

## CHAPTER 9: EDUCATION FOR ELECTORAL PARTICIPATION

This chapter discusses what electoral education is, how it is delivered and by whom. The chapter also considers options for electoral education, with the objective of improving electoral participation in Australia.

### INTRODUCTION

- 9.1 Democracy depends upon participation; it has been noted that ‘a healthy democracy needs citizens who are informed and who are involved and engaged in the issues that are important to them’.<sup>577</sup> Electoral education and information programs can assist in providing eligible electors and soon-to-be eligible electors with ‘the keys to active and informed participation’,<sup>578</sup> by ensuring that they are aware of the mechanisms through which they can participate in Australia’s electoral system.
- 9.2 Electoral education is one component of a broader range of programs for civics and citizenship education and engagement; as noted below, options for reform of these broader programs are being progressed through other initiatives and are outside the scope of this paper.

### THE CURRENT ARRANGEMENTS

#### *Civics and citizenship education programs*

- 9.3 Civics education has been defined as ‘the development of citizenship or civic competence by conveying the unique meaning, obligation, and virtue of citizenship in a particular society or the acquisition of values, dispositions, and skills appropriate to that society’.<sup>579</sup> It has been noted that ‘a clear objective of civics education is the development of ‘active citizens’’.<sup>580</sup> In Australia, the term civics and citizenship education has generally been used to include both the attainment of civic knowledge, and the goal of equipping citizens to be active and engaged.
- 9.4 Civics education initiatives being progressed through processes separate to this Green Paper, discussed below, include:
- civics and citizenship education in schools;
  - civics education for new citizens;
  - education and promotion of civics and citizenship for all Australians; and
  - broader initiatives for civic engagement.

#### *Civics and citizenship education in schools*

- 9.5 Commonwealth, state and territory education ministers have committed to work with all school sectors to promote ‘world class curriculum and assessment,’ which will ‘develop successful learners, confident and creative individuals and active and informed citizens’.<sup>581</sup>

<sup>577</sup> JSCCEM, *Civics and Electoral Education*, op. cit., p. 1.

<sup>578</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 4-5.

<sup>579</sup> L Saha, ‘Political activism and civic education amongst Australian secondary school students’, *Australian Journal of Education*, vol. 44, no. 2, 2000, quoted in JSCCEM, *Civics and Electoral Education*, op. cit., p. 4.

<sup>580</sup> JSCCEM, *Civics and Electoral Education*, op. cit., p. 4.

<sup>581</sup> Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA), *Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians*, December 2008, p. 13, accessible at [www.mceetya.edu.au/mceetya/melbourne\\_declaration,25979.html](http://www.mceetya.edu.au/mceetya/melbourne_declaration,25979.html).

On 5 December 2008, the Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA) issued the *Melbourne Declaration of Educational Goals for Young Australians*, which noted that such a curriculum:

'...will support students to relate well to others and foster an understanding of Australian society, citizenship and national values, including through the study of civics and citizenship'.<sup>582</sup>

- 9.6 A national curriculum from kindergarten to year 12 for English, mathematics, the sciences and history is currently being progressed through the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA).<sup>583</sup> National curriculum will subsequently be developed in languages, geography and the arts. The development of national curriculum in history and geography will provide opportunities for Australian students to access civics and citizenship education. In addition, MCEETYA has asked ACARA to report by October 2009 on the approach that will be taken to other learning areas including civics and citizenship in the national curriculum. The potential deployment of civics and citizenship education consistently across primary and secondary schools represents a very significant opportunity to improve students' electoral proficiency.
- 9.7 Federal funding is provided through the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) for values education and civics and citizenship programs that support teaching and learning in these subject areas. DEEWR also provides funding for the Parliamentary and Civics Education Rebate (PACER) program, which subsidises schools travelling more than 150 kilometres to Canberra as part of a civics and citizenship excursion. To qualify for the rebate, schools must visit Parliament House, Old Parliament House (Museum of Australian Democracy program and/or the National Electoral Education Centre program), and the Australian War Memorial and where possible participate in an education program at these institutions.<sup>584</sup>
- 9.8 Civics and citizenship education in schools is reinforced by a MCEETYA sponsored national assessment program, which sample tests Year 6 and 10 students' knowledge of civic institutions and processes (identified as the civics component) and understanding of the attitudes, values and skills required for active participation as citizens (the citizenship component) every three years. The test was undertaken in 2004 and 2007 and will be undertaken again in 2010.

#### *Civics and citizenship education for new citizens*

- 9.9 In response to an independent review of the Australian Citizenship Test, completed in August 2008, the Australian Government is revising the citizenship test to focus on the concepts embodied in the Pledge of Commitment. The Pledge of Commitment includes an undertaking to pledge loyalty to 'Australia and its people, whose democratic beliefs I share'. The new test will be based on ensuring that applicants for citizenship have an adequate knowledge of the responsibilities and privileges of Australian citizenship, including Australia's democratic beliefs and systems.<sup>585</sup>

#### *Civics and citizenship education for the general community*

- 9.10 The independent review of the Australian Citizenship Test also drew attention to the need to have a consistent education program on civics and citizenship for all Australians, regardless of how they become citizens. In its response, the Australian Government supported this recommendation in principle, stating that:

<sup>582</sup> *ibid.*, p. 13.

<sup>583</sup> Further information on ACARA is available at: [www.acara.edu.au](http://www.acara.edu.au).

<sup>584</sup> The rebate is available for year 4 to year 12 students and is paid on a per student basis at rates varying according to the distance travelled. See [www.dest.gov.au/sectors/school\\_education/policy\\_initiatives\\_reviews/key\\_issues/student\\_learning/PACER\\_rebate.htm](http://www.dest.gov.au/sectors/school_education/policy_initiatives_reviews/key_issues/student_learning/PACER_rebate.htm)

<sup>585</sup> Further information on the Citizenship Test Review is available at [www.citizenshiptestreview.gov.au/](http://www.citizenshiptestreview.gov.au/).

'If we expect new citizens to be tested on their civic responsibilities we should also ensure that we teach this to those who are born here. Work in this area is currently underway as part of a whole-of-government approach to the promotion of civics and citizenship in the general community'.<sup>586</sup>

The Department of Immigration and Citizenship is leading the development of this whole-of-government approach, which will complement existing annual initiatives to promote and celebrate Australian citizenship including Australia Day (26 January), Harmony Day (21 March), and Australian Citizenship Day (17 September).<sup>587</sup>

9.11 A range of institutions in Canberra offer all Australians the opportunity to learn more about particular aspects of Australia's democracy. These include:

- the Museum of Australian Democracy at Old Parliament House, which opened on 9 May 2009 and enables visitors to celebrate, debate and experience the past, present and future of Australian democracy,<sup>588</sup>
- the Parliamentary Education Office at Parliament House, which educates schools, teachers and students about the federal Parliament;<sup>589</sup>
- the National Capital Exhibition, which tells the story of Canberra as Australia's national capital;<sup>590</sup>
- the National Electoral Education Centre (discussed in more detail at paragraph 9.16 below); and
- a wide range of other institutions including the Australian War Memorial, Government House, the High Court of Australia, the National Archives of Australia and the National Museum of Australia.

#### *Broader initiatives for civic engagement*

9.12 To foster greater community engagement with government and democratic processes, the Australian Government is committed to trialling different and innovative mechanisms. A few examples of initiatives to date include the following:

- to promote a collaborative approach to challenging issues and better inform government decision making, the largest community consultative forum ever held in Australia, the Australia 2020 Summit, was convened in April 2008;
- the Office for Youth has provided opportunities for youth participation in government decision making processes, through mechanisms such as the Australia 2020 Youth Summit and the Australian Youth Forum (AYF), including AYF's inaugural youTHINK event held on 20 February 2009 at ten locations around Australia, and the AYF website for ongoing participation;<sup>591</sup>
- Community Cabinet meetings, which enable Australians to meet with Cabinet ministers in person and ask questions directly about issues that are important to them;<sup>592</sup> and
- the Australian Public Affairs Channel, which commenced broadcasting on 20 January 2009 and will contribute to greater community awareness of the political process.

<sup>586</sup> Australian Government, *Moving forward...Improving Pathways to Citizenship: Government Response to the Report by the Australian Citizenship Test Review Committee*, November 2008, p. 5, available at [www.citizenshiptestreview.gov.au/\\_pdf/government-response-to-the-report.pdf](http://www.citizenshiptestreview.gov.au/_pdf/government-response-to-the-report.pdf).

<sup>587</sup> Further information on these initiatives is available at [www.citizenship.gov.au](http://www.citizenship.gov.au) and [www.harmony.gov.au](http://www.harmony.gov.au).

<sup>588</sup> For further information, see [moadoph.gov.au](http://moadoph.gov.au).

<sup>589</sup> For further information, see [www.peo.gov.au](http://www.peo.gov.au).

<sup>590</sup> For further information, see [www.nationalcapital.gov.au/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=235:national-capital-exhibition&catid=57:ql-menu-visiting&Itemid=196](http://www.nationalcapital.gov.au/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=235:national-capital-exhibition&catid=57:ql-menu-visiting&Itemid=196).

<sup>591</sup> For further information, see [www.deewr.gov.au/Youth/OfficeForYouth/Pages/default.aspx](http://www.deewr.gov.au/Youth/OfficeForYouth/Pages/default.aspx).

<sup>592</sup> For further information, see [www.pm.gov.au/community\\_cabinet/index.cfm](http://www.pm.gov.au/community_cabinet/index.cfm).

### Electoral education

- 9.13 Electoral education, which is also known as voter education, encompasses ‘relatively... complex types of information about voting and the electoral process’, including concepts such as:<sup>593</sup>
- the ‘role, responsibilities and rights of voters’;
  - the ‘relationship between elections and democracy’;
  - how votes translate into Parliamentary seats;
  - the secrecy of the ballot;
  - the universal franchise;
  - why each vote is important, and is a means by which representatives are held publicly accountable; and
  - the ‘conditions necessary for democratic elections’.
- 9.14 Electoral education can be conducted by a wide variety of organisations and individuals. It can be supported and sponsored by organisations including schools, electoral management bodies (EMBs), government agencies or departments in different jurisdictions, and stakeholders in the electoral process such as media, political parties, human rights commissions and other interest groups.
- 9.15 As noted at paragraph 9.2 above, electoral education is one element of civics and citizenship education. For example, the national *Statements of Learning for Civics and Citizenship* agreed by all Australian ministers for education indicate students in Year 5 are expected to understand the role and purpose of elections, parliament, government, political parties and civic participation in Australia’s democratic system.<sup>594</sup> Other aspects of electoral education that relate to a more advanced knowledge and understanding of these practices are specified for Years 7 and 9.<sup>595</sup> The 2007 national assessment of civics and citizenship tested students’ knowledge and understanding of electoral processes including the minimum voting age, identifying the qualities of a democratic electoral process, and the reasons for a secret ballot,<sup>596</sup> the results of this process are discussed at 9.30 and 9.38 below.
- 9.16 EMBs in Australia play a central role in conducting, supporting and sponsoring electoral education. Whilst all EMBs in Australia conduct some form of electoral education, New South Wales is the only jurisdiction where this function is not required under legislation.<sup>597</sup>

<sup>593</sup> The Administration and Cost of Elections (ACE) Project, ‘Basic Ideas and Definitions of Voter Information, Voter Education and Civic Education,’ *ACE Encyclopaedia*, available at [aceproject.org/ace-en/topics/ve/vea/default/?searchterm='relatively%20complex%20types%20of%20information'](http://aceproject.org/ace-en/topics/ve/vea/default/?searchterm='relatively%20complex%20types%20of%20information').

<sup>594</sup> The *Statements of Learning for Civics and Citizenship* document agreed essential skills, knowledge, understandings and capacities in civics and citizenship that all young Australians should have the opportunity to learn by the end of Years 3, 5, 7 and 9. They are available at [www.mceetya.edu.au/verve/\\_resources/SOL\\_Civics\\_Copyright\\_update2008.pdf](http://www.mceetya.edu.au/verve/_resources/SOL_Civics_Copyright_update2008.pdf).

<sup>595</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>596</sup> For example, the Year 6 assessment asks questions relating to the minimum voting age, identification of democratic electoral processes, secrecy of the ballot, referendums, and compulsory voting; the Year 10 assessment asks questions relating to the secrecy of the ballot, the role of referendums, and compulsory voting. The assessment booklet used for the 2007 Year 6 and Year 10 tests can be found in Appendix 2 of the School Release Materials, accessible at [www.mceetya.edu.au/mceetya/default.asp?id=12182](http://www.mceetya.edu.au/mceetya/default.asp?id=12182).

<sup>597</sup> The NSW Election Funding Authority maintains a Political Education Fund which provides funding to eligible registered political parties. The role of the Political Education Fund was discussed in the report of the Legislative Council Select Committee on Electoral and Political Party Funding, Parliament of New South Wales, *Electoral and Political Party Funding in New South Wales*, Report 1, June 2008, pp. 59-68, accessible through [www.parliament.nsw.gov.au/partyfunding](http://www.parliament.nsw.gov.au/partyfunding). The NSW Electoral Commission produces a variety of materials to support electoral education which are accessible at [www.elections.nsw.gov.au/electoral\\_education\\_and\\_resources](http://www.elections.nsw.gov.au/electoral_education_and_resources).

For example, the Electoral Act requires the AEC 'to promote public awareness of electoral and Parliamentary matters by means of the conduct of education and information programs and by other means'.<sup>598</sup> Electoral education activities undertaken by the AEC include the following.

- The School and Community Visits Program (SCVP), which is delivered to a range of audiences, including school students, new citizens, Indigenous people and other community groups. The AEC markets this program to schools as being complementary to the civics curriculum. During 2007-08, 1580 school and community visits were conducted by AEC staff, with over 60,000 school students and over 20,000 community members participating.
- The National Electoral Education Centre in Canberra, which delivers education sessions to schools and community groups. These sessions cover Australia's electoral system and discuss rationales for the current system, voting mechanisms and processes. Each session culminates in a mock election in which audience members participate both as electors and officials. In 2007-08 over 75,000 visitors, mostly school students, attended the National Electoral Education Centre.
- Electoral education resources for teachers, which take the form of civics curriculum-tailored electoral education resources<sup>599</sup> and delivery of professional development workshops for in-service and pre-service teachers which discuss strategies and resources for teaching electoral education.

9.17 The Australian Government announced in the 2009-10 Budget that Electoral Education Centres in Melbourne and Adelaide would be closed, as part of wider Government efforts to reduce expenditure. A small federal contribution to funding for the Western Australian Electoral Education Centre (run by the Western Australian Electoral Commission) will also be ceased. The announcement noted that the internet and printed material will continue to provide alternative means of providing electoral education.<sup>600</sup> The AEC is collaborating with DEEWR on strategies to ensure that its experience, and its high quality teaching and learning resources, are made available to Australian schools in effective ways. Through this collaboration with DEEWR, the AEC will also consult ACARA on ways that it can support the development of national curriculum in this area, with particular emphasis on providing effective teaching and learning resources when the relevant parts of the national curriculum are available.

9.18 State and territory EMBs also undertake a variety of activities and produce a range of resources specifically designed to enhance electoral education of current or future electors. Examples of specific activities and resources include:

- an Electoral Education Centre in Perth, which (as noted in paragraph 9.17 above) is run by the Western Australian Electoral Commission;
- online resources directed at students and teachers, which are available through EMB websites in New South Wales, Victoria, Queensland, Western Australia and the ACT;
- interactive and dynamic web-based electoral education presentations and animations, which are available from EMBs in South Australia and Victoria;
- presentations to schools and community groups, which are available from EMB staff in Victoria, Western Australia and the ACT; and
- resources for conducting school-based elections, which are available from EMBs in Victoria, Western Australia, South Australia and the ACT.

<sup>598</sup> Electoral Act, op. cit., section 7(1)(c).

<sup>599</sup> *Democracy Rules* can be accessed on the AEC website at [www.aec.gov.au/Education/Democracy\\_Rules/index.htm](http://www.aec.gov.au/Education/Democracy_Rules/index.htm).

<sup>600</sup> Australian Government, *Budget Paper No. 2, 2009-10*, 12 May 2009, p. 249, accessible at [www.budget.gov.au/2009-10/content/bp2/html/index.htm](http://www.budget.gov.au/2009-10/content/bp2/html/index.htm).

- 9.19 One element of electoral education is voter information, which can be defined as procedural information about voting, such as information on how to enrol to vote and the practical mechanisms for voting (such as the date, time, and place for voting in a specified election).<sup>601</sup> EMBs in the Commonwealth, states and territories provide voter information through a range of activities including television, print and radio advertising campaigns, publishing of information on EMB websites, and undertaking other public awareness activities. The provision of voter information by EMBs increases in the period immediately preceding an election. Voter information is also distributed throughout the election cycle, with a focus on reminding eligible electors about their responsibilities to enrol and/or update their enrolment details when they move. Activities include mail outs to targeted individuals and other enrolment stimulation activities directed at youth, new citizens, Indigenous persons and homeless persons.

## CHALLENGES, OPPORTUNITIES AND OPTIONS FOR CHANGE

- 9.20 As noted in previous chapters, there is evidence that some eligible Australians do not fully participate in Australia's electoral system, by either not enrolling, not turning out to vote, or unintentionally casting an informal vote. While the reasons for lack of electoral participation may be complex and varied, electoral education initiatives could have a role to play in improving rates of electoral participation, by seeking to ensure that all eligible electors have a sufficient understanding of the electoral process, and of how to express their views through engagement with that process. In seeking to improve levels of civic education and engagement more generally, the broad civics education initiatives discussed above are also likely to be relevant to improving rates of electoral participation.
- 9.21 In considering options for electoral education initiatives, a number of the key principles discussed in chapter 2 may be relevant. For example, from the perspective of universality, it could be argued that electoral education should be accessible to all Australians, and should be delivered in a way that is meaningful to a range of audiences. From the perspective of fostering a civic culture, it could be argued that electoral education should enable voters to understand the importance of democratic elections, and to feel a sense of ownership and responsibility for the successful conduct of elections. To ensure flexibility, it might be argued that electoral education programs should be able to adapt to the changing requirements of the Australian community.
- 9.22 From the perspective of effectiveness and efficiency, it could be argued that any resource implications of particular options for reform should be considered: questions for consideration in this context might include whether existing electoral education programs are best achieving their objectives or whether they should be amended or replaced with alternative programs that may be more effective in increasing electoral participation. For example, online delivery of education and information programs might be regarded as more cost-effective than programs delivered through education centres or visits to specific groups. However, while online programs might be seen as an effective way to provide education and information for some target audiences (such as youth), they may not be seen as the most effective mechanism to deliver education and information to other target audiences (such as some Indigenous Australians).
- 9.23 Options to enhance electoral education in the Australian community could take the form of a broad civics and citizenship education initiative, a separate electoral education activity or program focusing on one or more marginalised groups, or a combination of these two approaches. For example, one option proposed by the Australia 2020 Summit was to implement active citizenship training in primary and secondary schools, with this training

<sup>601</sup> ACE Project, 'Basic Ideas and Definitions of Voter Information, Voter Education and Civic Education,' op. cit.

being available to the wider community too.<sup>602</sup> Other options that have been proposed focus on improving electoral education for specified 'target audiences', such as young people, Indigenous Australians and migrant citizens.<sup>603</sup>

9.24 Specific options discussed below are focused on electoral education for:

- the general community; and
- specified groups who may be less likely to participate fully in the electoral system than the general population, namely:
  - youth;
  - Indigenous Australians;
  - migrant citizens; and
  - persons experiencing homelessness.

9.25 Additional options for increasing electoral participation such as changing the rules for formality of votes, enabling alternative methods of enrolment, or the provision of extended or alternative voting services are discussed in chapters 5, 7 and 11 respectively.

#### *Electoral education for the general community*

9.26 There have been a number of suggestions that existing electoral education activities should be expanded or enhanced, with the objective of improving the electoral participation of all Australians. Options for consideration may include:

- redesigning the electoral education section of the AEC website to ensure links to specific information requirements are clear;<sup>604</sup>
- expanding existing community outreach activities to a greater variety of community groups, which could be enabled by utilising staff who work in polling booths, engaging adult educators, or reviewing the roles of the AEC's network of divisional staff;
- a dedicated website providing enrolling and voting information;<sup>605</sup>
- further research or audits into the electoral engagement and participation of the voting population;<sup>606</sup>
- specific education activities to address particular aspects of current electoral processes, for example, highlighting the differences between voting systems in different jurisdictions and their link to informal voting at federal elections;<sup>607</sup> or
- consideration of how civil society organisations (partisan and non-partisan) could have a greater role in electoral education.

9.20 In addition, it has been argued that there is scope for greater coordination between, or integration of, organisations responsible for delivery of civics and electoral education, both within the Commonwealth and between the Commonwealth, states and territories. In 2007, JSCCEM noted that it had received a number of submissions expressing the view that civics and electoral education 'requires a more coordinated and coherent approach', not just across

<sup>602</sup> *Australia 2020 Summit: Final Report*, op. cit., p. 308.

<sup>603</sup> JSCCEM, *Civics and Electoral Education*, op. cit.

<sup>604</sup> Democratic Audit of Australia, submission number 41 to JSCCEM, *Inquiry into civics and electoral education*, pp. 4-5.

<sup>605</sup> See [www.aboutmyvote.co.uk](http://www.aboutmyvote.co.uk).

<sup>606</sup> Such as the *Audit of Political Engagement*, undertaken by the Hansard Society in the United Kingdom. See [www.hansardsociety.org.uk/blogs/publications/archive/2009/04/01/audit-of-political-engagement-6.aspx](http://www.hansardsociety.org.uk/blogs/publications/archive/2009/04/01/audit-of-political-engagement-6.aspx)

<sup>607</sup> Democratic Audit of Australia, submission number 45 to JSCCEM, *Inquiry into the 2007 Federal Election*, op. cit., p. 5.

jurisdictions but 'between education authorities and parliamentary and electoral education agencies such as electoral commissions and parliamentary education offices'.<sup>608</sup>

### *Electoral education to enhance the participation of specified groups*

#### *Youth*

9.28 Statistics indicate that younger persons are less likely to participate in the electoral process than older age cohorts. The AEC has estimated as at 31 December 2008, over 400,000 eligible Australians aged 18-25 were not enrolled and therefore not eligible to vote. Put another way, approximately one in five eligible 18-25 year olds are not enrolled to vote.

9.29 It has been noted that under-enrolment may be symptomatic of wider concerns or perceptions held by some young persons about the political process, including that politics is unappealing, irrelevant or not explicitly connected to them, or excludes youth points of view and meaningful youth participation.<sup>609</sup> While broader strategies (such as the mechanisms for civic engagement discussed in paragraph 9.12 above) are likely to be required to address these concerns, electoral education initiatives may have a role to play in improving electoral participation among young people.

9.30 A 2007 JSCEM inquiry into civics and electoral education noted with concern that 'surveys have shown that Australians between the ages of 15 and 35 typically have limited knowledge of Australia's political history and political system, and have little interest in Australian political affairs'.<sup>610</sup> The most recent round of civics and citizenship national assessment for Year 6 and Year 10 students found that only 54% of Year 6 students and 41% of Year 10 students met the proficiency standards for their year level.<sup>611</sup>

9.31 Civic knowledge and understanding can be obtained from a diverse range of sources, including family (parents, siblings), news media (newspapers, radio, internet), EMBs<sup>612</sup> and schools. The Youth Electoral Study (YES), which was conducted between 2003 and 2007 by the AEC and researchers from the University of Sydney and the Australian National University, found that schools and family play independent but supporting roles in young Australians learning about politics and increasing their commitment to vote. Selected findings particularly relevant to electoral education included that:<sup>613</sup>

- awareness of enrolling at age 17 is low;
- females are more likely than males to intend to enrol, and to actually enrol;
- young people do not generally perceive themselves as well prepared to vote;
- parents are the main source of information about voting;

<sup>608</sup> JSCEM, *Civics and Electoral Education*, op. cit., p. 60.

<sup>609</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 8-12; see also M Horsley and D Costley, *Young People Imagining a New Democracy: Young People's Voices Focus Groups Report*, Whitlam Institute, 2008, available at [www.whitlam.org/whitlam/images/stories/projects/focus%20groups%20report.pdf](http://www.whitlam.org/whitlam/images/stories/projects/focus%20groups%20report.pdf).

<sup>610</sup> JSCEM, *Civics and Electoral Education*, op. cit., p. iii.

<sup>611</sup> MCEETYA, *National Assessment Program: Civics and Citizenship Years 6 and 10 Report 2007*, Curriculum Corporation, p. xiv. The 'proficiency standards', set in 2004, represent a 'challenging but reasonable' expectation for typical Year 6 and 10 students to have reached by the end of each of those years of study. For example, Year 6 students are expected to recognise a benefit of having different political parties in Australia; to identify a principle for opposing compulsory voting; and recognise the division of governmental responsibilities in a federation. Available at [www.mceetya.edu.au/verve/\\_resources/NAP-CC\\_2007\\_Report\\_16Feb07.pdf](http://www.mceetya.edu.au/verve/_resources/NAP-CC_2007_Report_16Feb07.pdf)

<sup>612</sup> JSCEM, *Civics and Electoral Education*, op. cit., p. 14.

<sup>613</sup> Reports can be found at [www.aec.gov.au/About\\_AEC/Publications/youth\\_study/index.htm](http://www.aec.gov.au/About_AEC/Publications/youth_study/index.htm).

- student elections and student government are very important factors in student views about politics and voting; and
  - where parents had described voting negatively, or as a confusing process, participants indicated they tended to be put off voting.
- 9.32 The findings of the YES study continue to be used by the AEC to develop enrolment promotion and awareness strategies targeting young people. Recent activities have included: a national school-based Enrol to Vote Week; a birthday card program targeting people turning 17 or 18; a trial of an SMS request for enrolment forms; attendance by the AEC at career markets, Youth Weeks, youth festivals and university orientation days; and a partnership with Triple J through Rock Enrol to promote enrolment on the radio and at Big Day Out concerts. As outlined in paragraphs 9.16 to 9.18 above, the AEC and state and territory EMBs also conduct a range of activities to complement civics education in schools.
- 9.33 A number of different options have been suggested for education to improve youth participation in the electoral process, including:
- establishing civics education as a core curriculum subject in schools,<sup>614</sup> providing practical civics and citizenship activities and school governance activities such as voting in schools,<sup>615</sup> and delivery of greater electoral education content in schools;<sup>616</sup>
  - placing electoral educators in all states and territories to develop and present electoral education;<sup>617</sup>
  - reviewing the rebate program which subsidises schools travelling more than 150 kilometres to Canberra as part of a civics and citizenship excursion, and in particular how it affects Australia's most remotely located students;<sup>618</sup>
  - communicating with younger audiences using mediums (such as text and email) and methods (such as peer education) which are more culturally relevant to them;<sup>619</sup> and
  - EMBs making greater use of information about young, eligible voters held by state and territory education, vocational education and training<sup>620</sup> and transport authorities.
- 9.34 Options canvassed in other chapters of this paper, including lowering the age of enrolment and voting to 16 (covered in chapter 4), introducing automatic enrolment (covered in chapter 7), and ensuring enrolment and voting procedures are simple and accessible (covered in chapters 7 and 11), may also have an impact on youth electoral participation.

<sup>614</sup> *Australia 2020 Youth Summit Communiqué*, Appendix A, accessible at [www.australia2020.gov.au/youth/](http://www.australia2020.gov.au/youth/). In addition, a key theme which emerged from the youTHINK Australian Youth Forum held on 20 February 2009 was the need to improve civics education in schools. See also Whitlam Institute, *Putting the politics back into Politics: Young people and democracy in Australia*, Discussion Paper, January 2009, p. 7.

<sup>615</sup> This was another theme of the youTHINK Australian Youth Forum held on 20 February 2009; see also MCEETYA, *National Assessment Program: Civics and Citizenship Years 6 and 10 Report 2007*, op. cit., p. xix.; and University of Sydney, 'Study finds schools turn Gen Y off democracy', press release, 11 May 2009, available at [www.usyd.edu.au/news/84.html?newsstoryid=3375](http://www.usyd.edu.au/news/84.html?newsstoryid=3375).

<sup>616</sup> JSCEM, *Civics and Electoral Education*, op. cit., p. 63.

<sup>617</sup> *ibid.*, p. 64.

<sup>618</sup> *ibid.*, p. 82.

<sup>619</sup> This was an issue that emerged from the youTHINK Australian Youth Forum held on 20 February 2009.

<sup>620</sup> JSCEM, *Civics and Electoral Education*, op. cit., p. 24.

9.35 Other strategies utilised in other countries that could be considered include:

- mock elections conducted in conjunction with national elections, to familiarise students with voting processes and democratic procedures, as occur in Canada,<sup>621</sup> the United Kingdom,<sup>622</sup> New Zealand,<sup>623</sup> and the United States<sup>624,625</sup>
- a national youth parliament, to encourage engagement with civic issues and develop confidence of youth as public actors, as occurs in New Zealand and the United Kingdom;<sup>626</sup>
- pilot studies to trial and evaluate new youth engagement strategies, as have occurred in the United Kingdom<sup>627</sup>; and
- recognition of excellence in teaching and student journalism on electoral matters, as has occurred in New Zealand.<sup>628</sup>

### *Indigenous Australians*

9.36 An elector's ethnicity is not recorded either on the electoral roll or when a vote is cast, so it is not possible to measure precisely the levels of enrolment, voter turnout and formality of votes cast by Indigenous people at federal elections. However, there are indications that electorates with a comparatively high Indigenous population (such as those in the NT) demonstrate lower rates of enrolment and voter turnout than the national average. Formality is also generally lower in remote areas, which tend to have higher proportions of Indigenous voters. While low participation rates in these areas may be due to a range of factors, it has been acknowledged that 'a higher than average proportion of Indigenous people remain disenfranchised'.<sup>629</sup>

9.37 Factors such as lower literacy levels and school retention rates, health and social conditions as well as the general remoteness of some communities<sup>630</sup> may all impact on the level of enrolment and electoral awareness amongst Indigenous communities. Additional factors that have been acknowledged include a perception that voting is not relevant to Indigenous people, a 'feeling of disempowerment and lack of 'ownership' of process', confusion about the different levels of government and voting systems and that existing efforts to facilitate electoral education are not sufficiently active, visible or culturally appropriate.<sup>631</sup>

<sup>621</sup> [www.studentvote.ca](http://www.studentvote.ca).

<sup>622</sup> [www.mockelections.co.uk](http://www.mockelections.co.uk).

<sup>623</sup> [www.kidsvoting.org.nz](http://www.kidsvoting.org.nz).

<sup>624</sup> [www.kidsvotingusa.org](http://www.kidsvotingusa.org).

<sup>625</sup> The Electoral Commission of Queensland conducted mock elections in a small number of schools in conjunction with the 2009 Queensland state election. See [www.abc.net.au/stateline/qld/content/2006/s2521042.htm](http://www.abc.net.au/stateline/qld/content/2006/s2521042.htm).

<sup>626</sup> See [www.myd.govt.nz/ayv/youthparliament/youthparliament.aspx](http://www.myd.govt.nz/ayv/youthparliament/youthparliament.aspx) and [www.ukyouthparliament.org.uk](http://www.ukyouthparliament.org.uk). This option was also proposed by the Australia 2020 Summit: see *Australia 2020 Summit – Final Report*, op. cit., p. 313. An Indigenous Youth Parliament is being run in Queensland in 2009, see [www.communities.qld.gov.au/youth/engagement/indigenous-youth-parliament/](http://www.communities.qld.gov.au/youth/engagement/indigenous-youth-parliament/).

<sup>627</sup> See [www.electoralcommission.org.uk/about-us/partnership-grants/new-initiatives-fund-media-campaigns](http://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/about-us/partnership-grants/new-initiatives-fund-media-campaigns).

<sup>628</sup> [www.elections.org.nz/study/wallace/wallace-awards.html](http://www.elections.org.nz/study/wallace/wallace-awards.html)

<sup>629</sup> JSCEM, *Civics and Electoral Education*, op. cit., pp. 85-86.

<sup>630</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) 2006 Census data estimates that of the 517,174 Indigenous people estimated to be resident in Australia at the time of the census, 164,274 (31.8%) live in major cities, 221,508 (42.8%) live in regional areas, and 131,392 (25.4 %) live in remote areas. ABS, 4713.0 – *Population Characteristics, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians, 2006*, 27 March 2008, p. 18, available at [http://www.ausstats.abs.gov.au/ausstats/subscriber.nsf/0/38644B6D33F2EF79CA257418000E9E1A/\\$File/47130\\_2006.pdf](http://www.ausstats.abs.gov.au/ausstats/subscriber.nsf/0/38644B6D33F2EF79CA257418000E9E1A/$File/47130_2006.pdf).

<sup>631</sup> Queensland Parliament Legal, Constitutional and Administrative Review Committee, *Hands on Parliament: Interim Evaluation of the Implementation of Recommendations made following a Parliamentary Committee Inquiry into Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples' Participation in Queensland's Democratic Processes*, Report No. 61, November 2007, pp. 29-34 accessible at [www.parliament.qld.gov.au/LCARC](http://www.parliament.qld.gov.au/LCARC) and JSCEM, *Civics and Electoral Education*, op. cit., pp. 88-89.

- 9.38 National assessment of civics and citizenship education conducted in 2004 and 2007 demonstrated that students who were Indigenous performed less well than their non-Indigenous peers.<sup>632</sup> The Melbourne Declaration issued by Australian education ministers in December 2008 acknowledged the need to improve Indigenous educational outcomes,<sup>633</sup> and incorporate local Indigenous student experience and cultural knowledge into educational practice.<sup>634</sup> The Declaration included a commitment to supporting young Australians to become active and informed citizens, who would 'understand and acknowledge the value of Indigenous cultures and possess the knowledge, skills and understanding to contribute to, and benefit from reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians'.<sup>635</sup>
- 9.39 A dedicated continuous Indigenous electoral education program encouraging Aboriginals and Torres Strait Islanders to participate in the electoral process was administered by the AEC and its predecessor from 1979 to 1996.<sup>636</sup> Following the discontinuation of federal funding in 1996, specific initiatives to target Indigenous participation were developed which included short-term fieldwork in the lead up to federal elections and targeted communication and advertising campaigns through a variety of media and in a variety of languages. Other initiatives aimed at raising awareness have been implemented by the AEC in partnership with some state electoral management bodies, particularly in the NT and Queensland.
- 9.40 As part of its commitment to closing the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians, the Australian Government announced in the 2009-10 Budget that it will provide \$13 million over four years for an Indigenous Electoral Participation Program 'aimed at increasing levels of enrolment, voter turnout and formal voting in urban, regional and remote areas'.<sup>637</sup> The program will be administered by the AEC and will involve education and enrolment activities tailored to each locality, to be developed in consultation with Indigenous communities.<sup>638</sup> Partnerships with Indigenous communities and organisations will be built through a network of field staff and localised Indigenous liaison staff.<sup>639</sup> Following a set-up phase which will include consultation and identification and recruitment of Indigenous field staff and agents, the program will fully commence in July 2010.<sup>640</sup>
- 9.41 Additional options to increase electoral education and increase electoral participation amongst Indigenous electors could include:
- implementation of induction strategies incorporating the delivery of civics education for pre-service teachers bound for regional and remote communities;<sup>641</sup>

<sup>632</sup> MCEETYA, *National Assessment Program – Civics and Citizenship Years 6 and 10 Report 2007*, op. cit., p. 107. Student backgrounds highlighted as being statistically significant to performance in assessment included parental occupation groups, school geographic location and status as either Indigenous or non-Indigenous (pp. xv-xvii).

<sup>633</sup> MCEETYA, *Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians*, op. cit., pp.7, 10, and 15.

<sup>634</sup> *ibid.*, p. 7.

<sup>635</sup> *ibid.*, p. 9.

<sup>636</sup> The programs involved permanent teams visiting Indigenous communities to promote electoral awareness and voter education.

<sup>637</sup> *Budget Paper No. 2 Budget Measures 2009-10*, p. 214, available at [www.budget.gov.au/2009-10/content/bp2/html/index.htm](http://www.budget.gov.au/2009-10/content/bp2/html/index.htm); Hon J Macklin MP (Minister for Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs), *Closing the Gap between Indigenous and Non-Indigenous Australians*, Budget Ministerial Statement, 12 May 2009, p. 31, available at [www.budget.gov.au/2009-10/content/ministerial\\_statements/indigenous/html/index\\_indigenous.htm](http://www.budget.gov.au/2009-10/content/ministerial_statements/indigenous/html/index_indigenous.htm)

<sup>638</sup> Hon J Macklin MP (Minister for Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs), *Closing the Gap between Indigenous and Non-Indigenous Australians*, Budget Ministerial Statement, op. cit.

<sup>639</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>640</sup> Senator the Hon J Faulkner, '\$13.0 Million to Help Improve Indigenous Electoral Participation', Media Release, 12 May 2009, available at [www.cabinetsecretary.gov.au/media/2009/mr\\_172009.html](http://www.cabinetsecretary.gov.au/media/2009/mr_172009.html).

<sup>641</sup> JSCEM, *Civics and Electoral Education*, op. cit., p. 101.

- a modified civics education website to be created for an Indigenous audience;<sup>642</sup> and
- training and guidelines to be provided for polling officials in communicating with Indigenous Australians be reviewed for their adequacy.<sup>643</sup>

### *Migrant citizens*

- 9.42 The recent review of the Australian Citizenship test noted that, with the exception of Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islanders, 'we are all immigrants, refugees, or the descendants of immigrants, refugees or transported convicts'.<sup>644</sup> Migrants are eligible to enrol and vote once they become citizens. Over 4 million people have become citizens since Australian citizenship was introduced in 1949, with 107,647 new citizens approved by the Department of Immigration and Citizenship in 2007-08.<sup>645</sup> As noted above, applicants for citizenship are required to pass a citizenship test and make a Pledge of Commitment.
- 9.43 It has been observed that migrants and new citizens have many adjustments to make in settling into their new life in Australia and, with work and family commitments, may have little time and energy to engage with electoral processes and educational opportunities.<sup>646</sup> While some new citizens may find Australia's system of democracy unfamiliar if they have never lived in a democratic society, it is not evident that a lack of democratic experience necessarily results in decreased electoral participation.
- 9.44 Successive studies by the AEC of ballot paper informality at federal elections have found that electoral divisions with comparatively large numbers of people from a non-English speaking background 'are more likely to have higher levels of informality'.<sup>647</sup> For the 2007 federal election, the 10 electoral divisions with the highest proportion of informal votes cast were among the 24 divisions with largest proportion of persons from a non-English speaking background.<sup>648</sup>
- 9.45 Migrant electoral education and awareness activities undertaken by the AEC in 2007-08 included: attendance at citizenship ceremonies; presentations for migrant resource centres and migrant education classes; distribution of educational material in a range of languages; translation of advertising, enrolment and how-to-vote materials; broadcasting of translated television advertisements on how to cast a formal vote at specified polling places; and the recruitment of polling place staff with community language skills at particular locations. In addition, nearly 2,500 new migrants visited AEC Electoral Education Centres in 2007-08.
- 9.46 Options for enhancing the participation of migrant citizens in the electoral process through provision of electoral information and education might include:
- a review of the languages into which electoral materials are translated, with consideration of expanding these to include languages spoken by more recent migrant arrivals to Australia;<sup>649</sup>

<sup>642</sup> *ibid.*, p. 102.

<sup>643</sup> *ibid.*, p. 106.

<sup>644</sup> Australian Citizenship Test Review Committee, *Moving forward... Improving Pathways to Citizenship*, August 2008, p. 1, available at [www.citizenshiptestreview.gov.au/content/read-report.htm](http://www.citizenshiptestreview.gov.au/content/read-report.htm).

<sup>645</sup> Department of Immigration and Citizenship, 'Australian Citizenship Statistics', available at [www.citizenship.gov.au/resources/facts-and-stats/stats.htm](http://www.citizenship.gov.au/resources/facts-and-stats/stats.htm).

<sup>646</sup> Local Government Association of Queensland, submission no. 67 to JSCEM, *Inquiry into Civics and Electoral Education*, 1 June 2006, pp. 1-2, accessible at [www.aph.gov.au/House/committee/em/education/subs.htm](http://www.aph.gov.au/House/committee/em/education/subs.htm).

<sup>647</sup> AEC, *AEC Research Report No 11 – Analysis of Informal Voting: House of Representative 2007 Election*, 2009, p. 16, accessible at [www.aec.gov.au/About\\_AEC/Publications/Strategy\\_Research\\_Analysis/index.htm](http://www.aec.gov.au/About_AEC/Publications/Strategy_Research_Analysis/index.htm).

<sup>648</sup> Ranking of electoral divisions by proportion of 'persons born in non-English speaking countries' and proportion of 'persons who speak English not well or not at all' can be found in P Nelson, 'Electoral Division rankings: Census 2006 second release', *Research Paper no. 23 2007-2008* (revised 4 February 2009), Parliament of Australia Parliamentary Library, pp. 45 and 49.

<sup>649</sup> JSCEM, *Civics and Electoral Education*, op. cit., p. 125.

- developing a program of electoral education to be implemented through existing migrant settlement activities, such as English language classes;<sup>650</sup>
  - requiring all citizenship ceremonies to feature a presentation regarding the notion of citizenship, voting rights and obligations in Australia, including opportunities for enrolment at the ceremony;<sup>651</sup> or
  - an electoral education program delivered in the lead up to federal elections, which targets those areas where there is a high proportion of voters from non-English speaking backgrounds, a different voting system used for state elections, and a high level of informal voting at federal elections.<sup>652</sup>
- 9.47 Australia's existing efforts to provide electoral education, information and voting services to migrants and naturalised citizens have been described as extensive compared with other established democracies.<sup>653</sup> However, some practices employed in other countries that could be considered for Australia might include:<sup>654</sup>
- employing community liaison officers in the lead up to a federal election to engage with particular ethnic communities as occurs in Canada and the United Kingdom;
  - pilot studies to trial and evaluate new migrant engagement strategies, as occurs in Canada and the United Kingdom;
  - posting a 'voting pack' to each elector, which contains information on the electoral system and voting information in a variety of different languages, as occurs in New Zealand;<sup>655</sup> and
  - providing ballot papers in languages other than English in identified electoral divisions, as occurs in some states in the United States.

#### *Persons experiencing homelessness*

- 9.48 As outlined in chapter 7, persons experiencing homelessness may enrol to vote using 'no fixed address' enrolment. No large-scale research into electoral participation amongst Australians experiencing homelessness has been conducted to date; small research projects provide varying estimations of how many eligible Australian voters who are homeless are not enrolled, ranging from 33% to 90%.<sup>656</sup> Although over 65% of the homeless population are older than the minimum voting age, homelessness remains an issue that disproportionately affects young people as 43% of homeless people are under 25.<sup>657</sup>

<sup>650</sup> For example, the JSCEM recommended that 'the Department of Immigration and Citizenship, in consultation with the Australian Electoral Commission, develop a programme of electoral education, to be implemented through migrant resource centres' and that 'a professional development seminar for migrant resource workers to enable them to deliver this programme of electoral education.' JSCEM, *Civics and Electoral Education*, op. cit., p. 126.

<sup>651</sup> *ibid.*, p. 126.

<sup>652</sup> *ibid.*, p. 127.

<sup>653</sup> L Tossutti, 'The Electoral Participation of Ethnocultural Communities,' *Working Paper Series on Electoral Participation and Outreach Practices*, Elections Canada, 2007, p. 25, available at [www.elections.ca/loi/res/paper/ethnocultural/ethnocultural\\_e.pdf](http://www.elections.ca/loi/res/paper/ethnocultural/ethnocultural_e.pdf).

<sup>654</sup> Practices noted in *ibid.*, pp. 25-28, 30-31. Some of these practices are also utilised in state and territory jurisdictions in Australia: for example, the ACT employs bilingual educators to provide information to communities in languages other than English, and the ACT's electronic voting system allows voters to choose from 12 languages for their ballot paper instructions.

<sup>655</sup> The AEC publishes and distributes a householder booklet for each election. *Your official guide to the 2007 federal election* was provided to more than 8 million households prior to the 2007 election.

<sup>656</sup> Data from Hanover Welfare Services and the Australian Federation of Homelessness Organisations, as cited in P Lynch and J Cole, op. cit., p. 157.

<sup>657</sup> ABS, 2050.0 – *Australian Census Analytic Program: Counting the Homeless, 2006*, 4 Sep 2008, p. ix, available at [www.ausstats.abs.gov.au/ausstats/subscriber.nsf/0/57393A13387C425DCA2574B900162DFO/\\$File/20500-2008Reissue.pdf](http://www.ausstats.abs.gov.au/ausstats/subscriber.nsf/0/57393A13387C425DCA2574B900162DFO/$File/20500-2008Reissue.pdf).

- 9.49 Because people experiencing homelessness are often facing a number of issues,<sup>658</sup> electoral participation may not be seen by many to be a first-order priority. A survey conducted by Hanover Welfare Services<sup>659</sup> following the 2007 federal election appears to support this, finding that of those respondents who reported that they were eligible and did not vote, 32% of respondents indicated that there were 'too many other issues to deal with.'<sup>660</sup>
- 9.50 A 2005 AEC research paper found that for those homeless people who do not enrol and vote, the reasons are 'complex and frequently situation-specific', but that key factors included a lack of knowledge of the provisions relating to itinerant enrolment and voting, and alienation and/or hostility to the political process.<sup>661</sup> The report concluded that there was a general lack of civic engagement or civic skills generally within the homeless population surveyed, and a need for enhanced information and awareness for the homeless and homeless agency workers.<sup>662</sup>
- 9.51 For the 2007 federal election, the AEC provided enrolment information, including forms and fact sheets, to over 1300 Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP) provider organisations.<sup>663</sup> Other activities included attendance at events for persons experiencing homelessness.<sup>664</sup>
- 9.52 Submissions to recent federal and state parliamentary inquiries<sup>665</sup> have suggested that further action is required to enable those experiencing homelessness to participate equitably in the electoral process.<sup>666</sup> Options that have been suggested to improve education and information services for homeless persons include:
- that a detailed action plan to promote enrolment and voting among persons experiencing homelessness be implemented and publicly reported against;<sup>667</sup>
  - delivering electoral education about 'enrolment, voting and voting rights' to homeless persons and staff of supported accommodation and assistance organisations in appropriate locations;<sup>668</sup>

<sup>658</sup> The Australian Government is progressing a range of initiatives to reduce homelessness through *The Road Home: Homelessness White Paper*, available at [www.fahcsia.gov.au/sa/housing/progserv/homelessness/whitepaper/Pages/default.aspx](http://www.fahcsia.gov.au/sa/housing/progserv/homelessness/whitepaper/Pages/default.aspx).

<sup>659</sup> Hanover Welfare services is a Melbourne-based agency that provide services and advocacy for those experiencing homelessness. Survey results were based on a census of 132 Hanover clients who were eligible to vote in the 2007 election. Hanover Welfare Services, submission no. 109 to JSCEM, *Inquiry into the 2007 Federal Election*.

<sup>660</sup> This was the second most cited reason for not voting; 60% of respondents indicated they were not enrolled. Hanover Welfare Services, op. cit., p. 7.

<sup>661</sup> G Dario, 'Electorally Engaging the Homeless', AEC, Research Report No. 6, February 2005, pp. 7, available at [www.aec.gov.au/pdf/research/papers/paper6/research\\_paper6.pdf](http://www.aec.gov.au/pdf/research/papers/paper6/research_paper6.pdf).

<sup>662</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 8-9.

<sup>663</sup> AEC, submission no. 169.6 to JSCEM, *Inquiry into the 2007 Federal Election*, p. 14.

<sup>664</sup> AEC, *Annual Report 2007-08*, 2008, p. 95.

<sup>665</sup> For federal inquiry submissions see, for example: Homelessness Australia, submission no. 34, and PILCH Homeless Persons' Legal Clinic, submission no. 135, to JSCEM, *Inquiry into the 2007 Federal Election*. For state inquiry submissions see, for example: PILCH Homeless Persons' Legal Clinic, the Human Rights Law Resource Centre and the Victorian Association for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders, op. cit.

<sup>666</sup> Additional options to address homeless persons' electoral participation are addressed in chapters 7 and 11.

<sup>667</sup> As per recommendation 2, JSCEM, *Inquiry into the Conduct of the 2004 Federal Election and Matters Related Thereto*, op. cit., p. 17 and PILCH Homeless Persons' Legal Clinic, the Human Rights Law Resource Centre and the Victorian Association for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders, op. cit., pp. 19-20.

<sup>668</sup> Electoral Matters Committee, Victorian Parliament, *Inquiry into the Conduct of the 2006 Victorian State Election*, June 2008, p. 85, available at [www.parliament.vic.gov.au/emc/2006%20State%20Election/Inquiry%20into%202006%20Victorian%20state%20election.pdf](http://www.parliament.vic.gov.au/emc/2006%20State%20Election/Inquiry%20into%202006%20Victorian%20state%20election.pdf).

- 'promoting electoral participation in transitional housing and crisis accommodation centres';<sup>669</sup> and
- using a range of educational strategies including training, brochures and posters targeting staff of homeless organisations and their clients which address the misconception that homeless people are not able to enrol and vote.<sup>670</sup>

9.53 Strategies utilised internationally that might be considered include:

- for its 2006 federal election, Elections Canada employed community relations officers in electoral districts with large homeless populations;<sup>671</sup>
- in the United States, several states hold a National Homeless and Low-Income Voter Registration Week each year;<sup>672</sup>
- a US homeless advocacy organisation, the National Coalition for the Homeless (NCH), produces an annual voter rights and registration pack which provides targeted information and strategies for homeless shelters and their residents;<sup>673</sup> and
- in the United Kingdom, the Electoral Commission funded a short-term project which involved a homeless charity producing and delivering training modules and a democracy toolkit for the homeless and homeless agency workers.<sup>674</sup>

## DISCUSSION POINTS

9.54 This chapter has suggested some options for electoral education initiatives, with the objectives of improving participation in, knowledge of and support for Australia's electoral system. Submissions are invited on the following questions:

- Do you think that any changes should be made to existing electoral education programs?
  - If so, what programs do you think should be in place to effectively and efficiently improve electoral participation in Australia?
- Should electoral education be mandatory in all Australian schools?
- Do you think that any new electoral education strategies should be introduced to improve the electoral participation of particular groups, such as:
  - youth?
  - Indigenous Australians?
  - migrant citizens?
  - persons experiencing homelessness?
- If so, what strategies do you think should be developed?
- Are there any specific groups not discussed in this chapter who you think would benefit from better electoral education?

<sup>669</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>670</sup> Hanover Welfare Services, as cited in Electoral Matters Committee, Victorian Parliament, *Inquiry into the Conduct of the 2006 Victorian State Election*, *op. cit.*, p. 85.

<sup>671</sup> See Elections Canada, *Report of the Chief Electoral Officer of Canada on the 39<sup>th</sup> General Election of January 23, 2006, 2006*, p. 75 accessible from [www.elections.ca](http://www.elections.ca) and M J Prince, 'The Electoral Participation of Persons with Special Needs,' *Working Paper Series on Electoral Participation and Outreach Practices*, Elections Canada, 2007, p. 30, available at [www.elections.ca/loi/res/paper/special\\_needs/special\\_needs\\_e.pdf](http://www.elections.ca/loi/res/paper/special_needs/special_needs_e.pdf).

<sup>672</sup> M J Prince, *ibid.*, p. 21.

<sup>673</sup> *ibid.* See also [www.nationalhomeless.org/projects/vote/index.html](http://www.nationalhomeless.org/projects/vote/index.html).

<sup>674</sup> Further information is available at [www.electoralcommission.org.uk/\\_\\_data/assets/electoral\\_commission\\_pdf\\_file/0013/13315/Broadway\\_21945-16275\\_\\_E\\_\\_N\\_\\_S\\_\\_W\\_\\_.pdf](http://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/__data/assets/electoral_commission_pdf_file/0013/13315/Broadway_21945-16275__E__N__S__W__.pdf).