prioritise media and digital literacy education in the next version of the Australian Curriculum as a cross-curriculum priority.**
- 4.134 The Committee recognises that frequent curriculum updates can be burdensome for teachers. As such, ACARA should collaborate with universities and researchers to develop media literacy tools that can be taught in schools to support critical information processing as they can be adaptable on the ground to new information. These tools should be designed for longevity, reducing the need for constant updates in response to the fast-evolving digital environment.

Recommendation 19

- 4.135 The Committee recommends that ACARA, in collaboration with universities and other academics, design media literacy tools for the next version of the Australian Curriculum to support students' critical information processing that are adaptable to a changing online environment.**
- 4.136 A consistent theme throughout this inquiry was that teachers need more support to engage their students in contemporary issues. Changes to the Australian Curriculum means that teachers will need more support and training to deliver content on complex issues such as social media, misinformation and disinformation, and AI.
- 4.137 As such, the Committee recommends that ACARA work with the state and territory education authorities, and teacher associations, to develop national teacher professional development resources containing standardised instructions, resources and tools.

Recommendation 20

- 4.138 The Committee recommends that, further to Recommendation 5, ACARA collaborate with state and territory education authorities and teacher**

associations to develop guidance, resources and tools that support the delivery of education on media and digital literacy. This should cover social media, misinformation and disinformation, and artificial intelligence. Nationally consistent teacher professional development resources should be in place for the new version of the Australian Curriculum.

- 4.139 While schools play a significant role in fostering media literacy, education should be lifelong, and responsibility cannot rest solely on institutions. Rather, a collaborative, societal approach is needed to reinforce these skills. The comprehensive media literacy strategy should prioritise support for adult populations, particularly for CALD communities and other vulnerable groups.
- 4.140 Chapter 3 recommended that the Australian Government collaborate with CALD grassroots community organisations to develop and deliver civics education programs in community centres across Australia. Leveraging these partnerships presents an opportunity to incorporate digital literacy training to empower individuals to access reliable information and participate in online civics discussions.
- 4.141 Digital and media literacy programs, co-designed with community centres, should teach participants how to critically evaluate information sources and identify misinformation and disinformation. The Australian Government should also consider funding grant schemes for grassroots organisations that are best placed to support media literacy education within high needs communities.

Recommendation 21

- 4.142 The Committee recommends that the Australian Government work with grassroots community organisations for CALD people and other vulnerable groups to develop and deliver co-designed media and digital literacy training to support members of these groups build their skills to critically evaluate information sources and identify misinformation and disinformation.**
- 4.143 False narratives and misinformation proliferate rapidly on social media and can significantly impact public understanding of democratic issues, especially during electoral events. For CALD communities, misinformation and disinformation may be more readily available in languages other than English, and with no translated resources to counteract these, communities are more vulnerable to political exploitation.
- 4.144 The Committee acknowledges the hard work of the AEC and state and territory electoral commissions in establishing disinformation registers. Such resources can reduce the burden on community members and families who often bear the responsibility of debunking information circulating on social media channels.
- 4.145 The third element of a national strategy for media literacy should focus on funding to improve the development of and access to factual, translated resources to counteract disinformation. The Committee considers that the AEC and its state and territory counterparts, with appropriate funding, are best placed to develop and disseminate

these resources. The AEC should work with grassroots organisations and community leaders to ensure that information is translated appropriately and is communicated in a way that fits into everyday language norms.

Recommendation 22

4.146 The Committee recommends that the AEC be appropriately funded to work with state and territory electoral commissions and grassroots community organisations, to develop and disseminate factual, appropriately translated electoral information in a range of formats, including audio, visual, infographic and simple text that can be easily shared across social media platforms.

4.147 A deeper understanding of how Australians, and in particular CALD groups, receive and process information is needed to refine media literacy strategies. Media literacy not only includes the ability to critically engage with news stories, but also understand how algorithms work on social media, such as recommender systems that can target certain groups to push specific agendas, particularly during electoral events.

Recommendation 23

4.148 The Committee recommends that as part of a national media literacy strategy, the Australian Government support research initiatives to gain a better understanding of how all Australians receive and process civics and electoral information on social media. Research should be focused on:

- **the role of social media and the impact of recommender systems on democratic processes**
- **how vulnerable groups, such as CALD communities, receive and consume information to better understand how to combat misinformation and disinformation in these communities.**

**Senator the Hon Carol Brown
Chair
28 January 2025**



A. Submissions

- 1 Professor George Williams AO
- 2 Mr Robert Heron
- 3 Mr John Seddon
- 4 Mr Peter Leverenz
- 5 Dr Adam Lovett
- 6 City of Darwin
- 7 Dr Robyn Stephenson
- 8 Bega Valley Shire Council
- 9 Associate Professor Tanya Notley, Professor Michael Dezuanni, and Professor Sora Park
 - 9.1 Supplementary to submission 9
 - 9.2 Supplementary to submission 9
- 10 Beaufort Secondary College
- 11 newDemocracy Foundation
- 12 Dr Zareh Ghazarian and Dr Jacqueline Laughland-Booy
- 13 Dr Keith Heggart
- 14 Social and Citizenship Education Association of Australia
 - 14.1 Supplementary to submission 14
- 15 Australian Electoral Commission
 - 15.1 Supplementary to submission 15
 - 15.2 Supplementary to submission 15
 - 15.3 Supplementary to submission 15
- 16 Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority
- 17 Social Education Victoria

- 18** Northern Territory Government
- 19** Professor Lisa Hill, Professor Rodrigo Praino and Ms Isabella Courtney
- 20** Northern Territory Legislative Assembly
- 21** NSW Parliamentary Education and Engagement
- 22** Parliamentary Education Office (Commonwealth)
- 22.1 Supplementary to submission 22
- 23** Dr Simon Knight
- 24** Australian Lawyers Alliance and Australians for Native Title and Reconciliation (ANTaR)
- 25** NSW Education Standards Authority
- 25.1 Supplementary to submission 25
- 26** South Australian Commissioner for Children and Young People
- Attachment 1
- 27** Mr Matthew Hawkins
- 28** News and Media Research Centre, University of Canberra
- 29** National Archives of Australia
- 30** Australian Council for Student Voice
- 31** Professor Anne Twomey
- 32** Academy of the Social Sciences in Australia
- 33** Real Republic Australia
- 34** National and State Libraries Australasia
- 35** Business Educators Australasia Inc.
- 36** Queensland University of Technology
- 37** Australian Communications and Media Authority
- 38** Department of Education
- 38.1 Supplementary to submission 38
- 39** Rule of Law Education Centre

- 40** Mr Simon Zulian
- 41** University of Melbourne
- 41.1 Supplementary to submission 41
- 42** Monash University Centre for Youth Policy and Education Practice
- 43** Down Syndrome Australia
- 44** Civic Engagement Youth Advisory Group
- 45** Associate Professor Elisa Arcioni, Ms Cornelia Koch, Associate Professor Joe McIntyre, Dr Sandy Noakes and Professor Catherine Renshaw
- 45.1 Supplementary to submission 45
- 46** Australian Library and Information Association
- 47** Chinese Australian Forum
- 48** National Library of Australia
- 49** Susan McKinnon Foundation
- 50** Political and Legal Educators Association of Western Australia
- 51** Department of Parliamentary Services
- 52** Charles Sturt University
- 53** Australian Youth Affairs Coalition
- 54** Professor Daniel Joyce
- 55** Ms Lyndal Howison
- Attachment 1
- 56** Run For It
- 57** Australian Professional Teachers Association
- 58** Mrs Alexina Baldini and Dr Shelley Connell
- 59** National Film and Sound Archive of Australia
- 60** Associate Professor Deborah Henderson
- 61** Mr Benjamin Cronshaw
- 62** University of Sydney

- 63** AMES Australia
- 64** Australian Council for Educational Research
- 65** Next25
- 66** Dr Bede Harris
- 67** Ms Kate Rankine
- 68** Local Government NSW
- 68.1 Supplementary to submission 68
- 69** Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority
- 70** Commissioner for Children and Young People Tasmania
- 71** Tauondi Aboriginal Corporation (Tauondi Aboriginal College)
- 72** Australian War Memorial
- 73** Universities Australia
- 74** Victorian Electoral Commission
- 74.1 Supplementary to submission 74
 - Attachment 1
- 75** Advocate for Children and Young People
- 76** Australian Broadcasting Corporation
- 77** Mr Joshua Patrick
- 78** Professor Rosalind Dixon and Rose Vassel
- 79** Democracy Matters
- 80** Youth Decide Australia
- 81** UN Youth Australia
- 82** Professor Kim Rubenstein
- 83** Uniting Church in Australia, Synod of Victoria and Tasmania
- 84** Australian Historical Association
- 85** Department of Home Affairs

- 86** Victorian Trades Hall Council
- 87** Institute of Public Affairs
- 88** Youth Affair Council of South Australia
- 89** Australian Media Literacy Alliance
- 90** Foundation for Young Australians
- 91** Dr Ruth Reynolds
- 92** Dr Joe McIntyre and Jacqueline Charles
- 93** Curtin Youth
- 94** NCETP and PACER Alternative Attractions
- 95** South Australian Youth Forum
- 96** Professor Murray Print
- 97** Dr Kevin Bonham
- 98** Settlement Council of Australia
- 99** Constitution Education Fund Australia
- 100** NSW Electoral Commission
- 100.1 Supplementary to submission 100
- 101** Rachel Krust and Jonathan Moskovic
- 102** Museum of Australian Democracy
- 103** Parliament of South Australia
- 104** The Y
- 105** Deaf Connect
- 106** Professor Naomi Dale and Md Azmain Muhtasim Mir
- 107** Australian Federation of Disability Organisations
- 108** Mr Timothy Wood
- 109** Law Council of Australia
- 110** National Capital Educational Tourism Project

- 111** Meta
- 112** *Name Withheld*
- 113** Mr Phil Bachmann
- 114** Mr Thomas Chick
- Attachment 1
- 115** Clerks of the Legislative Assembly and Council at the Parliament of Victoria
- 115.1 Supplementary to submission 115
- 116** Dr Sarah Moulds
- 117** Australian Human Rights Commission
- 118** Federation of Ethnic Communities' Councils of Australia
- 118.1 Supplementary to submission 118
- 119** Women for an Australian Republic
- Attachment 1
 - Attachment 2
- 120** The Australia Institute
- 121** Northern Territory Electoral Commission
- Attachment 1
 - Attachment 2
- 122** Professor Emeritus Alan Reid AM
- 123** Mr Christopher Shaw
- 124** Julie James Bailey
- 125** South Australian Government
- 126** Mr Matthew Potocnik
- 127** Dr Fan Yang and Associate Professor Sukhmani Khorana
- 128** Australian Education Union
- 129** Central Land Council
- 130** SBS

- 131** United Nations Association of Australia
- 132** Speaker of the House of Representatives



B. Public hearings

Thursday 23 May 2024

Canberra

Australian Curriculum, Assessment, and Reporting Authority

- Mr Stephen Gniel, Chief Executive Officer (A/g)
- Ms Sharon Foster, Executive Director - Curriculum
- Mr Russell Dyer, Executive Director - Assessment and Reporting

Department of Education

- Ms Julie Birmingham, First Assistant Secretary - Teaching and Learning
- Ms Madonna Morton, First Assistant Secretary - Higher Education
- Mrs Nina Downes, Assistant Secretary (A/g) - Curriculum and Learning

Office for Youth

- Ms Gemma Sandlant, Assistant Secretary

Australian Media Literacy Alliance

- Ms Anita Planchon, Chair
- Mrs Christine Evely, Co-Chair
- Ms Patricia Hepworth, Member

Australian Electoral Commission

- Mr Tom Rogers, Electoral Commissioner
- Mr Jeff Pope, Deputy Electoral Commissioner
- Ms Kath Gleeson, First Assistant Commissioner - Service Delivery
- Mr Michael Lynch, First Assistant Commissioner - Electoral Integrity and Operations
- Mr Andrew Johnson, Chief Legal Officer
- Ms Cathie Kennedy, Assistant Commissioner (A/g) - Communication, Education and Engagement

Australian Council for Student Voice

- Mr Mitchell Sprague, Executive Director

- Mr Flynn O'Hallahan, Chair

Foundation for Young Australians

- Molly Whelan, Chief Executive Officer
- Ms Tahlia Azaria, Executive Director - Young Mayors Program

Private capacity

- Dr Zareh Ghazarian
- Dr Keith Heggart
- Associate Professor Tanya Notley
- Adjunct Associate Professor Libby Tudball

Wednesday 19 June 2024

Canberra

Australian Youth Affairs Coalition

- Ms Joanna Rostami, Chief Executive Officer
- Ms Kirsty Kain, National Policy and Advocacy Lead
- Ms Nellie Wotherspoon, Policy Officer

Run For It

- Mr Edward Krutch, National Director

UN Youth Australia

- Mr Caleb Henley, National President
- Mr Dylan Storer, Western Australia Divisional President

Youth Affair Council of South Australia

- Ms Anne Bainbridge, Chief Executive Officer

South Australian Youth Forum

- Ms Amber Brock-Fabel, Director
- Ms Abbey Wilkinson, Executive
- Ms Eleanor Buckham, Member
- Mr Jamie Reichelt, Member

South Australian Commissioner for Children and Young People and the South Australian Student Representative Council

- Ms Helen Connolly, Commissioner
- Ms Sania Ali, student representative

- Mr Raghunaath Vijayan, student representative
- Ms Natasha Weber, student representative
- Mr Lincoln Williams, student representative

Settlement Council of Australia

- Ms Sandra Elhelw, Chief Executive Officer
- Mr Ashraful Azad, Policy Lead

Professor Anne Twomey, Private capacity

Civic Engagement Youth Advisory Group

- Ms Faaiza Murshed
- Mr Kuba Meikle

Tuesday 23 July 2024

Maningrida

Bawinanga Aboriginal Corporation

- Ms Amanda Ewart, Acting-Chief Executive Officer
- Ms Cynthia Brown, Director

Nja-Marleya Cultural Leaders and Justice Group

- Seide Ramadani, Chief Executive Officer
- Mr Garth Malwurja Doolan, Deputy Chair

Maningrida Progress Association

- Mr Ian McLay, Chief Executive Officer
- Mr Shane Namanurki, Chairperson

Mala'la Health Service Aboriginal Corporation

- Ms Valda Bokmakarray, Board Member

Wednesday 24 July 2024

Darwin

City of Darwin

- Ms Simone Saunders, Chief Executive Officer
- Mr Scott Walker, Manager Advocacy and Policy

Northern Territory Electoral Commission

- Ms Karen Parker, Manager Corporate Information and Training

Central Land Council

- Ms Christine Williamson, Senior Policy Officer

Northern Land Council

- Mr David Astalosh, General Manager Strategy and Communications

The Multicultural Council of the Northern Territory

- Dr Edwin Joseph, President

Thursday 25 July 2024

Cairns

Department of Education, Far North Queensland Region

- Mrs Brooke Byars, Head of Department Humanities and Business

Cairns Youth Council (Young Mayors)

- Mr Antonije Dimitrijevic, Mayor
- Ms Sofia Hoorn, Deputy Secretary
- Mr Aiden Senaratne, Youth Councillor

Wednesday 7 August 2024

Canberra

Wyndham Citizens' Academy, Wyndham Community and Education Centre

- Mr John Sheen, Deputy Chief Executive Officer

Meadow Heights Education Centre

- Ms Preethi Vergis, Chief Executive Officer
- Mrs Cristina Thompson, Administration Officer

Constitution Education Fund Australia

- Mrs Kerry Jones, Chief Executive Officer
- The Hon Robert French AC, Chair
- Professor Geoff Gallop, Director
- Professor Sarah Murray, Director
- Professor George Brandis, Director

Thursday 8 August 2024

Canberra

Parliament of Victoria

- Dr Narelle Wood, Senior Education Adviser
- Mr Andres Lomp, Community Engagement Manager

The Y

- Mr Jarrod Dobson, National Director Advocacy and Public Policy
- Ms Kaitlin Woolford, Victorian Youth Parliament Program Coordinator
- Ms Miranda Cross, Policy Advisor
- Maeson Harvey, WA Youth Advocate

Victorian Trades Hall Council

- Mr Luke Hilakari, Secretary
- Ms Tiarne Crowther, Politics & Research Lead

Social Education Victoria

- Ms Laura Newman, Executive Officer

Victorian Electoral Commission

- Mr Sven Bluemmel, Electoral Commissioner
- Ms Melea Tarabay, Director, Communication and Engagement
- Ms Sue Lang, Strategic Communications Advisor

Federation of Ethnic Communities' Councils of Australia

- Ms Mary Ann Geronimo, Chief Executive Officer
- Ms Padma Muralidharan, Senior Policy and Projects Officer

Ethnic Communities Council of Victoria

- Mr Eddie Micallef, Chairperson
- Mr James Houghton, Senior Policy Advisor

Wednesday 11 September 2024

Canberra

- Hon Milton Dick MP, The Speaker of the House of Representatives

Friday 13 September 2024

Canberra

News and Media Research Centre, University of Canberra

- Professor Mathieu O'Neil, Professor of Communication

Parliamentary Education Office, Department of the Senate

- Ms Jackie Morrie, Deputy Clerk
- Ms Anita Donaldson, A/g Director
- Ms Helene Halliday, Assistant Director

Universities Australia

- Mr Luke Sheehy, Chief Executive Officer

Private capacity

- Dr Sarah Moulds

Australian Electoral Commission

- Mr Tom Rogers, Electoral Commissioner
- Mr Jeff Pope, Deputy Electoral Commissioner

Thursday 3 October 2024

Canberra

Private capacity

- Professor Rosalind Dixon
- Mrs Rose Vassel
- Professor Murray Print
- Associate Professor Elisa Arcioni
- Associate Professor Joe McIntyre
- Dr Sandra Noakes
- Mrs Catherine Renshaw

Melbourne Law School, The University of Melbourne; and ARC Centre of Excellence for Automated Decision-Making and Society

- Dr Fan Yang, Research Fellow

School of the Arts and Media, UNSW

- Associate Professor Sukhmani Khorana, Scientia Associate Professor in the Faculty of Arts, Design and Architecture

Rule of Law Education Centre

- Mrs Sally Layson, Chief Executive Officer
- Mrs Justine Hanks, Education Manager

Parliament of NSW

- Ms Jeannie Douglass, Senior Manager, Education and Engagement
- Ms Daniela Giorgi, Senior Education Officer

Local Government NSW

- Mr David Reynolds, Chief Executive
- Cr Darriea Turley AM, President

NSW Electoral Commission

- Dr Matthew Phillips, Acting NSW Electoral Commissioner
- Ms Andrea Summerell, Executive Director Elections
- Ms Philippa Brandon, Director of Communications

NSW Department of Education

- Ms Megan Kelly, Executive Director Curriculum and Reform

NSW Education Standards Authority

- Dr Paul Cahill, Executive Director, Curriculum

Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority

- Mr Stephen Gniel, Chief Executive Officer
- Mr Russell Dyer, Executive Director, Assessment and Reporting
- Ms Sharon Foster, Executive Director, Curriculum

Wednesday 16 October 2024

Melbourne

University of Melbourne

- Professor Jeannie Marie Paterson, Director of the Centre for AI and Digital Ethics
- Dr Andrew Perfors, Professor and Director of the Complex Human Data Hub
- Associate Professor Piers Howe, Associate Professor, Melbourne School of Psychological Sciences

Australian Federation of Disability Organisations

- Mr Matthew Hall, National Manager – Systemic Advocacy and Policy

Down Syndrome Australia

- Mr Darryl Steff, Chief Executive Officer

Social and Citizenship Education Association of Australia

- Dr Jia Ying Neoh, President
- Dr Deborah Green, Secretary
- Dr Bryan Smith, Member of the Executive
- Dr Libby Tudball, Private capacity

Australian Council for Educational Research

- Mr Julian Fraillon, Senior Advisor
- Dr Tim Friedman, Senior Research Fellow

SBS

- Ms Clare O'Neil, Director of Corporate Affairs
- Ms Pamela Cook, Acting Director of Audio & Language Content

AMES Australia

- Ms Maria Tsopanis, Senior Manager, Community Development and Social Participation
- Mr Laurie Nowell, Media Manager



C. Survey summary

In addition to seeking views from the community via written submissions and public hearings, the Committee was keen to hear from students, teachers and recent school leavers about their experiences with civics and citizenship education.

The Committee opened three online surveys from 5 June 2024 to 30 August 2024, and links were widely distributed to schools across Australia. In designing the survey, the Committee considered risks to privacy, and that questions were age-appropriate for student cohorts. Surveys were completed anonymously. Respondents were able to discontinue the survey at any time and choose 'prefer not to answer' to most questions.

A preamble was made available at the start of each survey to inform participants on the Committee's inquiry, a definition of 'civics' and information on the survey. The preamble encouraged students to discuss and complete the survey with a parent, family member or teacher.

Each survey contained up to 25 questions relating to several areas of interest to the Committee to identify issues and trends in relation to civics education across Australia and encourage engagement with the Committee's inquiry. The Committee received:

- 590 responses from school students
- 314 responses from educators
- 55 responses from school leavers.

Please note that the results are presented in their primary format, no changes have been made to any typographical errors in responses, and independent statistical analysis on the data has not been conducted.

Civics education survey – Students

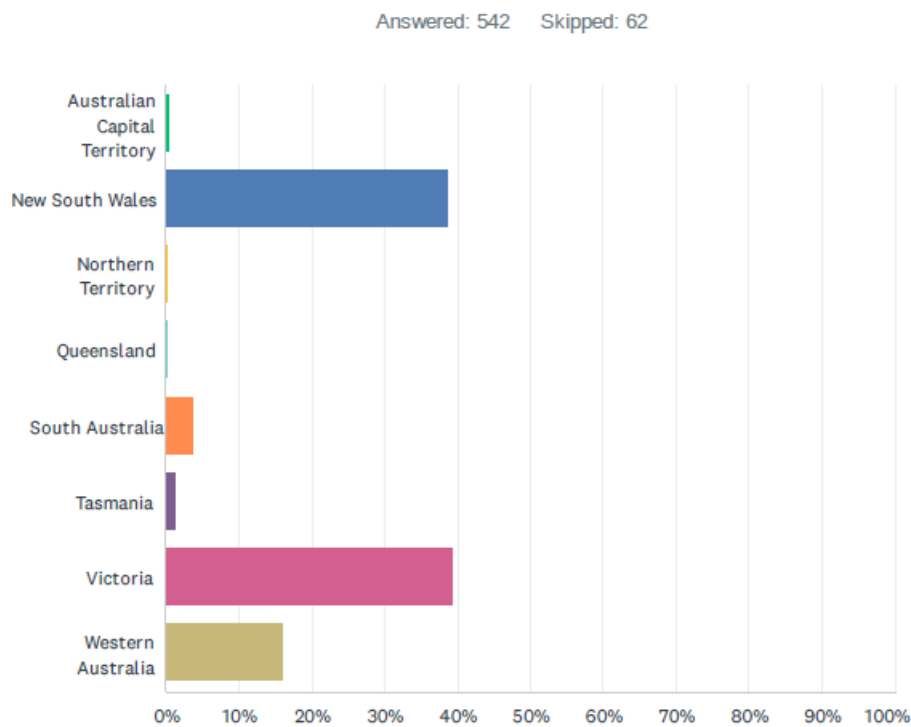
590 responses

Question 1 sought the respondent’s confirmation to continue with the survey after reading the preamble.

590 respondents selected ‘Yes’ and 14 selected ‘No’.

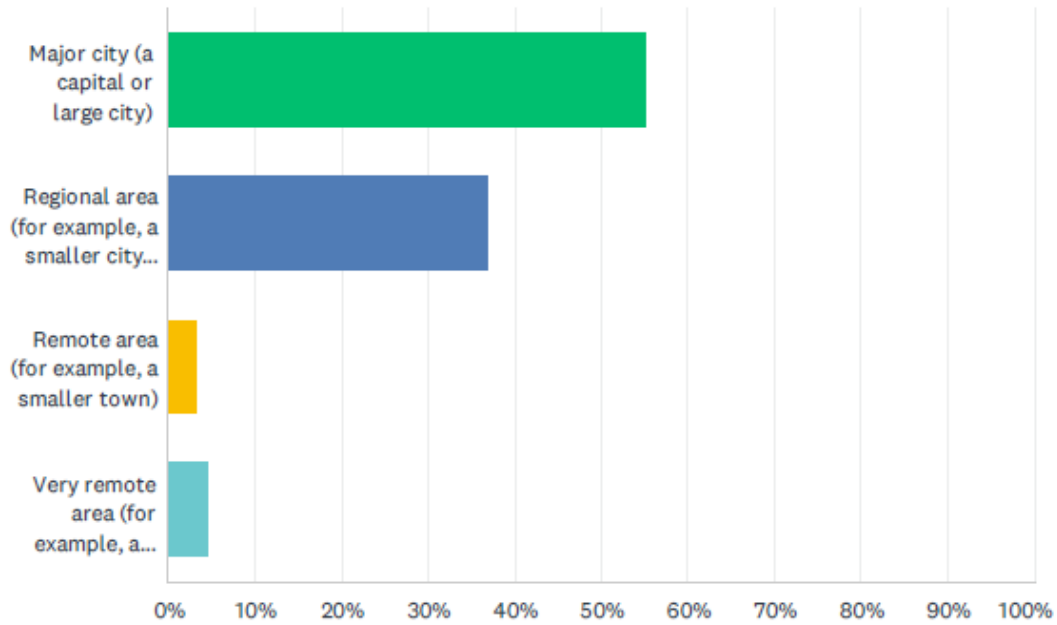
Question 2: In which state or territory do you attend school?

While all states and territories were represented, 423 of all respondents were from Victoria or New South Wales.



Question 3: Where is your school located?

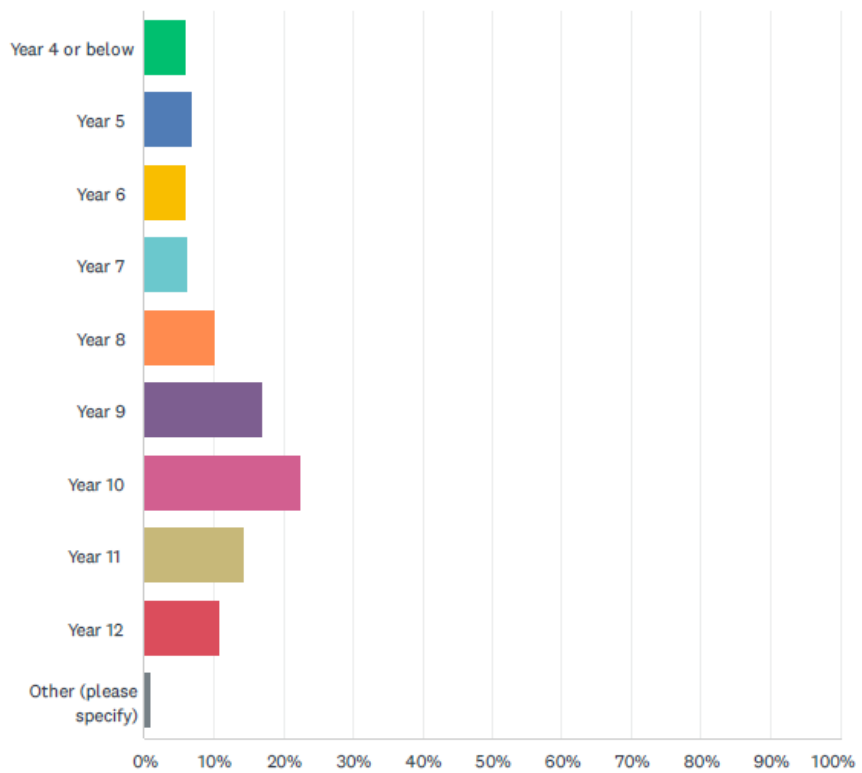
Answered: 542 Skipped: 62



Question 4: What is your current school year?

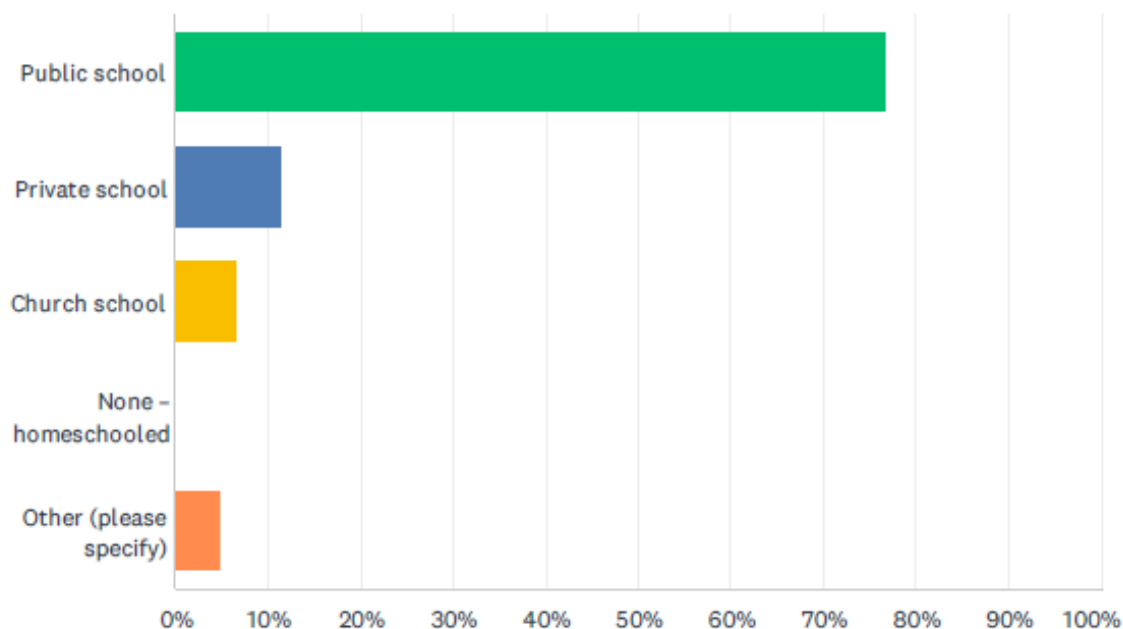
Most respondents were Year 10 students (n=121).

Answered: 542 Skipped: 62



Question 5: What kind of school do you attend?

Answered: 542 Skipped: 62



Most respondents who selected 'Other' stated that they attended a Selective school.

Question 6 sought the respondent's confirmation to submit the above answers and continue with the survey. 542 respondents selected 'Yes' and none selected 'No'.

Question 7: How important is civics education to you?

Respondents were asked to rate the importance from a scale of 1 (not important at all) to 5 (very important). Most respondents (n=137) selected '3'. 66 school students rated that civics education is very important to them. The weighted average rating was 3.45.

Box C.1 Q7. Free text responses

Student comments on Question 7 had four themes. The first of these was support for civics education. Students from primary school commented that civics education was 'fun'. High school students went into more detail, for example:

Civics is an absolutely essential part of the curriculum as it informs us students about our legal system and roles and responsibilities as citizens as well as being educated about the rights we have as individuals as well as the vital role we play in shaping our economy. (Year 10, public school, very remote, Victoria)

The second theme centred on understanding civics as a necessity. Students commented: 'You have to vote' (Year 6, public school, major city, Victoria) and 'I don't want to be fined if I vote incorrectly' (Year 9, public school, major city, WA).

Some students commented that they did not see the point of civics education. Comments included: 'It feels pointless ... like im not making an impact and the world's gonna go to shit anyway so why care abt civics' (Year 11, private school, regional area, Victoria).

Finally, some students stated that they had not been taught civics at all. For example: 'I don't really know what civics is, never learnt a thing about it' (Year 12, public school, regional area, Victoria).

Question 8: What parts of civics do you think are important?

Respondents were asked to rate the importance from a scale of 1 (not important at all) to 5 (very important) for each option.

Most school students agreed that 'Understanding how to vote and take part in elections' was the most important part of civics (n=215 selected '5').

The weighted average rating for each option is as follows:

- Understanding how to vote and take part in elections. (4.21)
- Understanding how to be a responsible member of the community. (4.00)
- Understanding how to talk about political and social issues in a respectful way. (3.73)
- Understanding how government and institutions such as Parliament and the courts work. (3.70)
- Understanding how to participate in democracy outside of elections (for example contacting members of parliament, joining a political party, or joining an interest group). (3.44)

Box C.2 Q8. Free text responses

Students commenting on Question 8 were split between those who wanted more education on issues, for example '... I think it would be greatly beneficial to expand this to include students engagement with politicians on issues that matter to them' (Year 12, public school, major city, NSW) and those who wanted more education on process: 'I think teaching students how to vote and how we can help is more important' (Year 7, public school, regional area, Victoria).

Respect when discussing political issues also attracted some student comments:

I think people need to learn how to say what THEY think, not aggressively or rudely, but honestly and directly because people are too sensitive nowadays and

need to accept that people have their own opinions and that the real world is not so soft, gentle and blunting, they need to understand that people will not always soften the real facts... (Year 9, public school, major city, NSW)

Students also suggested that civics education should take place later in their schooling: 'Understanding how to vote and participate in a democracy is more important for senior students as they get closer to being able to vote' (Year 10, private school, major city, Victoria).

Question 9: How do you generally engage with politics and social issues?

Respondents were asked to rate the frequency from a scale of 1 (never) to 5 (very frequently) for each option.

The weighted average ratings for all options were low, indicating that engagement overall with politics and social issues is not high among the school students surveyed.

The weighted average rating for each option is as follows:

- By talking to a family member. (2.91)
- In school. (2.90)
- By talking to friends. (2.53)
- Through television. (2.51)
- Through social media. (2.46)
- Through internet sites. (2.39)
- Through your local community. (1.96)

Box C.3 Q9. Free text responses

Students identified a range of ways in which they engaged with politics and social issues, including 'mostly discussing topics at church', (Year 10, public school, major city, NSW), extracurricular student activities such as 'through youth councils', (Year 9, public school, regional area, SA) and through conversations with 'teachers family and friends' (Year 10, public school, regional area, Victoria).

Several students said that they were not interested in politics and social issues: 'I don't really care about politics I have more important things to do than talk about a bunch of people arguing with each other' (Year 10, public school, regional area, WA).

Question 10: How sure are you that you can find information about politics and social issues?

Respondents were asked to rate this question from a scale of 1 (very unsure) to 5 (very sure). Most respondents (n=140) selected '4'.

Box C.4 Q10. Free text responses

One student stated, 'I have access to the internet and other human beings so I'm very much quite sure I can find any/some information at all about politics and social issues' (Year 9, public school, major city, NSW).

The comments also demonstrated that students were aware that information on social and political issues might be tainted with misinformation and bias: 'There is the danger that finding information on these issues will lead to areas where political parties will aim to influence, young people for example, of their views' (Year 12, church school, major city, Victoria) and 'Can easily find "some information", but I have to filter through trash to find the actual information' (Year 11, public school, major city, NSW).

Question 11: How sure are you that you can work out whether you can trust information about politics and social issues?

Respondents were asked to rate this question from a scale of 1 (very unsure) to 5 (very sure). Most respondents (n=148) selected '3'.

31 school students selected that they are very unsure about how to work out whether they can trust information about politics and social issues.

Box C.5 Q11. Free text responses

One student noted: 'using digital sources I look for websites ending in .gov or .org as they are generally trustable' (Year 9, public school, regional area, Victoria). Another student expressed concern that 'it can be difficult at times to notice political biases and ulterior motives' (Year 10, public school, major city, SA).

Some students criticised the media, for example: 'There is a lot of corruption and misinformation being spread so trusting the news in this time can be very difficult for society' (Year 10, public school, very remote, Victoria).

Question 12: Should students have to study civics in schools?

Most respondents (n=267) selected 'Yes'. 94 selected 'No'.

Box C.6 Q12. Free text responses

Most student respondents agreed that students should study civics in school, for example: 'We need to learn how to vote, be a responsible citizen, and understand basic politics' (Year 10, public school, regional area, WA).

Some respondents were more qualified in their support than others: 'I don't really like learning about parliament and government but we prob should' (Year 9, church school, regional area, NSW) and 'Enough to get by without being ignorant of how to solve some of Australia's issues' (Year 9, public school, regional area, WA).

Others were of the view that civics should be optional, rather than compulsory: 'If they want to, they can but if they don't want to they shouldn't be forced to study it' (Year 8, private school, regional area, SA).

Question 13: Is civics offered at your school?

287 students selected 'Yes' and 125 selected 'No'.

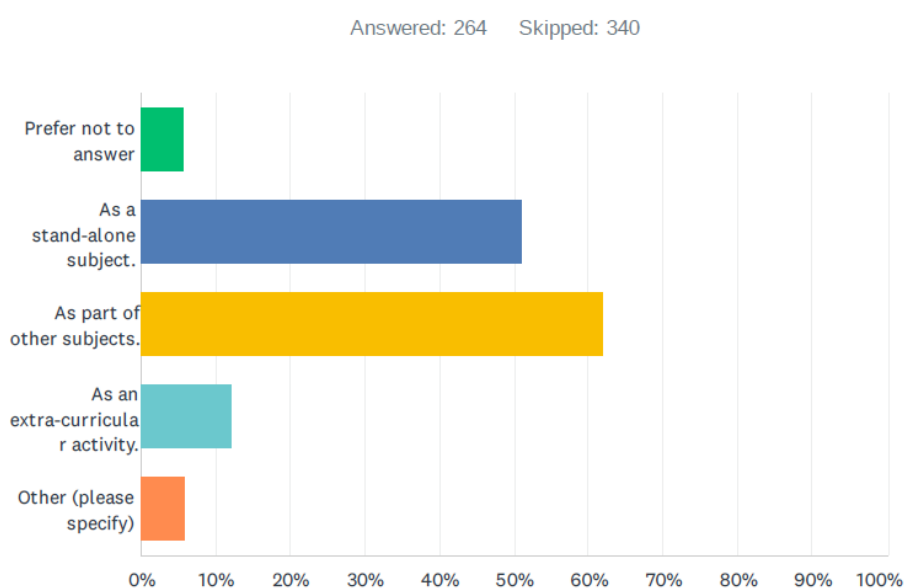
Questions 14 to 23 were answered by 264 respondents and skipped by 340 respondents.

Question 14: How is civics taught or offered at your school?

For this question, respondents could select as many as apply.

Civics taught as part of other subjects at their school was the most popular selection (n=164).

The second most popular selection was that civics is taught as a stand-alone subject (n=135).



Question 15: Do you have to take civics at your school?

171 respondents selected 'Yes' and 75 selected 'No'.

Question 16: How confident are your teachers in teaching civics?

Respondents were asked to rate this question from a scale of 1 (not confident) to 5 (very confident).

Most school students (n=183) selected '4' or '5' indicating that the teachers at their school are quite confident in teaching civics.

Question 17: How much have you learned about the purpose of government and what it does?

Respondents were asked to rate this question from a scale of 1 (nothing) to 5 (a lot).

Most respondents (n=115) selected '4'. The weighted average rating for this question was 3.83.

Box C.7 Q17. Free text responses

Students who commented fell into three groups: those who learnt about the purpose of government through school (for example, through Legal Studies or VCE Australian Politics), those who obtained their understanding from sources other than the civics curriculum and those who did not know much at all.

Students who obtained their understanding from sources other than the civics curriculum said: 'Almost all of my learning has been outside of school,' (Year 9, public school, regional area, SA) and 'Learnt more from social media' (Year 11, private school, regional area, Victoria).

Students who said that they did not know about the purpose of government argued: 'I know nothing because its taught so badly, so I hate it' (Year 10, public school, regional area, WA).

Question 18: How much have you learned about how Australia's democracy has evolved over time?

Respondents were asked to rate this question from a scale of 1 (nothing) to 5 (a lot).

Most respondents (n=84) selected '3'. The weighted average rating was 3.29.

There were not many free text responses to this question. Most students who commented said that they had either not been taught the history of Australian democracy at all or had only been taught aspects of it.

Question 19: How much have you learned about different types of government (for example, types of government in other countries)?

Respondents were asked to rate this question from a scale of 1 (nothing) to 5 (a lot).

Most respondents (n=83) selected '3'.

Question 20: How much have you learned about the purpose of elections and how to participate in them?

Respondents were asked to rate this question from a scale of 1 (nothing) to 5 (a lot).

Most respondents (n=90) selected '4' indicating that students have a good knowledge of the purpose of elections and how to participate in them.

Question 21: How much have you learned about how to participate in democracy outside of elections?

Respondents were asked to rate this question from a scale of 1 (nothing) to 5 (a lot).

Most respondents (n=87) selected '3'.

Question 22: How much have you learned about how to talk about political and social issues in a respectful way?

Respondents were asked to rate this question from a scale of 1 (nothing) to 5 (a lot).

Most respondents (n=86) selected '3'. '2' was the second most popular response (n=55).

Box C.8 Q22. Free text responses

The main theme of the comments on Question 22 was that talking about issues respectfully was something students learned from sources other than civics classes.

For example: 'Learned from self experience, definitely not from the fake way adults/teachers tend to promote it' (Year 9, public school, major city, NSW) or 'This topic hasn't really been taught to us specifically it's just sort of an expectation in the classroom ... it's not been taught it's just the way that it is ...' (Year 11, public school, regional area, NSW).

Question 23: How satisfied are you with the civics education you have received?

Respondents were asked to rate this question from a scale of 1 (very dissatisfied) to 5 (very satisfied).

Most respondents (n=90) selected '4'. The second most popular response was '3' (n=73) indicating that most students who responded to the survey were satisfied with the civics education they received at school.

Box C.9 Q23. Free text responses

A handful of student commenters expressed their satisfaction with their civics education: 'So much fun we enjoy doing it and good way to learn,' (Year 5, public school, major city, Victoria) and 'I am satisfied' (Year 10, public school, regional area, WA).

Another student remembered the practical aspects of their civics classes: '... the only 2 things I remember fully from previous years are when we did a court roleplay and when a person came in and did an interactive presentation on types of voting' (Year 9, public school, remote area, WA).

There were also a small number of negative comments, including: 'don't like it' (Year 8, private school, remote area, SA) and 'I havent remembered much about civics so I feel like it was a waste of my time' (Year 10, public school, regional area, WA).

Question 24: How should civics education in schools be improved?

This was a free text question.

Box C.10 Q24. Free text responses

Most students wanted more civics education. For example:

It should be more practical and engaging, but above all more present! (Year 12 public school, major city, NSW)

Many students provided specific examples of elements they would like included in the curriculum. For example:

- 'Mock elections, analysing campaigns' (Year 10, private school, major city, WA)
- 'Talk about real world problems and have debates' (Year 10, public school, regional area, Victoria)
- 'By making it fun and interesting to learn instead of writing paragraphs of information that the students will hate and not remember' (Year 10, public school, remote area, Victoria)
- 'Teach about elections and information clearly about real life events that actually happen as a adult (not sure if they don't if I haven't reached that yet), provide advice too, teach information in a clear and concise way so students

understand what goes on without making it overly complicated and jargon.’
(Year 9, public school, major city, NSW).

A number of students wanted civics to be made a mandatory part of the curriculum:
‘Being made mandatory, like how English is’ (Year 12, church school, major city,
Victoria) and ‘It should be in every school, especially senior education’ (Year 10, public
school, remote area, Tasmania).

**Question 25 sought the respondent’s confirmation to submit the above answers. 359
respondents selected ‘Yes’ and 22 selected ‘No’.**

Civics education survey – educators

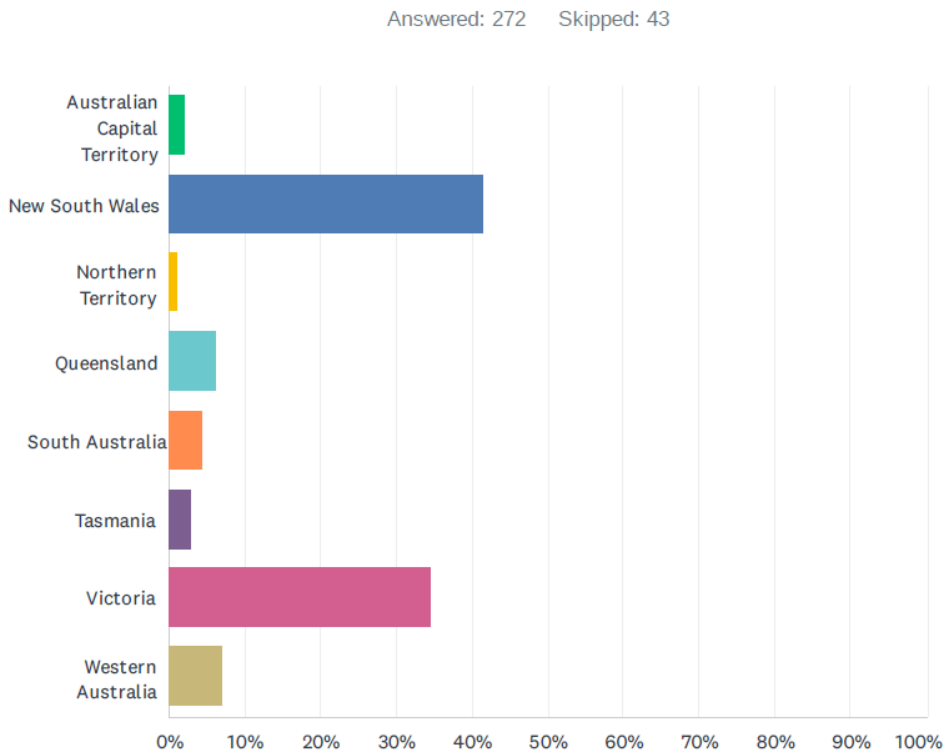
314 responses

Question 1 sought the respondent’s confirmation to continue with the survey after reading the preamble.

314 respondents selected ‘Yes’ and 1 selected ‘No’.

Question 2: In which state or territory do you work as an educator?

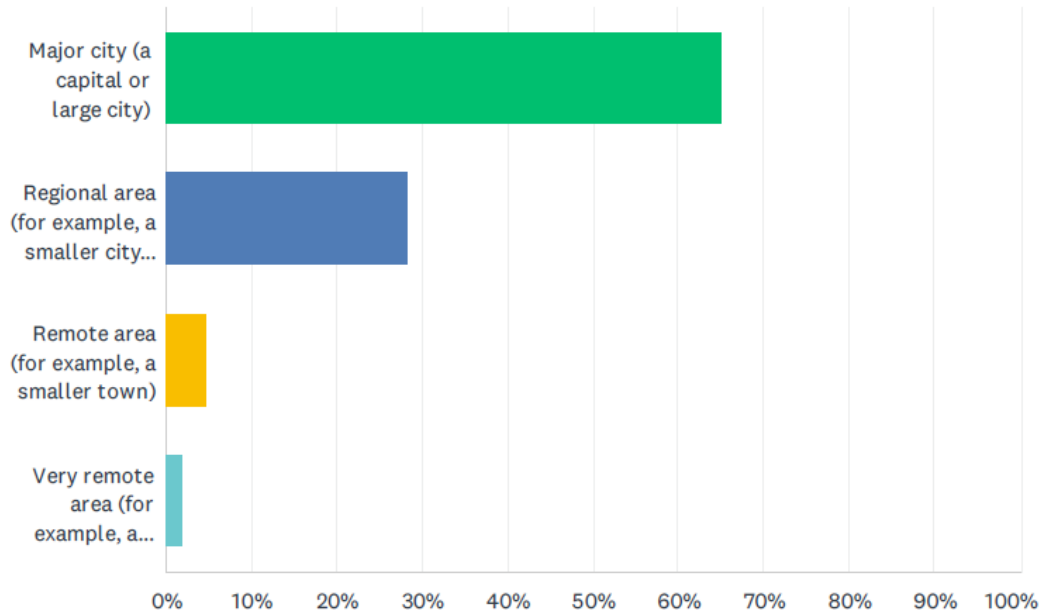
While all states and territories were represented, 207 of all respondents worked in New South Wales or Victoria.



Question 3: Where is your school located?

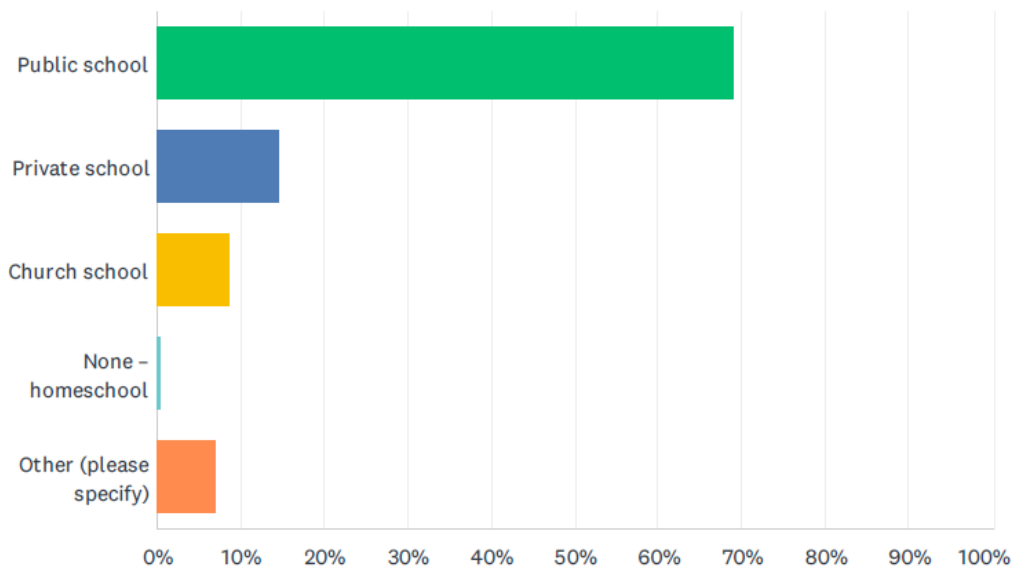
Most respondents (n=177) said that they teach at a school located in a major city.

Answered: 272 Skipped: 43



Question 4: In what kind of school do you work?

Answered: 272 Skipped: 43

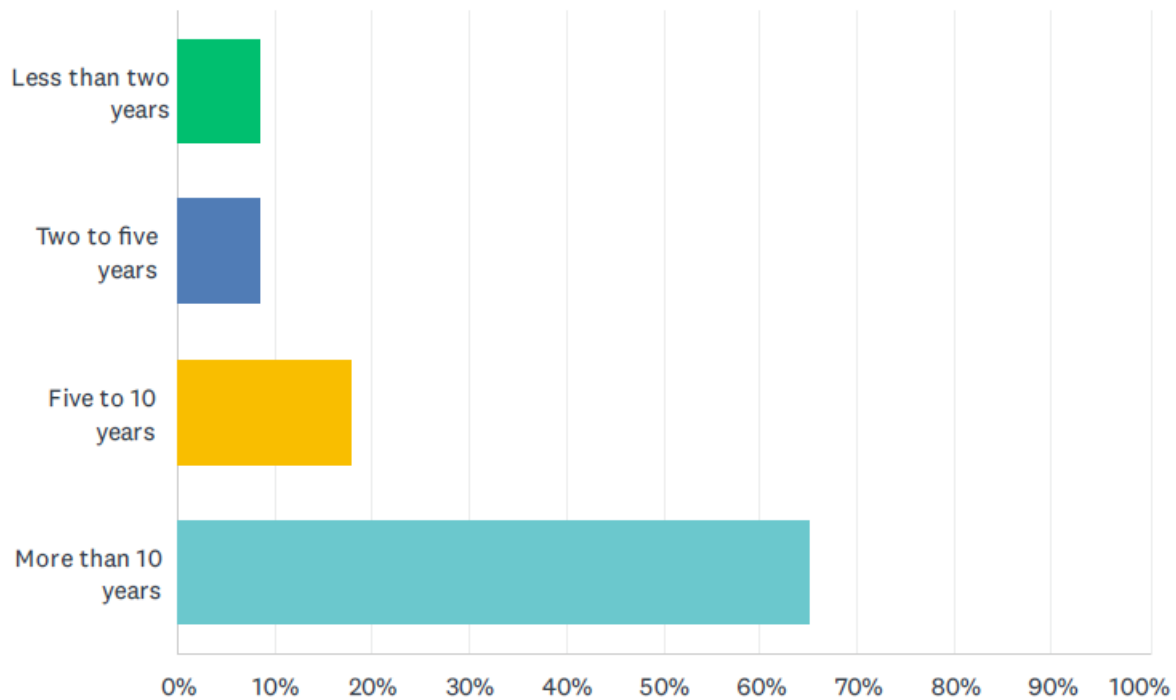


Some of those who selected 'Other' cited that they teach at university, a gallery/museum or education department.

Question 5: How many years of teaching experience do you have?

Most respondents (n=177) said that they have more than 10 years of teaching experience. 23 respondents had less than two years of teaching experience.

Answered: 272 Skipped: 43



Question 6 sought the respondent’s confirmation to submit the above answers and continue with the survey. 272 respondents selected ‘Yes’ and none selected ‘No’.

Question 7: How important is civics education to you?

Respondents were asked to rate this question from a scale of 1 (not important at all) to 5 (very important). Most educators (n=165) selected ‘5’.

Question 8: What parts of civics do you think are important?

Respondents were asked to rate the importance from a scale of 1 (not important at all) to 5 (very important) for each option.

Most educators agreed that ‘Understanding how to be a responsible member of the community’ was the most important part of civics (n=184 selected ‘5’).

The weighted average rating for each option is as follows:

- Understanding how to be a responsible member of the community. (4.74)

- Understanding how to talk about political and social issues in a respectful way. (4.66)
- Understanding how to vote and take part in elections. (4.61)
- Understanding how government and institutions such as Parliament and the courts work. (4.50)
- Understanding how to participate in democracy outside of elections (for example contacting members of parliament, joining a political party, or joining an interest group). (4.31)

Box C.11 Q8. Free text responses

Written comments on Question 8 identified a number of aspects of civics education as important, including: understanding how the system of laws and government work, knowing how to discuss divisive issues, and how to be engaged in civic life.

Comments included:

- ‘Understand how policies are made & enacted by different political parties & how the gov bureaucracy is separate from the elected arm of government.’ (University educator, regional area, Queensland)
- ‘...focusing on how we can interact with these institutions, how power moves between the people and institutions and ways that we can interact and share our views with the community and those that can influence change.’ (Public school, major city, Victoria)

Respondents also felt ‘the need for respectful attitudes pervades all areas of life, personal and public’ (Public school, regional area, Victoria). One educator argued that:

Skills and knowledge about how to ethically and responsibly respond to losing a democratic vote (or even an argument) without undermining the democracy itself is just as important as understanding process questions like how does voting work. (Public school, regional area, NSW)

Teaching students how to engage in public life was also identified as an important part of civics education. For example, one respondent believed civics is: ‘Understanding one’s privilege and responsibility. An opportunity to encourage diversity and more representative government and civic leadership’ (Public school, regional area, Victoria).

Question 9: How do you generally engage with politics and social issues?

Respondents were asked to rate the frequency from a scale of 1 (never) to 5 (very frequently) for each option.

‘Discussion with others’ was the most common way that the educators surveyed engage with politics and social issues (n=167 out of 224 selected ‘4’ or ‘5’). The weighted average rating for each option is as follows:

- Through discussion with others. (4.08)
- Through internet sites. (3.40)
- In school. (3.31)
- Through television. (3.19)
- Through social media. (3.01)
- Through your local community. (3.00)

Question 10: How sure are you that your students can find information about politics and social issues, including political policies?

Respondents were asked to rate this question from a scale of 1 (very unsure) to 5 (very sure).

Most educators (n=78 out of 224) selected '2' indicating that they are unsure that their students can find information about politics and social issues. Only 14 educators selected '5 – very sure'.

Box C.12 Q10. Free text responses

Many teachers argued that it was necessary to provide guidance to students on how to find accurate information on politics and social issues. One teacher commented:

It is challenging for secondary-age students to navigate the proliferation of information available to them, and to determine its veracity. This is a key skill and learning area that straddles civics and citizenship learning and other subjects including media studies and even art and technology. (Public school, major city, Victoria)

Some teachers noted the contribution made by students' parents and friends to their knowledge of politics and social issues, while some discussed the influence of social media on students' understanding of social issues and politics: 'they can navigate through social media but are reluctant to search thoroughly through content and are content to click on the first link or information' (Public school, regional area, NSW).

Others said: 'I'm sure the information is available, but I'm not sure that they would do a good job of distinguishing between a reputable source and a less reliable one' (Public school, major city, Victoria).

Many commenters discussed their students' lack of interest in civics and citizenship: 'Could they? Perhaps. Are they interested in doing so? Highly unlikely' (Private school, regional area, NSW).

Another common view was that students were parochial in their interests: 'They are often unaware of even very high-profile debates' (Public school, major city, Victoria).

Question 11: How sure are you that your students can work out whether information about politics and social issues is reliable?

Respondents were asked to rate this question from a scale of 1 (very unsure) to 5 (very sure).

Most educators (n=93 out of 224) selected '2' indicating that they are unsure that their students can work out whether information is fact or fiction. Only 1.34% of educators selected '5 – very sure' and 3.57% selected '4'.

Box C.13 Q11. Free text responses

Teachers expressed concern that the information environment students lived in caused them to adopt narratives about politics and social issues that were not accurate.

Many teachers advocated for students being taught how to find accurate and reliable information on politics and social issues, for example:

- 'They must be explicitly taught how to do this, and to consider and understand alternative viewpoints.' (Public school, regional area, Queensland)
- 'Media literacy/competency can and should be spread across all subjects.' (Democracy education specialist, major city, NSW)
- 'Resourcing and ideas on how to be more critical of news to counter misinformation.' (Public school, major city, ACT)
- 'Understanding of bias and balance without civics education is lacking.' (Public school, major city, Victoria)

Question 12: Should civics education be compulsory in schools?

Most respondents (n=204) selected 'Yes' and 13 selected 'No'.

Box C.14 Q12. Free text responses

Most respondents to this question were in favour of compulsory civics education: '... every student should be armed with the knowledge and skills to help determine their future political and democratic choices and participation' (Public school, major city, Victoria).

Teachers' concern at the level of engagement by students continued to be a major factor:

The students are unlikely to ever be enthusiastic about this en-masse, but the classroom is one of the few spaces where heterogenous thinking can be modelled and where students are obliged to think - even if superficially - about the social and political structures that underpin their experiences. (Public school, major city, Victoria).

A number of teachers were concerned about the effect that mandating civics as a compulsory subject would have in an already full curriculum: 'The curriculum is already extremely full. Something would need to come out' (Public school, regional area, NSW).

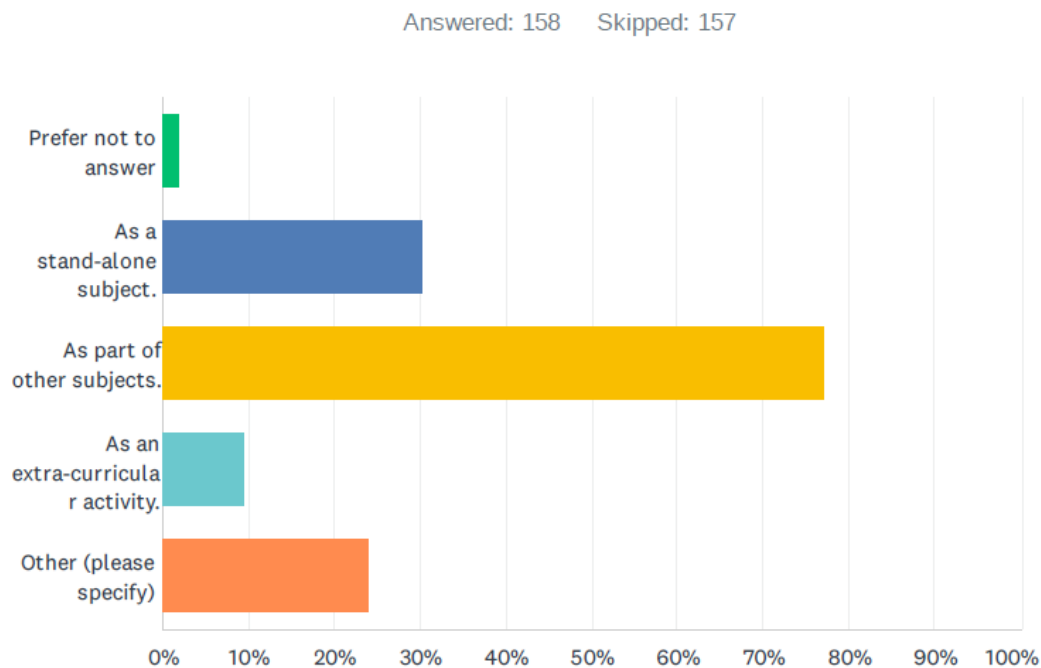
Question 13: Is civics offered at your school?

161 respondents selected 'Yes' and 63 selected 'No'.

Question 14: How is civics taught or offered at your school?

For this question, respondents could select as many as apply.

Most respondents (n=122) said that civics is taught as part of other subjects at their school. The second most popular response was 'as a stand-alone subject', which received 48 selections.



Question 15: Is civics compulsory at your school?

Most respondents (n=117) selected 'Yes' and 32 selected 'No'.

Question 16: In what year levels is civics taught at your school?

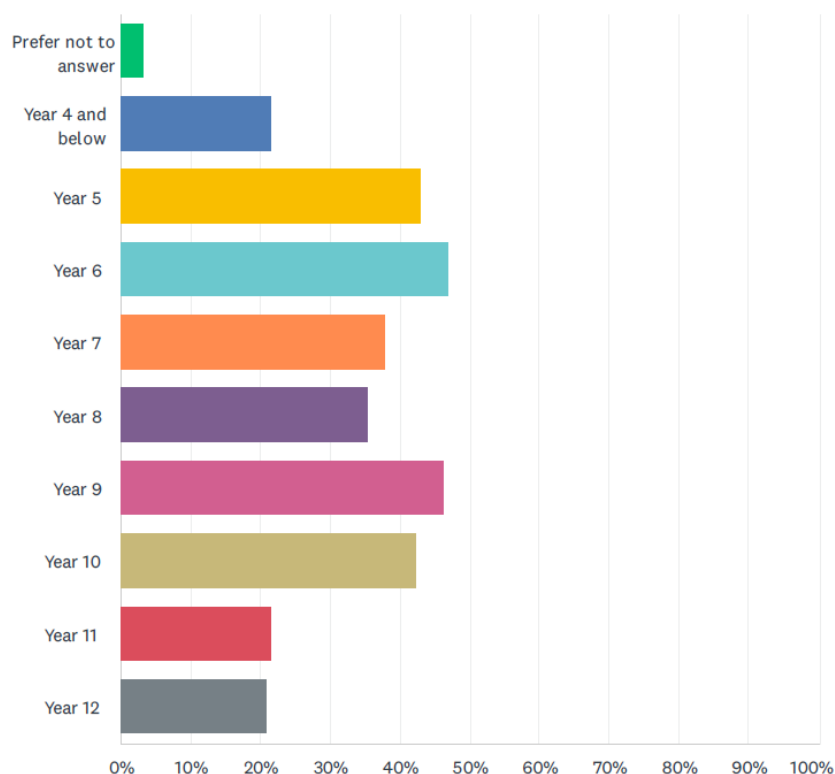
For this question, respondents could select as many as apply.

Answered: 158 Skipped: 157

Year 6 received the highest number of selections (n=74), followed closely by Year 9 (n=73).

Year 10 received 67 selections.

Year 11 and 12 received 67 selections total.



Question 17: What is the focus of the civics curriculum or program?

For this question, respondents could select as many as apply.

'Understanding the role and functions of government and institutions' received the most selections (n=141), followed by 'Understanding how to engage with democratic processes such as voting' (n=127) and 'Understanding how to be a responsible citizen' (n=120).

Question 18: Does your school provide students with opportunities to engage with civics outside the classroom (e.g., excursions or engagement with government-led programs)?

Most respondents (n=113) selected 'Yes' and 39 selected 'No'.

Box C.15 Q18. Free text responses

A number of educators said that a lack of resourcing, including financial costs and staffing, prevented them from organising civics activities outside the classroom. For

example: 'We are too understaffed to be able to do this' (Public school, regional area, Queensland).

Teachers at schools with sufficient resources to offer civics activities outside the classroom identified a selection of activities that were available to students, including:

- trips to Canberra (Public school, major city, Victoria)
- the National Schools Constitutional Convention (Public school, regional area, Tasmania)
- school clubs that engage with social issues (Public school, major city, Victoria)
- Model United Nations competitions (Public school, major city, Victoria)
- guest speakers (Private school, major city, Victoria)
- visits to, or by local Members of Parliament (Public school, major city, SA)
- visits to courts (Church school, major city, NSW).

Question 19: Do you teach civics?

Most respondents (n=118) selected 'Yes' and 40 selected 'No'.

Question 20: Have you received specific training in teaching civics?

Most respondents (n=77) selected 'No'. 37 respondents selected 'Yes'.

Question 21: Does your school offer professional development for teachers in relation to civics education?

Most respondents (n=85) selected 'No'. 22 selected 'Yes'.

Box C.16 Q21. Free text responses

Very few respondents on this question responded positively. Many educators discussed the limited opportunities for professional development. One teacher noted that there was 'limited availability of places to go' (Public school, major city, Victoria).

Another respondent was representative of a number who indicated that their professional development was informal: 'We usually rely on the teachers trained in civics to support other staff' (Public school, major city, Victoria). Some teachers stated that they attended conferences, which are not available to all teachers.

Finally, some teachers responded that they had either not had, or not recently had, professional development: 'Not had any PD for Legal or Civics in years ...' (Public school, regional area, Queensland).

Question 22: How equipped do you feel to teach civics?

Respondents were asked to rate this question from a scale of 1 (not equipped at all) to 5 (very equipped).

The weighted average rating for this question was 4.03 indicating that while teachers have not had specific training or professional development in relation to civics education, they still feel equipped to teach it to their students. Most educators (n=48) selected '5' and the second most popular selection (n=37) was '4'.

Question 23: How should civics education in schools be improved?

This was a free text question.

Box C.17 Q23. Free text responses

A consistent theme was that improving civics education will require a complex series of interventions, rather than simple changes. For example:

... making it relatable to students by using analogies to help them understand complex abstract ideas such as the separation of powers. Case studies and empirical studies are also useful to model these complex ideas. Role playing is an effective strategy in the Humanities and it can be applicable to Civics and Citizenship. (Private school, major city, Victoria)

Many other educators suggested an array of changes, including:

- decluttering the curriculum: 'The curriculum is quite full, it could be pared back to include the essentials' (Public school, regional area, Queensland); 'Reduce the crowded curriculum' (Private school, major city, NSW).
- making civics mandatory: 'Make civics a subject. Make it mandatory. Give teacher training' (Public school, regional area, NSW).
- making civics a greater priority in the curriculum, including a suggestion to integrate 'civics into all of the [Key Learning Areas] is an easy solution and it would give a tangible and authentic seam of learning through the syllabuses' (Public school, remote area, NSW).
- more resourcing, such as 'compulsory teacher training for in-service teachers' (Education resource provider, major city, NSW); improving 'professional development' (Gallery, regional area, NSW); 'lesson plan development and unit overviews' (Public school, major city, Victoria).
- active participation in civics education by Members of Parliament, who 'should visit more and be more accessible so that it all means something' (Private school, regional area, Tasmania).

Question 24 sought the respondent's confirmation to submit the above answers.

215 respondents selected 'Yes' and 2 selected 'No'.

Civics education survey – school leavers

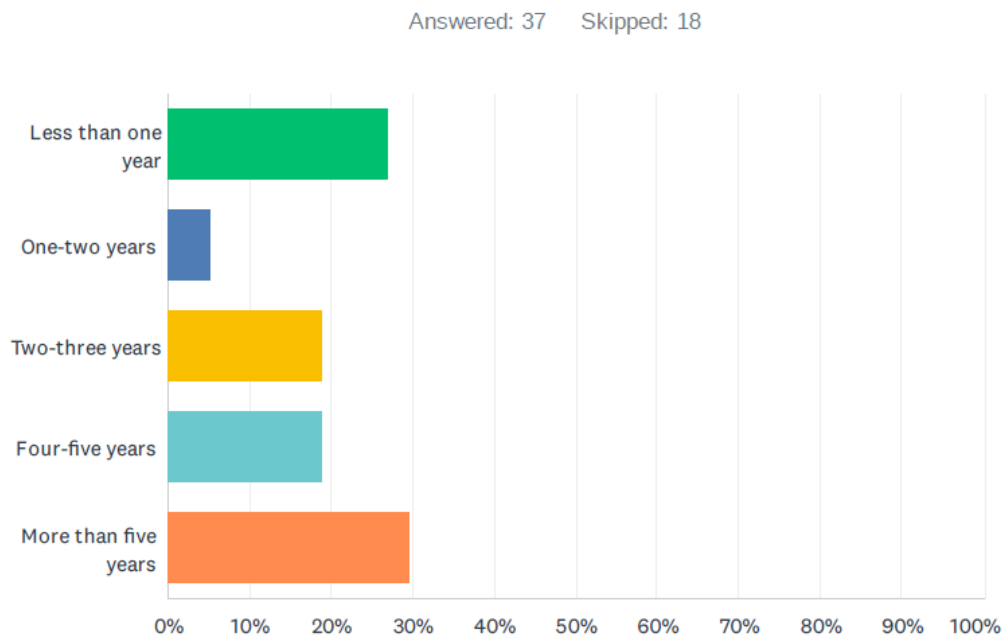
55 responses

Question 1 sought the respondent’s confirmation to continue with the survey after reading the preamble.

55 respondents selected ‘Yes’ and none selected ‘No’.

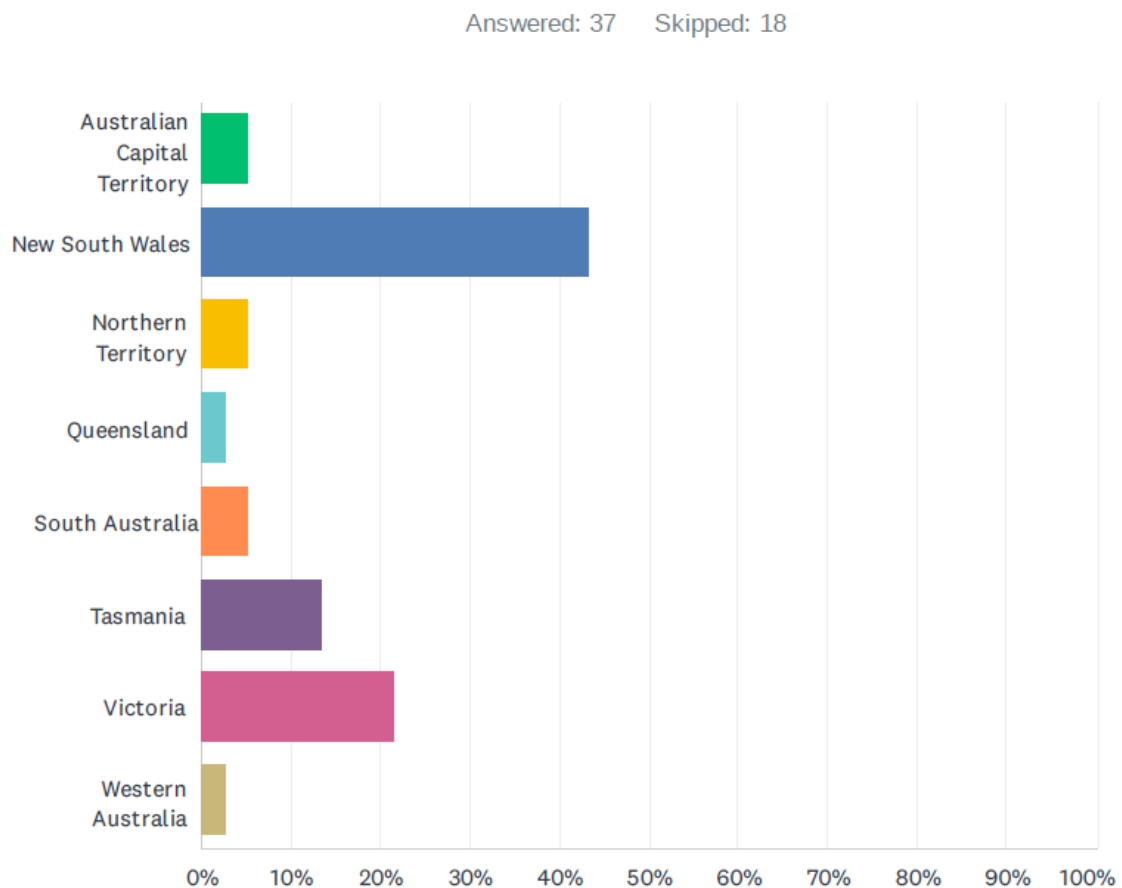
Question 2: How long ago did you leave secondary school?

Most respondents (n=11) selected ‘more than five years’ followed closely by ‘less than one year’ (n=10).



Question 3: In which state or territory did you attend school?

While all states and territories were represented, most respondents attended school in New South Wales (n=16).



Question 4: Where did you attend school?

None of the respondents attended a school in a remote or very remote area. Most respondents (n=27) attended a school in a major city.

10 respondents attended a school in a regional area (for example, a smaller city or larger town).

Question 5: What kind of school did you attend?

None of the respondents attended a home-school. Most respondents (n=23) attended a public school, and 10 respondents attended a private school. 2 respondents attended a church school.

Question 6 sought the respondent's confirmation to submit the above answers and continue with the survey. 37 respondents selected 'Yes', none selected 'No' and 18 skipped the question.

Questions 7 to 13 were answered by 24 respondents, while 31 respondents skipped the questions.

Question 7: How important is civics education to you?

Respondents were asked to rate this question from a scale of 1 (not important at all) to 5 (very important).

Almost all respondents (n=21) selected '5' with the second most popular selection being '4' (n=3). No respondents selected '1', '2' or '3' indicating very strongly that civics education is very important to recent school leavers.

Box C.18 Q7. Free text responses

'Civics education allows for a better understanding of the issues I see in day-to-day life such as the cost of living crisis and way for me to work with others to take action' (One to two years since graduation, church school, major city, Victoria).

One respondent commented on the impact a lack of civics education had on them:

I would like to know about how our voting system works and any other information students should know such as how to participate in the voting process. (Two to three years since graduation, public school, major city, NSW)

Question 8: What parts of civics do you think are important?

Respondents were asked to rate each option from a scale of 1 (not important at all) to 5 (very important).

School leavers rated each option very highly indicating that all parts of civics are important to them. The weighted average rating for each option is as follows:

- Understanding how to vote and take part in elections. (4.92)
- Understanding how to talk about political and social issues in a respectful way. (4.79)
- Understanding how government and institutions such as Parliament and the courts work. (4.79)
- Understanding how to be a responsible member of the community. (4.71)
- Understanding how to participate in democracy outside of elections (for example contacting members of parliament, joining a political party, or joining an interest group). (4.29)

Question 9: How do you generally engage with politics and social issues?

Respondents were asked to rate the frequency from a scale of 1 (never) to 5 (very frequently) for each option.

Most respondents (n=10) selected that they very frequently talk to family members to engage with politics and social issues. The least selected option was 'through your local community' which received a weighted average rating of 2.83.

Talking to friends received the highest weighted average rating with 20 respondents selecting '4' and '5' total.

The weighted average rating for each option is as follows:

- By talking to friends. (4.17)
- Through social media. (4.00)
- Through internet sites. (4.00)
- By talking to family members. (4.00)
- Through television. (3.46)
- Through the institution you attend (for example, university or TAFE). (3.46)
- Through your local community. (2.83)

Question 10: How sure are you that you can find information about politics and social issues, including political policies?

Respondents were asked to rate this question from a scale of 1 (very unsure) to 5 (very sure).

Most respondents (n=21) selected '5' or '4' indicating that most school leavers are sure or very sure that they can find this information.

Box C.19 Q10. Free text responses

Respondents considered that their civics education had not given them sufficient skills to find information about civics. One respondent said that 'civic education at a primary and secondary level is ill equipped to teach people how to find this information' (One to two years since graduation, church school, major city, Victoria).

Question 11: How sure are you that you can work out whether information about politics and social issues is reliable?

Respondents were asked to rate this question from a scale of 1 (very unsure) to 5 (very sure).

Most respondents (n=17) selected '5' or '4' indicating that most school leavers are sure or very sure that they can work out if information they read is fact or fiction.

Question 12: Should civics education be compulsory in schools?

Most respondents (n=23) selected 'Yes' and 1 selected 'No'.

Box C.20 Q12. Free text responses

One respondent said 'basic civics education should be compulsory' (One to two years since graduation, church school, major city, Victoria), while another argued that teaching civics as an elective:

...was very insufficient and didn't teach anything about how to participate in democracy, who are the parties and what they stand for, and why voting is important ... (Less than one year since graduation, public school, major city, NSW)

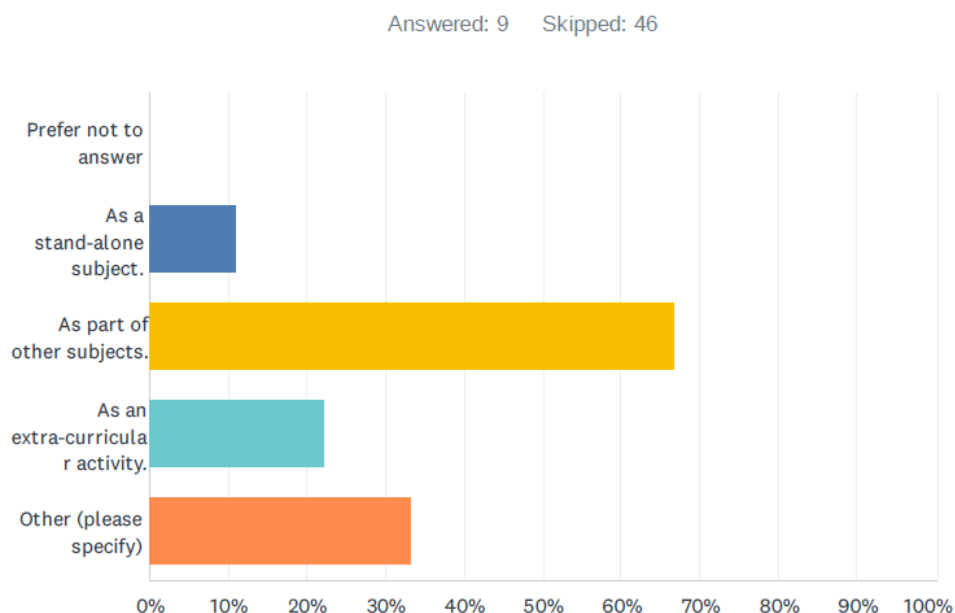
Another respondent believed civics should not be 'completely compulsory but more encouraged' (Less than one year since graduation, public school, major city, NSW).

Question 13: Was civics offered at your secondary school?

Most school leavers (n=15) said that civics was not offered at their secondary school, 9 said that it was.

Question 14: How was civics taught or offered at your secondary school?

Most respondents (n=6) said that civics was taught or offered as part of other subjects.



Question 15: Was civics compulsory at your secondary school?

Most school leavers (n=6) said that civics was compulsory, 3 selected 'No'.

Question 16: How confident were your teachers in teaching civics?

Respondents were asked to rate this question from a scale of 1 (not confident at all) to 5 (very confident). The weighted average rating for this question was 3.78 indicating that school leavers felt that their teachers were reasonably confident in teaching civics in school.

Question 17: How much did you learn about the purpose of government and what it does?

Respondents were asked to rate this question from a scale of 1 (nothing) to 5 (a lot). Most school leavers (n=3) selected '2' indicating that they did not learn much about government during school.

Box C.21 Q17. Free text responses

School leavers were less impressed with the extent to which civics education covered the purpose of government, for example:

We were taught it at a very basic level, however had we learnt how to critically analyse the purpose and compare it other forms of government I would've had a more nuanced understanding and I would've retained the information. (One to two years since graduation, church school, major city, Victoria)

Question 18: How much did you learn about how Australia's democracy has evolved over time?

Respondents were asked to rate this question from a scale of 1 (nothing) to 5 (a lot). The weighted average rating for this question was low (2.78).

Question 19: How much did you learn about different types of government (for example, types of government in other countries)?

Respondents were asked to rate this question from a scale of 1 (nothing) to 5 (a lot). The weighted average rating for this question was low (2.33).

Question 20: How much did you learn about the purpose of elections and how to participate in them?

Respondents were asked to rate this question from a scale of 1 (nothing) to 5 (a lot). The weighted average rating for this question was average (3.33).

Question 21: How much did you learn about how to participate in democracy outside of elections?

Respondents were asked to rate this question from a scale of 1 (nothing) to 5 (a lot). The weighted average rating for this question was very low (2.11).

Box C.22 Q21. Free text response

'Frankly I'm still not sure how best to do that other than by joining a political party.' (Two to three years since graduation, public school, major city, NSW)

Question 22: How much did you learn about how to talk about political and social issues in a respectful way?

Respondents were asked to rate this question from a scale of 1 (nothing) to 5 (a lot). The weighted average rating for this question was very low (2.11).

Question 23: How satisfied are you with the civics education you received during secondary school?

Respondents were asked to rate this question from a scale of 1 (very dissatisfied) to 5 (very satisfied). The weighted average rating for this question was low (2.78).

Question 24: How should civics education in schools be improved?

This was a free text question.

Box C.23 Q24. Free text responses

Written responses included two themes: that civics education should be compulsory, and that specific aspects of civics education should be taught.

Respondents in favour of compulsory civics education stated that it should be 'a stand-alone mandatory subject' (Four to five years since graduation, selective high school, major city, NSW) and 'It should be compulsory and extensive, covering all the necessities of the system in an engaging way so that students learn as much as possible' (Less than one year since graduation, public school, major city, Tasmania).

In relation to what specific aspects of civics education should be included, respondents said practical matters, such as 'media literacy' (Four to five years since graduation, private school, major city, NSW). Another respondent suggested:


An understanding of the systems in which politics operates in our country to provide context such as election cycles, budget process, balance of power in parliaments, economic and social analysis of public policies, and ... An understanding of the two houses of parliament and the impact of our vote in different types of elections. Ways to find fact checked information about political parties, political donations, and political affiliations. How legislation is designed and passed through parliament. How to appeal to local and national government for change, contribute to consultations or participate in public hearings. (More than five years since graduation, public school, regional area, NSW)

Another respondent argued that civics education should include 'exactly what a Member of Parliament or Senator does and how exactly the voting system works' (Two to three years since graduation, public school, major city, NSW).

Other respondents suggested more analytical approaches needed to be included, such as:

... more on policy and history with a focus on Australia and key thinkers. This should work to show students how their interests intersect and overlap with politics, government and social issues. (One to two years since graduation, church school, major city, Victoria)

Question 25 sought the respondent's confirmation to submit the above answers. 21 respondents selected 'Yes' and 0 selected 'No'. 34 respondents skipped this question.



Dissenting report by Senator the Hon James McGrath

- 1.1 The Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters' (JSCEM) inquiry into civics education, engagement, and participation in Australia served as an important opportunity for community groups and experts to come together to discuss the effectiveness and accessibility of civics education in Australia.
- 1.2 The Final Report provided a rigorous assessment and a consideration of mechanisms to improve civics education. Indeed, many Recommendations in the Final Report focus on specific tools to improve the dissemination, accessibility, and national alignment of civics education in Australia.
- 1.3 However, some Recommendations take away from the overall objective and scope of this inquiry. That is, some Recommendations focus on mechanisms to target and tailor different forms of civics education to different types of Australians, rather than improving the civics education of all Australians.
- 1.4 For example, Recommendation 23 states:

Research should be focused on...how vulnerable groups, such as culturally and linguistically diverse communities, receive and consume information to better understand how to combat misinformation and disinformation in these communities.
- 1.5 Though there is a place to tailor educational resources based on language, these types of Recommendations are examples of deficit discourse that ultimately looks down on such communities and targets the differences between Australians rather than what unites us.
- 1.6 As such, parts of JSCEM's inquiry into civics education, engagement, and participation in Australia makes strong strides to improve civics education in Australia. However, civics education should be focused on the dissemination and promotion of civics in Australia on a non-ideological basis rather than tailoring different educational practices to different Australians depending on their race or ethnicity.

Senator the Hon James McGrath

Deputy Chair



Additional comments by Kate Chaney MP

- 1.1 I thank the Committee for its work on this report. In my view, there are two central themes that could be better addressed in the majority report. These are addressed below.

Theme 1: Emphasizing evidence-based approaches

- 1.2 While it is an excellent first step for the report to acknowledge the significance of applied programs and the problems with the relatively passive status quo approach, it is also important to acknowledge the gaps in our current knowledge.
- 1.3 These gaps exist not only because we don't have a great picture of how civics education is currently being delivered, as the report acknowledges, but also because there is much still to research and learn about what works.
- 1.4 The report helpfully notes the focus of many submissions on 'access to practical experience, and more practical learning in the classroom, so that students can better understand why they're learning particular topics'.¹ This recognises the problems with the passive nature of the status quo, which is 'presented in a way that does not engage students, nor sufficiently prepare them to cast an informed and formal vote';² and ultimately recommends 'more applied programs that integrate knowledge, student voice and motivation to create a more engaging and impactful learning experience'.
- 1.5 Systematic literature reviews of the impact of civics education interventions emphasize two kinds of intervention with high potential:
- 1 An 'open classroom climate, which is defined as a classroom in which students are exposed to the enlivening discussion of political and social issues, are encouraged to share their own opinions and have their opinions respected by their teacher'³ and
 - 2 Active, participatory approaches, which are learner-centred (e.g., which involve research topics selected by students themselves) (vs 'acquisition-based approaches').⁴

¹ Majority report, p. 29.

² Majority report, p. 29.

³ Campbell (2019), p. 6.

⁴ Donbavand and Hoskins (2021), p. 7.

- 1.6 However, the literature ultimately notes that ‘the renaissance of research into civic education is only just beginning...the existing data are too limited, and randomized studies are rare. Truly advancing our understanding of civic education will require a large-scale, multi-method, interdisciplinary effort.’⁵
- 1.7 The recommendations in the majority report focus on increasing curriculum time, consistency and accountability and teacher training, and note that pilot programs to prepare Year 11 and 12 students to participate in electoral processes should be informed by ‘debate-based’ training for teachers to cover ‘contemporary issues.’⁶ However, they fall short of sufficiently emphasizing that truly creating an impactful curriculum requires much further research and testing of what actually works and a continued commitment to adapting based on the best available research.

Suggested additional recommendation 1

- 1.8 **The Committee should recommend the establishment of a university-based centre of civics and citizenship education scholarship at a leading Australian university,⁷ which would support ACARA and relevant state authorities to develop recommendations based on the latest research and evidence.**
- 1.9 This evidence should be generated using robust research methods, including pilots of a range of techniques and models (ideally including randomized controlled trials).

Theme 2: Increased opportunities to participate in democracy

- 1.10 There is a need for accompanying ‘supply-side interventions’ i.e., opportunities for citizens (especially young people) to participate and have a say in our democracy.
- 1.11 At the highest level, options for addressing political disengagement can be classified into two buckets:
- 1 ‘Demand side’ responses, pointing to ‘changing deficiencies within the citizenry’;⁸ (i.e., including formal civics education) and
 - 2 ‘Supply side’ responses, pointing to ‘rectifying problems in the political goods on offer and the way they are marketed.’⁹
- 1.12 Academic literature emphasizes that where voters feel their vote won’t have a significant impact, they have limited incentive to invest in informing themselves.

⁵ Campbell (2019).

⁶ Majority report, p. 42.

⁷ See submission of Mr Keith Heggart, p. 2.

⁸ Smith, R. et al (2015), p. 14.

⁹ Ibid, p. 14.

While civics education can help build a vital foundation of interest, that interest has to be matched by opportunities to feel heard.

- 1.13 Where voters feel their votes will not have a significant impact, they have limited incentive to invest in informing themselves.¹⁰ For example, once citizens learn that their seat is safe and that therefore their lower house vote will not be decisive, there is little incentive for them to increase their knowledge of candidates or party platforms.¹¹
- 1.14 While these approaches per se were not explicitly invited by the terms of reference, they are arguably critical accompaniments to formal civics education; without these 'supply side' incentives, the value of civics education is significantly decreased.

Suggested additional recommendation 2

- 1.15 **The Committee should recommend a 'democratic action fund' to fund local efforts to 'provide opportunities for people to experience public and community decision-making in environments that explore and experiment with new democratic methods.'**¹²
- 1.16 Participatory initiatives that other submissions highlighted (e.g., the 'Young Mayors Program', noted by the Foundation for Young Australians, as well as well-recognised participatory innovations that are being explored around the globe (e.g., participatory budgeting and citizens' juries) could fall within the scope of this fund.

Suggested additional recommendation 3

- 1.17 **The Committee should recommend collaboration between researchers, local members and candidates of all political persuasions to pilot opportunities for young people to have a say on issues in their local electorate**

Ms Kate Chaney MP

Independent Member for Curtin

¹⁰ Ibid, p. 16.

¹¹ Ibid, p. 51.

¹² newDemocracy submission, p. 1.