



NATIONAL CAPITAL Educational Tourism Project



SUBMISSION TO THE ELECTORAL REFORM GREEN PAPER

This submission relates to Chapter 9: Education for Electoral Participation and specifically addresses the following question:

Do you think that any changes should be made to existing electoral education programs?

Submission intent

To highlight the important work of the National Electoral Education Centre operating in Canberra and to propose that this centre be provided with substantially more resources as part of this Electoral Reform so it can continue to provide vital education leading to increased understanding and participation in our electoral and voting processes by young Australians.

Background

The National Capital Educational Tourism Project (NCETP) was formed in 1999 to encourage more schools throughout Australia to see the benefits of visiting the National Capital to participate in a range of education programs offered by the national institutions. The number of student visitors to the National Capital has increased over 50% and now over 160,000 students visit on an annual basis.

The NCETP is managed and funded under an Agreement between the National Capital Attractions Association (NCAA) and the ACT Government. The NCETP Stakeholder Council comprises of representatives from NCAA, Australian Capital Tourism (ACT Government), Australian War Memorial, National Gallery of Australia, Questacon, Museum of Australian Democracy and National Museum of Australia.

The NCETP, in partnership with a range of national institutions, develop and implement programs that encourage teachers to plan excursions to the National Capital with the primary purpose of civics and citizenship. This includes participation from such attractions as discussed in point 9.11 along with the National Electoral Education Centre.



The NCAA through the NCETP currently manage the administration and promotion of the Parliament and Civics Education Rebate program, discussed in point 9.7, under a Services Agreement with Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relation (DEEWR). This program has significantly increased the number of schools that see the idea of visiting their National Capital as an important part of civics and citizenship education.

National Electoral Education Centre

As discussed in point 9.16, the National Electoral Education Centre currently educates over 75,000 students in Australia's electoral systems and voting processes. This education is vital in encouraging these students to understand the rights and responsibilities of their Australian citizenship. These students also visit a range of other civics institutions such as those discussed in 9.11. In fact, there are more than 12 national institutions that contribute to the overall experience of a visit to the nation's capital.

As part of the National Capital experience, the National Electoral Education Centre is rated very highly among teachers in relation to their programs. The NCETP commissions independent research, on a biannual basis, to measure the school excursion market to the National Capital. This independent research, *'Size and Effect of School Excursions to the National Capital'* is conducted by the Centre for Tourism Research (CTR) at the University of Canberra. Also, included in this research is data on teacher's satisfaction with the programs at the national institutions.

In 2007, data collected by the Centre for Tourism Research on the National Electoral Education Centre was as follows:

- The National Electoral Education Centre was ranked in the top 4 institutions that provided the highest level of satisfaction
- Teachers ranked the programs of the National Electoral Education Centre at a 4.69 out of 5 (with 5 being very satisfied)
- 95.2% of teachers who participated in a program at the National Electoral Education Centre with students were satisfied and from this percentage 76.2% of teachers were very satisfied

As stated previously, 160,000 interstate students now visit the National Capital on an annual basis. The National Electoral Education Centre is only able to offer programs to half of these student visitors due to its size and current resourcing levels. The National Electoral Education Centre has to turn away a large number of visiting schools each year. This, along with difficulty in securing places at other institutions will often deter schools from undertaking an excursion to the National Capital, an important civics and citizenship activity.

The National Electoral Education Centre is part of the mandatory institution visitation process for the Parliament and Civics Education Centre (PACER) that assists over 80,000 student per year. Along with visits to Parliament House and the Australian War Memorial, currently schools can do programs at the Museum of Australian Democracy at Old Parliament House and/or the National Electoral Education and while some schools do both, this is not always possible. If the National Electoral Education Centre was expanded and appropriately resourced, it could be argued that all PACER eligible students could undertake the important programs offered at the centre.

Conclusion

The purpose of this submission is to strongly implore that, while considering alternative or additional education programs that encourage effective learning in Australia's electoral system that it is recognised that the National Electoral Education Centre is currently providing outstanding programs that contribute to the goals of this Electoral Reform Paper. Most importantly, this submission wishes to recognise that significant expansion of the facilities and education programs of the National Electoral Education Centre will further increase participation of young Australians in understanding of their right to vote, the voting processes and their role as citizens.

Finally, expansion and increased resourcing to the National Electoral Education Centre could open up possibilities, not only for student education, but to other important groups within the community that currently have no access to comprehensive information on Australia's electoral processes.

December 2009

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