



**PARLIAMENT OF VICTORIA**  
Electoral Matters Committee

**Inquiry into civics and  
electoral participation  
in Victorian state  
parliamentary elections**

Parliament of Victoria  
**Electoral Matters Committee**

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# Committee functions

The Electoral Matters Committee is constituted under section 9A of the *Parliamentary Committees Act 2003*.

The committee's functions are to inquire into, consider and report to the Parliament on any proposal, matter or thing concerned with:

- a. the conduct of parliamentary elections and referendums in Victoria;
- b. the conduct of elections of Councillors under the *Local Government Act 1989*; and
- c. the administration of, or practices associated with, the *Electoral Act 2002* and any other law relating to electoral matters.

# Committee membership



**Hon Louise Asher MP**  
Chair  
Brighton



**Ms Ros Spence MP**  
Deputy Chair  
Yuroke



**Ms Melina Bath MLC**  
Eastern Victoria  
(from 7 September 2017)



**Ms Lizzie Blandthorn MP**  
Pascoe Vale



**Hon Martin Dixon MP**  
Nepean



**Hon Russell Northe MP**  
Morwell  
(until 28 August 2017)



**Ms Fiona Patten MLC**  
Northern Metropolitan



**Hon Adem Somyurek MLC**  
South-Eastern Metropolitan

# Committee secretariat

## Staff

Mark Roberts, Executive Officer

Dr Nathaniel Reader, Research Officer

Bernadette Pendergast, Committee Administrative Officer, Mondays and Tuesdays

Maria Marasco, Committee Administrative Officer, Wednesdays and Thursdays

## Committee contact details

**Address** Electoral Matters Committee  
Parliament of Victoria, Spring Street  
EAST MELBOURNE VIC 3002

**Phone** 61 3 8682 2885

**Email** [emc@parliament.vic.gov.au](mailto:emc@parliament.vic.gov.au)

**Web** <https://www.parliament.vic.gov.au/emc>

This report is available on the Committee's website.

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# Terms of reference

## Inquiry into civics and electoral participation in Victorian state parliamentary elections

Received from the Legislative Assembly on 21 February 2017:

That, under section 33 of the *Parliamentary Committees Act 2003*, an inquiry into civics and electoral participation in Victorian state parliamentary elections be referred to the Electoral Matters Committee for consideration and report no later than 31 August 2018 and the Committee should specifically examine:

1. electoral and civics education, the Victorian Electoral Commission's (VEC's) community engagement programs and other best practice approaches used by the VEC, other Australian electoral commissions, the United Kingdom and New Zealand, to ensure that Victorian citizens are adequately informed and able to participate effectively in elections;
2. strategies to reduce informal voting at Victorian state elections which are not related to the voting system;
3. how the VEC employs and trains casual staff for Victorian state elections, this should involve discussion about methods to attract people to join the VEC's casual staffing roster for Victorian elections, the Committee should also examine the roles and responsibilities of the VEC's casual election staff in light of changing technological and societal demands; and
4. strategies to increase electoral participation amongst community groups that traditionally experience barriers to electoral participation, such as Victorians aged 18 to 24, Victorians from multicultural backgrounds, as well as Victorians who have recently become Australian citizens and are not familiar with Australia's electoral system.



# Chair's foreword

On behalf of the Electoral Matters Committee, I am pleased to present to the Parliament of Victoria its report, Inquiry into Civics and Electoral Participation in Victorian State Parliamentary Elections.

The committee received the Terms of Reference for this enquiry from the Government, advertised them, called for submissions and held public hearings to further discuss the material that we received. I wish to thank all of those who made submissions and who appeared at the public hearings.

I also wish to thank the members of the committee, Deputy Chair, Ros Spence, Martin Dixon, Lizzie Blandthorn, Fiona Patten, Melina Bath and Adem Somyurek for their engagement and interest in this reference. I also wish to acknowledge the excellent work of the staff, the Executive Officer, Mark Roberts, the Research Officer, Dr Nathaniel Reader, and the administrative staff, Bernadette Pendergast and Maria Marasco and to thank them for their support of the committee.

In the state of Victoria, there is a role for both the education system and for the Victorian Electoral Commission (VEC) in the teaching and awareness of civics. Indeed the VEC has a significant role in raising public awareness, specified under the Electoral Act, which is substantially delivered through its Passport to Democracy program. Whilst the Committee believes that civics and public understanding of the way our democracy works is a significant issue, unfortunately there is not wide public awareness of how our political system actually works. The Committee spent considerable time discussing the importance of civics, the extent of unintentional informal votes and how this could be rectified and the difficulties faced by the VEC and like bodies to recruit election staff.

The key recommendations from the report are the results of the Committee's extensive research, consultation and consideration. Most of the recommendations are targeted to the VEC but there are also a number of recommendations for the Government and the Parliament of Victoria to consider. The committee believes that, whilst the Passport to Democracy program has its strengths, there are significant opportunities to expand its use, for example by integrating a student vote project into the program and by fostering greater use of the program. The VEC could also undertake more extensive work with the Department of Education and Training to support students participating in School Council elections, for example by providing collateral similar to state election material. The Committee has also suggested further reporting to Parliament on enrolment rates of young Victorians aged 18 to 24 years and on informal voting. The Committee has offered what we hope are some helpful suggestions on recruiting younger people to work for the VEC to assist in the conduct of elections and has also suggested some ways in which older people could be recruited to the positions they have traditionally held in the administration of elections. We hope that the Parliament will consider the recommendations made to it in relation to improvements to the Victorian Parliament's already comprehensive program.

## Chair's foreword

I sincerely hope that the Committee's recommendations will be considered and acted upon and express my personal hope for progress in these areas, especially in the knowledge of civics throughout the community.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Louise Asher', with a large, stylized flourish at the end.

**Hon Louise Asher MP**  
**Chair**

# Recommendations

## 3 Civics and electoral education in Victoria and other jurisdictions

**RECOMMENDATION 1:** The committee recommends the Victorian Electoral Commission include statistics about the enrolment rate of eligible Victorian electors aged 18 to 24 years in its annual report to Parliament, and in each report to Parliament on a Victorian state election, as per Figure 3.3. . . . . 32

**RECOMMENDATION 2:** The committee recommends the Victorian Electoral Commission learn more about CIVIX’s parallel election program Student Vote, with a view to integrating, over time, the practice and principles of a parallel election into Passport to Democracy. . . . . 48

**RECOMMENDATION 3:** The committee recommends the Victorian Electoral Commission work with the Department of Education and Training to provide material support for elections for student representative positions for school council elections in Victorian schools in the form of election collateral that reflects, as far as practicable, election material used at Victorian state elections. . . . . 48

**RECOMMENDATION 4:** The committee recommends the Victorian Electoral Commission, in connection with Passport to Democracy, hold professional development sessions for teachers who are using Passport to Democracy resources in their classrooms. . . . . 48

**RECOMMENDATION 5:** The committee recommends the Victorian Electoral Commission provide Passport to Democracy resources to all Victorian schools. . . . . 50

**RECOMMENDATION 6:** The committee recommends the Victorian Electoral Commission set an annual performance target for increasing the number and percentage of Victorian schools using Passport to Democracy resources as part of their civics education curricula. This target should be included in the VEC’s Community Education and Electoral Inclusion Strategy 2017-2019 and the VEC’s annual report to Parliament. . . . . 50

**RECOMMENDATION 7:** The committee recommends the Victorian Electoral Commission, and the Victorian Government, explore non-school based opportunities to promote electoral engagement, including working with relevant peak organisations such as the Youth Affairs Council Victoria. . . . . 53

## 4 Non-systemic methods to reduce informal voting in Victorian state parliamentary elections

**RECOMMENDATION 8:** The committee recommends the Victorian Electoral Commission develop a detailed communication and information strategy for the 2018 Victorian state election, and future Victorian state elections, in conjunction with the relevant electoral advisory groups to disseminate information about how to cast a formal vote at Victorian state elections and in Districts with high levels of informal voting. The VEC’s strategy should focus on disengaged electors, and electors who have additional language, literacy or cultural needs for information about formal voting. . . . . 66

**RECOMMENDATION 9:** The committee recommends the Victorian Electoral Commission conduct further research into the relationship between age and informal voting at Victorian state elections, focusing on electoral Districts identified by the VEC as requiring particular attention. The VEC should benchmark its performance in relation to encouraging young people to cast formal votes in the VEC’s annual report to Parliament. . . . . 66

**RECOMMENDATION 10:** The committee recommends the Victorian Electoral Commission work with its CALD electoral advisory group to recruit and deploy ‘formal voting ambassadors’ for the 2018 Victorian state election and future Victorian state elections. The VEC should be responsible for the funding and administration of these personnel, and the logistics of the program. . . . . 68

**RECOMMENDATION 11:** The committee recommends the Victorian Electoral Commission continue its Driving Votes campaign focussing on electoral Districts where electors are under-represented in the electoral process, and report these findings in the VEC’s annual report to Parliament. . . . . 68

## 5 Election staffing for Victorian state parliamentary elections

**RECOMMENDATION 12:** The committee recommends the Victorian Electoral Commission re-establish, promote and expand its pilot program, Election Millennials @VEC, and make the program an ongoing part of its recruitment strategies to recruit young people aged 18 to 24 to join the VEC’s election personnel database. . . . . 79

**RECOMMENDATION 13:** The committee recommends the Victorian Electoral Commission prioritise and improve their social media as a marketing tool to communicate with and encourage young Victorians aged 18 to 24 about opportunities for casual election work. . . . . 79

**RECOMMENDATION 14:** The committee recommends the Victorian Electoral Commission place targeted advertising about casual election work at Victorian universities, including student email bulletins, in the lead up to Victorian electoral events, including by-elections and local government elections. . . . . 79

**RECOMMENDATION 15:** The committee recommends the Victorian Electoral Commission continue to expand its efforts to recruit election staff from communities who experience barriers to electoral participation and report on this as part of the VEC’s annual report to Parliament. . . . . 79

**RECOMMENDATION 16:** The committee recommends the Victorian Electoral Commission include functionality in its Election Management System so that the VEC can track the number of employment offers made to specific community groups against the number of offers which are accepted.. . . . 84

**RECOMMENDATION 17:** The committee recommends the Victorian Electoral Commission strengthen its relationships with CALD community groups so that information about election work opportunities is provided in clearer and more regular formats. Social media should be the priority channel wherever possible for communicating offers to CALD communities.. . . . 84

**RECOMMENDATION 18:** The committee recommends the Victorian Electoral Commission considers Elections Canada’s strategies to recruit and retain election casual staff and returning officers for Canadian federal elections. The VEC should liaise with Elections Canada to learn more about its Aboriginal Community Relations Officer and Aboriginal Elder and Youth Programs. . . . . 84

**RECOMMENDATION 19:** The committee recommends the Victorian Electoral Commission adopt a recruitment approach for the Senior Election Official pool based on the City of Ottawa’s proactive approach to election staff recruitment. The committee also recommends the VEC further examine the City of Ottawa’s election staff recruitment and strategy around inclusivity, and adopt some of the principles underpinning the City’s corporate strategies for staff recruitment such as attending large exhibition style/community events. . . . . 86

**RECOMMENDATION 20:** The committee recommends the Victorian Electoral Commission use technology to streamline election staff training and evaluation activities wherever possible. The committee also recommends the VEC implement a centralised staff evaluation database to provide greater clarity around staff performance and training, as per the information provided in the VEC’s submission to the inquiry. . . . . 91

**RECOMMENDATION 21:** The committee recommends the Victorian Electoral Commission monitors the Electoral Commission of Queensland’s system migration to online-only training delivery for election staff, with a view to gradually expanding online training opportunities for future Victorian state elections. . . . . 91

**RECOMMENDATION 22:** The committee recommends the Victorian Electoral Commission adopt an ongoing staff engagement model for the Senior Election Official pool based on Elections Canada’s staff engagement practices, such as regular training and longer employment terms, as well as more generalised training and engagement for the election casual pool.. . . . 91

## 6 Electoral participation, and community engagement with parliamentary processes

- RECOMMENDATION 23:** The committee recommends the Victorian Government explore the introduction of a student budget consultation process, based on the Canadian model administered by CIVIX. For future state budgets the results of the survey could be shared with the Department of Treasury and Finance. . . . . 98
- RECOMMENDATION 24:** The committee recommends the Victorian Electoral Commission ensure that information provided on its website from political parties, such as how-to-vote cards, is consistent with guidelines used by the VEC for providing information in accessible formats. . . . . 102
- RECOMMENDATION 25:** The committee recommends the Victorian Electoral Commission offer magnifying sheets in all Victorian voting centres for Victorian state elections. The Victorian Electoral Commission should liaise with Elections Canada and the City of Ottawa regarding the details of the magnifying devices it provides to polling stations. . . . . 103
- RECOMMENDATION 26:** The committee recommends the Victorian Electoral Commission continue to work closely with CALD community groups like the Ethnic Communities’ Council of Victoria to ensure that the VEC’s CALD community engagement and outreach programs are suitably coordinated with CALD community groups, avoiding overlap where possible. . . . . 106
- RECOMMENDATION 27:** The committee recommends the Victorian Electoral Commission develop a strategy to engage community groups who are not successfully interacting with the VEC’s Democracy Ambassador Program. These ‘hard to reach’ groups should be a priority reference for the VEC’s Education and Inclusion Unit. . . . . 106
- RECOMMENDATION 28:** The committee recommends the Victorian Electoral Commission continue to use social media wherever possible to communicate information about electoral participation and voting to CALD communities. . . . . 106
- RECOMMENDATION 29:** The committee recommends that the Victorian Electoral Commission continue to evaluate, improve and measure the Democracy Ambassador program consistent with the Victorian Auditor-General’s recommendation in the 2016 performance audit of the Victorian Electoral Commission. . . . . 106
- RECOMMENDATION 30:** The committee recommends that the Victorian Electoral Commission continue to work closely with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community groups to ensure engagement and outreach programs are suitably coordinated, avoiding overlap where possible. . . . . 107
- RECOMMENDATION 31:** The committee recommends the Victorian Electoral Commission’s Homelessness Electoral Advisory Group continues to support and resource appropriately the electoral participation of Victorians experiencing homelessness. . . . . 108



**RECOMMENDATION 32:** The committee recommends the Parliament of Victoria initiate optional training for members of Parliament through the Community Engagement and Education Unit on how to organise and conduct a youth council. . . . 115

**RECOMMENDATION 33:** The committee recommends the Parliament of Victoria examine the possibility of recruiting student tour guides from universities to complement the existing Parliamentary tour program. . . . . 117

**RECOMMENDATION 34:** The committee recommends the Presiding Officers of the Parliament of Victoria establish a Representative Day forum for Members of Parliament where Members voluntarily visit Victorian schools. The Parliament’s Community Engagement and Education Unit should provide coordinating assistance for this event. . . . . 118

**RECOMMENDATION 35:** The committee recommends the Presiding Officers of the Parliament of Victoria investigate the feasibility of establishing a teacher training program for interested teachers involving teacher attendance at Parliament House. The program should adopt Canada’s holistic response to civics and elections education and focus not just on the Parliament of Victoria’s work, but Victoria’s parliamentary democracy. Any program should prioritise attendance by interested teachers from rural and regional Victoria and teachers from priority communities as per the Parliament of Victoria’s Strategic Plan 2015-2018. . . . . 120

**RECOMMENDATION 36:** The committee recommends the Department of the Legislative Assembly make available to visitors electoral enrolment forms and other electoral information as part of its public tour program. . . . . 121



## 1.1 Terms of reference – Inquiry into civics and electoral participation

On 21 February 2017 the committee received terms of reference from the Legislative Assembly to inquire into civics and electoral participation at Victorian state elections and report to Parliament by 31 August 2018. The committee was specifically required to report on:

- electoral and civics education, the Victorian Electoral Commission’s (VEC’s) community engagement programs and other best practice approaches used by the VEC, other Australian electoral commissions, the United Kingdom and New Zealand, to ensure that Victorian citizens are adequately informed and able to participate effectively in elections;
- strategies to reduce informal voting at Victorian state elections which are not related to the voting system;
- how the VEC employs and trains casual staff for Victorian state elections. This should involve discussion about methods to attract people to join the VEC’s casual staffing roster for Victorian elections. The Committee should also examine the roles and responsibilities of the VEC’s casual election staff in light of changing technological and societal demands; and
- strategies to increase electoral participation amongst community groups that traditionally experience barriers to electoral participation, such as Victorians aged 18 to 24, Victorians from multicultural backgrounds, as well as Victorians who have recently become Australian citizens and are not familiar with Australia’s electoral system.<sup>1</sup>

## 1.2 Responsibilities of the Electoral Matters Committee

The Electoral Matters Committee is a joint investigatory committee of the Parliament of Victoria. The committee comprises seven Members of Parliament drawn from the Legislative Assembly and Legislative Council.

While some committees have ongoing functions to scrutinise legislation and finances, the Electoral Matters Committee usually conducts inquiries based on a reference from either house of Parliament. The powers and responsibilities of the committee are determined by the *Parliamentary Committees Act 2003* (Vic). The committee’s functions, as defined by s9A, are, “if so required or permitted under this Act, to inquire into, consider and report to Parliament on any proposal, matter or thing concerned with–

- The conduct of parliamentary elections and referendum in Victoria;
- The conduct of elections of Councillors under the *Local Government Act 1989* (Vic); and

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<sup>1</sup> Parliament of Victoria, Electoral Matters Committee, ‘Terms of reference’, Parliament of Victoria. Accessed 9 February 2018 from <<https://www.parliament.vic.gov.au/emc/article/3543>>.

- The administration of, or practices associated with, the *Electoral Act 2002* (Vic) and any other law relating to electoral matters.<sup>2</sup>

### 1.3 The Electoral Matters Committee's previous inquiries

This inquiry is the Electoral Matters Committee's eleventh inquiry.

Most recently, in May 2017 the committee tabled its final report for the inquiry into electronic voting at Victorian state elections. This report was the first report by a Victorian parliamentary committee concerned solely with electronic voting. The committee made six recommendations, including a recommendation offering in principle support for the provision of a system of remote electronic voting at Victorian state elections.<sup>3</sup> The Victorian Government tabled its response to this report on 2 November 2017. Like the committee, the Government offered in principle support for remote electronic voting at Victorian state elections. However, as a first step towards the adoption of remote electronic voting in Victoria, the Government proposed referring remote electronic voting to the Council of Australian Governments to consider the development of a national approach to electronic voting.<sup>4</sup>

In 2015, the committee also tabled its final report for the inquiry into the 2014 Victorian state election. The report made six findings and 23 recommendations. The Victorian Government's response to the report was tabled in Parliament on 8 November 2016 and can be downloaded on the committee's website.

In the 57th and 56th Parliaments, the then Electoral Matters Committee inquired into:

- The future of Victoria's electoral administration (inquiry completed in 2014);
- The conduct of the 2010 Victorian state election (inquiry completed 2012);
- The functions and administration of voting centres (inquiry completed in 2010);
- Misleading or deceptive electoral advertising (inquiry completed in 2010);
- Voter participation and informal voting (inquiry completed in 2009);
- Political donations and disclosure (inquiry completed in 2009);
- The conduct of the 2006 Victorian state election (inquiry completed in 2008) and
- Matters relating to the committee's 2008 international investigations into political donations and disclosure and voter participation and informal voting (inquiry completed in 2008).<sup>5</sup>

In 2014 the then committee also issued a discussion paper for its inquiry into the impact of social media on Victoria's electoral administration. The discussion paper is available on the committee's website.

2 *Parliamentary Committees Act 2003* (Vic) s9A. Retrieved 27 January 2018 from <[http://www.austlii.edu.au/au/legis/vic/consol\\_act/pca2003273/s9a.html](http://www.austlii.edu.au/au/legis/vic/consol_act/pca2003273/s9a.html)>.

3 Parliament of Victoria, Electoral Matters Committee, "Report on inquiry into electronic voting", Parliament of Victoria, Melbourne, May 2017, p.xv.

4 Parliament of Victoria, Electoral Matters Committee, "Report on inquiry into electronic voting", Parliament of Victoria, Melbourne, May 2017, p.xv.

5 Parliament of Victoria, Electoral Matters Committee, "Inquiries".

## 1.4 Inquiry process

After receiving the terms of reference for this inquiry in February 2017, the committee commenced secondary research, including analysis of the political science literature on Australian electoral participation, civics and electoral education.

All Victorian parliamentary joint investigatory committees advertise their terms of reference and invite submissions from the general public and other interested parties. For this purpose, the Electoral Matters Committee secretariat maintains a comprehensive database of approximately 300 stakeholders. The database includes:

- Electoral commissions, including Australia’s nine electoral commissions;
- Australia’s two other dedicated parliamentary electoral matters committees (the Parliament of Australia’s Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters (JSCEM), and the NSW Parliament’s JSCEM);
- Psephologists, or people who study elections and electoral processes;
- Academics at Australian and international universities who have an interest in electoral administration, including the University of Melbourne’s Electoral Regulation and Research Network;
- Australia’s political parties, including the parties who contested the 2014 Victorian state election;
- Community and other advocacy/peak representative organisations representing a social group experiencing barriers to electoral participation (such as Vision Australia, which represents people who are blind or have low vision); and
- Members of the public with an interest in electoral administration and how Victorian elections are run.

For this inquiry the committee also contacted stakeholders with specific expertise in civics and electoral participation. The committee also actively sought evidence and views about the terms of reference from the Parliament’s Community Engagement Unit.

The committee wrote to its stakeholders in 5 June 2017, requesting submissions and their participation in the inquiry.

### 1.4.1 Submissions

Like all Victorian parliamentary joint investigatory committees, the committee also placed a call for submissions in print media, advertising in the *Herald Sun* on 3 June 2017. The inquiry was also publicised in the Parliament’s regular monthly advertisement in *The Age* newspaper, “Parliament News”. The deadline for submissions was 31 July 2017; the committee also accepted, by negotiation with submitters, some submissions after the due date.

In May and early June 2017 the committee also called for submissions on the Parliament’s website and the Parliament’s Twitter feed and Facebook pages.

The committee received 25 written submissions. A detailed list, ordered by name and date, is contained in Appendix One.

Submissions addressed a wide range of issues, including civics education, electoral participation and election staffing. Some of the major themes included:

- Victoria’s current civics and electoral education programs, and comparable programs in other Australian jurisdictions;
- Evidence from the Victorian Electoral Commission about its electoral education programs, electoral participation and election staffing programs;
- Evidence from other Australian electoral commissions about their electoral education programs, and evidence from some international jurisdictions, notably Canada and the United Kingdom, about electoral education, election staffing and electoral participation;
- Evidence about electoral participation at Victorian state elections, including evidence from advocacy groups representing Victorians who have a physical disability, such as vision impairment;
- Evidence about election staffing, including casual election staffing; and
- The experiences of individuals who have worked as casual election officials in Victoria for both the Victorian state elections and federal elections.

The committee wishes to thank those organisations and individuals who made a submission to the inquiry.

### Victorian Electoral Commission

The VEC is an independent and impartial statutory authority established under the *Electoral Act 2002* (Vic). The VEC conducts Victorian state elections, local council elections, certain statutory elections and polls, and commercial and community elections.<sup>6</sup> The VEC also conducts boundary reviews, maintains the Victorian electoral enrolment register, conducts electoral research and provides education services. Its core mission is to engage all Victorians who are entitled to vote in the democratic process.<sup>7</sup>

The VEC’s work is governed by three pieces of legislation:

- *Electoral Act 2002* (Vic);
- *Constitution Act 1975* (Vic); and
- *Electoral Boundaries Commission Act 1982* (Vic).

On 31 July 2017 the VEC provided a detailed submission to the inquiry. The submission is discussed throughout this report and is chiefly concerned with civics and electoral education, and election staffing. In a letter accompanying the submission, Warwick Gately AM, Victorian Electoral Commissioner, noted the VEC’s and Victoria’s strong performance on electoral participation;

“The VEC’s vision is ‘All Victorians actively participating in their democracy’. As such, it is important to ensure evidence-based, best practice strategies aimed at increasing voter connection with democratic participation and enhanced recruitment and training of staff. The VEC is very proud of the work it has done and continues to do, which is detailed in this submission”.<sup>8</sup>

The committee thanks the VEC for its submission and for its participation in the inquiry.

6 Victorian Electoral Commission, “About”, Victorian Electoral Commission, Melbourne, 2015. Retrieved 28 January 2018 from <<https://www.vec.vic.gov.au/About/Default.html>>.

7 Victorian Electoral Commission, “About”, Victorian Electoral Commission, Melbourne, 2015. Retrieved 28 January 2018 from <<https://www.vec.vic.gov.au/About/Default.html>>.

8 Victorian Electoral Commission, *Submission No.12*, p.1.

## 1.4.2 Public hearings

Public hearings are an important part of the joint investigatory committee inquiry process. Organisations and individuals are invited to appear before the committee in person to elaborate on their written submission and clarify, or add, additional evidence.

For this inquiry the committee held public hearings on Tuesday 24 October 2017 at 55 St Andrews Place, East Melbourne. The committee heard from eight organisations. The VEC was represented by Warwick Gately AM, the Victorian Electoral Commissioner, Liz Williams, Deputy Electoral Commissioner, Alex Markham, Manager, Education and Inclusion and Michelle Templeton, Manager, Election Staff Capability.

Appendix Two lists the hearing schedules and list of witnesses for the public hearings.

The committee wishes to thank those organisations and individuals who appeared at the public hearings.

## 1.4.3 Site visits

As noted earlier, many of the committee's stakeholders are located outside Victoria and Australia.

### Domestic

During this inquiry the committee travelled domestically to support its investigations and conduct meetings with interstate electoral commissions. The committee travelled to Canberra in September 2017 and to Sydney and Brisbane in November 2017. Table 1.1 lists the dates and organisations met. Appendix Three provides a detailed list of the individuals the committee met during these visits.

**Table 1.1** Inquiry into civics and electoral participation – domestic site visits

Meeting location	Date of visit	Organisations met with
Canberra, Australian Capital Territory	11 September 2017	Australian Electoral Commission Elections ACT Parliament of Australia, Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters
Sydney, New South Wales	20 November 2017	New South Wales Electoral Commission Parliament of NSW, Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters
Brisbane, Queensland	21 November 2017	Parliament of Queensland Queensland University of Technology

### New Zealand

In October 2017 the committee undertook a study tour to New Zealand as part of its inquiry. The committee visited Auckland on 9 October 2017 and Wellington on 10 and 11 October 2017. Appendix Three lists all the organisations and individuals the committee met whilst in New Zealand.

## Canada

From 9 April to 13 April 2018 the Electoral Matters Committee travelled to Canada in support of this inquiry. The study tour was approved by the Speaker of the Legislative Assembly, the Hon Colin Brooks MP, and the President of the Legislative Council, the Hon Bruce Atkinson MLC, on 11 December 2017. As part of the study tour the committee was also asked to examine how the Parliament of Canada, and the Ontario Legislative Assembly, conduct community engagement programs and identify any opportunities to improve the Parliament of Victoria's own community engagement initiatives.

The Committee visited Toronto from 9 April to 11 April 2018, and Ottawa on 12 April and 13 April 2018.

Four of the seven members of the Committee participated in the study tour:

- Hon Louise Asher MP (Chair)
- Ms Ros Spence MP (Deputy Chair)
- Hon Martin Dixon MP
- Ms Fiona Patten MLC.

The Committee was accompanied by Dr Nathaniel Reader, Research Officer. Preliminary research indicated a range of programs that may have been of interest to the Parliament of Victoria. To further explore these programs, the committee was also accompanied by Ms Suzie Luddon, the Parliament of Victoria's Community Engagement Projects Officer.

The committee met with Elections Canada and a range of other organisations involved in promoting electoral participation and electoral education. Appendix Three lists all the committee's meetings, and the organisations and individuals the committee met with.

In addition, as part of its reporting requirements, the committee completed a report on the study tour's meetings in June 2018.

## 1.5 Data analysis

The findings and recommendations in this report are based on the primary evidence – submissions, hearings transcripts and related documents – the committee received during the inquiry. Where appropriate, the committee secretariat completed secondary research to support the committee's investigations.

## 1.6 Report outline

This report is organised into six chapters, including this introduction.

Chapter Two – Background to the inquiry

Chapter Three – Civics and electoral education in Victoria and other jurisdictions

Chapter Four – Non-systemic methods to reduce informal voting in Victorian state parliamentary elections



Chapter Five – Election staffing for Victorian state parliamentary elections

Chapter Six – Electoral participation, and community engagement with parliamentary processes.



Civics and electoral participation have been core concerns for the Electoral Matters Committee in the 56th, 57th and 58th Parliaments. In 2009 the then committee completed an inquiry into voter participation and informal voting. As part of this inquiry the committee examined the major drivers behind electoral participation at Victorian state elections, focusing on voter turnout, electoral enrolment and informal voting. The committee's recommendations in that report contributed to the *Electoral Amendment (Electoral Participation) Act 2010* (Vic), which introduced direct enrolment in Victoria and made it possible for approximately 60,000 eligible Victorians to cast a provisional vote at the 2010 Victorian state election.<sup>9</sup> This report continues the committee's interest in promoting electoral participation for all eligible Victorians, focusing on non-systemic methods, such as civics and electoral education, as well as topics which the committee has previously not considered in detail, such as election staffing.

Civics involves students developing knowledge and skills which enable them to participate in, and contribute to, Australian society as active and informed democratic citizens. As noted by the Victorian Government,

“civics and citizenship is essential in enabling students to become active and informed citizens who participate in and sustain Australia's democracy...Students investigate political and legal systems, and explore the nature of citizenship, diversity and identity in contemporary society. They gain the knowledge and skills necessary to question, understand and contribute to the world in which they live”.<sup>10</sup>

For this inquiry the committee was particularly interested in the *electoral education* component of civics; how Victorian school students are taught Victorian and Australian electoral processes. Chapter Three examines current civics and electoral education programs in Victoria in the Government and Democracy strand of the Civics and Citizenship curricula, including the VEC's Passport to Democracy program.

Methods to reduce informal voting not involving changes to Victoria's voting system were also examined during this inquiry. In contrast to the committee's report on the 2014 Victorian state election – which comprehensively scrutinised different forms of optional preferential voting for the Legislative Assembly and Legislative Council – this inquiry examined different approaches to reducing informal voting principally involving elector education and increasing awareness of how to cast a valid vote in Australia's preferential voting system. Chapter Four considers evidence about this issue received from inquiry participants, the VEC and evidence gathered during the committee's interstate, New Zealand and Canadian study tours.

The committee was also required to consider election staffing arrangements for Victorian state elections as part of this inquiry. While the committee has received some evidence as part of previous inquiries detailing people's experiences as casual election staff for the VEC and the Australian Electoral Commission, this inquiry is

<sup>9</sup> Parliament of Victoria, Electoral Matters Committee, “Inquiry into voter participation and informal voting”, Parliament of Victoria, Melbourne, July 2009, p.v.

<sup>10</sup> Victorian Government, Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority, “Rationale and Aims”, Victorian Government, Melbourne, 2017. Accessed 12 February 2018 from <<http://victoriancurriculum.vcaa.vic.edu.au/the-humanities/civics-and-citizenship/introduction/rationale-and-aims>>.

the first, dedicated treatment of these issues. Chapter Five examines how the VEC employs, retains and trains both casual election staff and members of the VEC's Senior Election Official (SEO) pool.

Finally, the committee continues to have a strong interest in strategies and programs to improve electoral participation for groups who traditionally experience barriers to electoral participation, examining these issues in Chapter Six. These groups include Victorians aged 18 to 24 years, Victorians from multicultural backgrounds, as well as Victorians who have recently become Australian citizens and are not familiar with Australia's electoral system. Examining how the VEC and other organisations engage these community groups is something the committee has done in each of the ten inquiries it has completed. In addition, in Chapter Six, the committee also considers evidence about how the Parliament of Victoria promotes its work to the community, including evidence about how parliamentary institutions in Queensland, New Zealand and Canada perform these functions.

This chapter provides background to the committee's inquiry. It first defines key terms, such as civics and electoral education, informal voting, election staffing and community engagement with parliamentary processes and electoral participation. The chapter then briefly introduces each of these topics.

## 2.1 Definitions

### 2.1.1 Civics and electoral education

#### Civics

There is no single definition of 'civics' as it has both theoretical and practical applications. In a theoretical sense, according to the Stanford dictionary of philosophy, "civic education means all the processes that affect people's beliefs, commitments, capabilities, and actions as members or prospective members of communities. Civic education need not be intentional or deliberate; institutions and communities transmit values and norms without meaning to".<sup>11</sup> Developing knowledge about civic values is thus a lifelong process; in a speech to the Parliament of Queensland in 2015, Associate Professor Deborah Henderson, Queensland University of Technology, distinguished 'civics' from 'citizenship';

"Civics relates to civic knowledge and Citizenship is dispositional (attitudes, values, dispositions and skills). Interpretation lies at the heart of Civics and Citizenship Education. Civics is the more defined of the two. It is the study of Australian democracy, its history, traditions, structures and processes; our democratic culture... the ways Australian society is managed, by whom and to what end...[In contrast] Citizenship is the development of the skills, attitudes, beliefs and values that will predispose students to participate, to become and remain engaged and involved in that society/culture/democracy".<sup>12</sup>

11 Crittenden, Jack and Levine, Peter, "Civic Education". The Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy (Winter 2016 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.). Accessed 12 February 2018 from <<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2016/entries/civic-education>>.

12 Henderson, Deborah, "What is the place of civics education in Australia and what are we doing about it?" Accessed 12 February 2018 from <<https://www.parliament.qld.gov.au/aspg/documents/Deborah%20Henderson%20Speech.pdf>>.

In his submission to the inquiry, Dr Zyngier, Senior Lecturer in Curriculum and Teaching, Monash University, also discussed a similar distinction between ‘thin’ and ‘thick’ democratic processes and civic learning. According to Dr Zyngier, “thin democratic teaching focuses on activities such as students contributing food to a food drive or in a more active participatory manner organising a food drive for the poor while thick democratic teaching would explore why people are hungry, and then empower students to act to make decisions about and to solve its root causes”.<sup>13</sup>

In practical terms, civics education involves learning about the skills required to become active, informed and to participate in Australia’s democratic system. In Victoria the Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority (VCAA) defines civics and citizenship as:

“...essential in enabling students to become active and informed citizens who participate in and sustain Australia’s democracy. Through the study of Civics and Citizenship, students investigate political and legal systems, and explore the nature of citizenship, diversity and identity in contemporary society. They gain the knowledge and skills necessary to question, understand and contribute to the world in which they live. The Civics and Citizenship curriculum recognises that Australia is a secular democratic nation with a multicultural and multi-faith society, and promotes the development of inclusivity by developing students’ understanding of broader values such as respect, civility, equity, justice and responsibility. It acknowledges the experiences and contributions of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and their identities within contemporary Australia. While the curriculum strongly focuses on the Australian context, students also reflect on Australia’s position, and obligations, and the role of the citizen today within an interconnected global world”.<sup>14</sup>

## Electoral education

A key component of civics education is electoral education or ‘voter education’, which is the process of teaching electors about the mechanics of voting, or “education in support of the electoral process”. According to the ACE Electoral Knowledge Network, voter education is;

“enterprise designed to ensure that voters are ready, willing, and able to participate in electoral politics. It has been assumed that this entails election literacy and confidence that the electoral process is appropriate and effective in selecting governments and promoting policies that will benefit the individual voter”.<sup>15</sup>

In Australia, electoral education is primarily offered by schools, parliaments and electoral commissions. Australian political parties also assist electors to cast their vote at election time by providing how-to-vote card materials.

### 2.1.2 Informal voting

Informal voting is the act of casting a ballot which does not meet the established requirements for a completed ballot as prescribed in legislation or regulation.

<sup>13</sup> Dr David Zyngier, *Submission No.1*, p.p.1-2.

<sup>14</sup> Victorian Government, Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority, “Rationale and Aims”, Victorian Government, Melbourne, 2017. Accessed 12 February 2018 from <<http://victoriancurriculum.vcaa.vic.edu.au/the-humanities/civics-and-citizenship/introduction/rationale-and-aims>>.

<sup>15</sup> ACE Electoral Knowledge Network, “Civic and Voter Education”. Accessed 12 February 2018 from <<https://aceproject.org/ace-en/topics/ve/vea/vea03>>.

Victoria has a preferential voting system for the Legislative Assembly and a proportional preferential voting system for the Legislative Council. An informal ballot is any ballot paper that is not completed in line with the requirements set out in s93 and s94 of the *Electoral Act 2002* (Vic). Section 93 and 94 describe the formality requirements for Legislative Assembly and Legislative Council ballot papers respectively.

### 2.1.3 Election staffing

In Victoria the VEC employs two categories of casual staff for Victorian state elections; election casuals who work short-term for the VEC during the state election period and casual staff who belong to the VEC's Senior Election Official (SEO) pool.

As noted in the VEC's submission, election casuals are employed to undertake a short-term role for the election. The "bulk of this employment involves work in voting centres on Election Day and requires approximately 16,500 election officials for a Victorian state election. Other available casual roles may involve office work in the lead-up to Election Day and vote counting in the post-election period, which included approximately 3,200 casuals at the 2014 Victorian state election".<sup>16</sup>

The second group of casual staff are the SEOs. These are people appointed to management positions – Election Managers – for a full-time role of approximately nine weeks. The VEC has around 300 SEOs available for appointment at any point in time. The methods used to attract and train SEOs and other casual staff differ.

### 2.1.4 Community engagement in electoral participation and parliamentary processes

#### Electoral participation

As part of its inquiry into the 2014 Victorian state election the committee reviewed some of the key markers of electoral participation in Victoria. The committee noted that "electoral participation can mean different things in different electoral systems", and that electoral authorities also measure electoral participation in different ways.<sup>17</sup> Nevertheless, broadly speaking, given that voting in Australia and Victoria is compulsory for all eligible citizens, electoral participation in Australia is taken to mean participation through the act of voting in periodic, parliamentary elections.

In Victoria, the VEC has traditionally referred to three electoral indicators — voter turnout, informal voting and the rate of electoral enrolment — to determine the health of Victoria's electoral participation. In previous parliaments, the then Electoral Matters Committee referred to these indicators to assist its own investigations into how fully Victorians participate in electoral processes.

For this inquiry, the committee elected to focus on electoral participation as defined by the terms of reference; in Chapter Four, to explore ways to reduce informal voting which do not involve voting system reform; and in Chapter Six, identifying strategies to help communities who traditionally experience barriers to electoral participation be more involved in electoral processes.

<sup>16</sup> Victorian Electoral Commission, *Submission No.12a*, p.16.

<sup>17</sup> Parliament of Victoria, Electoral Matters Committee, "Inquiry into the 2014 Victorian state election", Parliament of Victoria, Melbourne, May 2016, p.12.

## Community engagement with parliamentary processes

Parliaments globally are investigating new forms of public communication and engagement. In a 2015 research paper, Hendriks and Kay observed that public “participation in legislatures extends well beyond citizens periodically voting and the occasional letter to elected representatives. The modern legislature is outward focused, taking active steps to connect with the public...Around the world new participatory activities are emerging in and around legislatures, ranging from open days, information centres and community cabinets through to experiments with e-petitions and social media”.<sup>18</sup> Hendriks and Kay conclude that parliaments “are undergoing a participatory makeover”.<sup>19</sup>

## 2.2 Civics and electoral education

This section discusses Victoria’s current civics and citizenship education curricula, and the Victorian Electoral Commission’s Passport to Democracy program.

### 2.2.1 Civics in Victoria

The Victorian Curriculum provides a Civics and Citizenship curriculum continuum from Levels 3-10. This curriculum is organised into three strands: Government and Democracy, Laws and Citizens, and Citizenship, Diversity and Identity. According to the Victorian Government, “learning in Civics and Citizenship develops knowledge, understanding and skills; emphasises investigating contemporary issues and developing points of views that encourage and enable students to participate in, and contribute to Australian society as active and informed citizens”.<sup>20</sup>

#### Structure

Table 2.1 outlines the three strands of civics education in Victoria. Electoral education falls under strand one, Government and Democracy.

<sup>18</sup> Hendricks, Carolyn, Kay, Adrian, “Connecting citizens to legislative deliberations: public engagement in committees”. Paper presented at 2015 Australian Political Studies Association (ASPA) Annual Conference 27-30 September 2015 Canberra. Accessed 9 February 2018 from <[https://www.newdemocracy.com.au/docs/researchpapers/HendriksKay\\_finalAPSA.pdf](https://www.newdemocracy.com.au/docs/researchpapers/HendriksKay_finalAPSA.pdf)>, p.2.

<sup>19</sup> Hendricks, Carolyn, Kay, Adrian, “Connecting citizens to legislative deliberations: public engagement in committees”. Paper presented at 2015 Australian Political Studies Association (ASPA) Annual Conference 27-30 September 2015 Canberra. Accessed 9 February 2018 from <[https://www.newdemocracy.com.au/docs/researchpapers/HendriksKay\\_finalAPSA.pdf](https://www.newdemocracy.com.au/docs/researchpapers/HendriksKay_finalAPSA.pdf)>, p.1.

<sup>20</sup> Victorian Government, Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority, “Rationale and Aims”, Victorian Government, Melbourne, 2017. Accessed 12 February 2018 from <<http://victoriancurriculum.vcaa.vic.edu.au/the-humanities/civics-and-citizenship/introduction/rationale-and-aims>>.

**Table 2.1 Strands of Victorian Civics and Citizenship Curriculum**

STRANDS		
Government and Democracy	Laws and Citizens	Citizenship, Diversity and Identity
Involves a study of Australian democracy and the key institutions, processes and roles people play in Australia's system of government. Australia's Westminster traditions and the principles and values which underpin democracy are considered. Students present points of view on Australian democracy and contemporary issues based on consideration of multiple viewpoints and evidence.	Focuses on Australia's legal system, the creation of laws and the rights and legal obligations of Australian citizens.	Explores the shared values of Australian citizenship, the diversity of Australia as a multicultural and multi-faith society, and factors that shape identity. It also covers an understanding of the common values and nature of citizenship in a diverse multicultural society.

Source: Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority, "Civics and Citizenship; Rationale and Aims", State Government of Victoria, 2017. Accessed 2 February 2018 from <<http://victoriancurriculum.vcaa.vic.edu.au/the-humanities/civics-and-citizenship/introduction/rationale-and-aims>>.

### Rationale and aims

According to the Victorian Government, Victoria's civics curricula aims to equip students with a varied knowledge of Australian law, government and culture. Specifically, in studying the Government and Democracy strand,

"students will develop knowledge and understanding of Australia's representative democracy and the key institutions, processes, and roles people play in Australia's political and legal systems. Emphasis is placed on Australia's federal system of government, derived from the Westminster system, and the liberal democratic values that underpin it such as freedom, equality and the rule of law. The curriculum explores how the people, as citizens, choose their governments, how the system safeguards democracy by vesting people with civic rights and responsibilities, how laws and the legal system protect people's rights and how individuals and groups can influence civic life".<sup>21</sup>

In addition, the VCAA website lists four broad aims for the Civics and Citizenship module;

- "a lifelong sense of belonging to, and engagement with, civic life as an active and informed citizen in the context of Australia as a secular democratic nation with a dynamic, multicultural and multi-faith society;
- knowledge, understanding and appreciation of the values, principles, institutions and practices of Australia's system of democratic government and law, and the role of the citizen in Australian government and society;
- skills necessary to investigate contemporary civics and citizenship issues, and foster responsible participation in Australia's democracy; and
- the capacities and dispositions to participate in the civic life of their nation at a local, regional and global level".<sup>22</sup>

21 Victorian Government, Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority, "Rationale and Aims", Victorian Government, Melbourne, 2017. Accessed 12 February 2018 from <<http://victoriancurriculum.vcaa.vic.edu.au/the-humanities/civics-and-citizenship/introduction/rationale-and-aims>>.

22 Victorian Government, Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority, "Rationale and Aims", Victorian Government, Melbourne, 2017. Accessed 12 February 2018 from <<http://victoriancurriculum.vcaa.vic.edu.au/the-humanities/civics-and-citizenship/introduction/rationale-and-aims>>.



## Learning about elections

Through the Government and Democracy strand, Victorian students learn progressively about the role of Australia’s democratic institutions, beginning in Year Three and continuing through to Year 10. According to the Victorian Government, the curriculum sets out what students are expected to learn and is designed “as a continuum of learning”.<sup>23</sup>

Table 2.2 details the key milestones in the Government and Democracy Strand.

**Table 2.2** Victorian Civics and Citizenship Levels and Aims; Government and Democracy Strand

Levels 3 and 4	Levels 5 and 6	Levels 7 and 8	Levels 9 and 10
<b>GOVERNMENT AND DEMOCRACY</b>			
Identify features of government and law and describe key democratic values	Discuss the values, principles and institutions that underpin Australia’s democratic forms of government and explain how this system is influenced by the Westminster system	Describe the key features of government under the Australian Constitution, including the separation of powers, the Executive, the role of the Houses of Parliament, and the division of powers	Discuss the role of political parties and independent representatives in Australia’s system of government, including the formation of governments, and explain the process through which government policy is shaped and developed
Identify how and why decisions are made democratically in communities	Describe the roles and responsibilities of the three levels of government, including shared roles and responsibilities within Australia’s federal system	Discuss the freedoms that enable active participation in Australia’s democracy within the bounds of law, including freedom of speech, association, assembly, religion and movement	Explain the values and key features of Australia’s system of government compared with at least one other system of government in the Asia region
Explain the roles of local government and some familiar services provided at the local level	Identify and discuss the key features of the Australian electoral process	Explain how citizens can participate in Australia’s democracy, including use of the electoral system, contact with their elected representatives, use of lobby groups, interest groups and direct action	Analyse how citizens’ political choices are shaped, including the influence of the media
	Identify the roles and responsibilities of electors and representatives in Australia’s democracy	Describe the process of constitutional change through a referendum	Explain the Australian government’s roles and responsibilities at a global level, including provision of foreign aid, peacekeeping and the United Nations

Source: Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority, “Civics and Citizenship; Scope and Sequence”, State Government of Victoria, 2017. Accessed 2 February 2018 from <<http://victoriancurriculum.vcaa.vic.edu.au/the-humanities/civics-and-citizenship/introduction/scope-and-sequence>>.

<sup>23</sup> Victorian Government, Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority, “Rationale and Aims”, Victorian Government, Melbourne, 2017. Accessed 12 February 2018 from <<http://victoriancurriculum.vcaa.vic.edu.au/the-humanities/civics-and-citizenship/introduction/rationale-and-aims>>.

As seen in Table 2.2, students begin learning about Australia's and Victoria's electoral processes from Year Three. Level Three in the sequence develops a basic knowledge of Australia's levels of government, teaching students the difference between federal, state and local government and familiar services provided at the local level. In Level Five students are then taught to identify the key features of Australia's electoral processes, such as elections and parliaments. By Level Six students are able to explain how citizens can participate in democracy. This involves discussion about the electoral system, how the electoral system and voting forms parliaments, as well as how to contact their elected representatives. By Level 10, students begin to think more critically about democratic institutions, analysing citizens' choices and the role of the media.

### Electoral education – the Victorian Electoral Commission

Besides the conduct of Victorian state and local government elections, s8 (f) of the *Electoral Act 2002* (Vic) stipulates that the VEC provide “public awareness of electoral matters that are in the general public interest by means of the conduct of education and information programs”. The VEC's Community Engagement and Education Unit is the main provider of electoral engagement strategies for Victorian elections. The Unit works with various groups in the Victorian community to “minimise barriers to democratic participation and encourage active citizens. Specifically, the Unit works with several communities including schools, homeless agencies, residents' associations, indigenous groups, disability groups and other community networks”.<sup>24</sup>

In addition, in its submission the VEC outlined its approach to encouraging electoral participation. It has developed a framework strategy, entitled *Enduring Framework for the Design, Implementation and Evaluation of Electoral Education and Awareness Programs* (2014-2018).<sup>25</sup> This framework covers the scope of the VEC's work on public awareness in the period prior to elections, in addition to its grassroots education and community engagement work. The latter is further defined by a *Community Education and Electoral Inclusion Strategy 2017-2019*, which sits under “the high level framework, and is designed to target, deliver and evaluate education and inclusion programs and services”.<sup>26</sup>

The VEC's primary civics and community engagement programs are;

- Passport to Democracy;
- A teacher and pre service teacher professional development program; and
- Richmond Emerging Aboriginal Leaders Program – Korin Gamadji Institute.

#### Passport to Democracy

Passport to Democracy (PTD) is an “online active citizenship resource which prompts students to consider what community issues are important to them and ultimately, how they can engage with the community to achieve positive change. Through the Program, students will make the connection between politics and how decisions made by their representatives affect them”.<sup>27</sup>

In practice, PTD is offered to students in Years Eight and Nine.

<sup>24</sup> Parliament of Victoria, Electoral Matters Committee, “Inquiry into the 2014 Victorian state election”, Parliament of Victoria, Melbourne, May 2016, p.102.

<sup>25</sup> Victorian Electoral Commission, *Submission No.12a*, p.2.

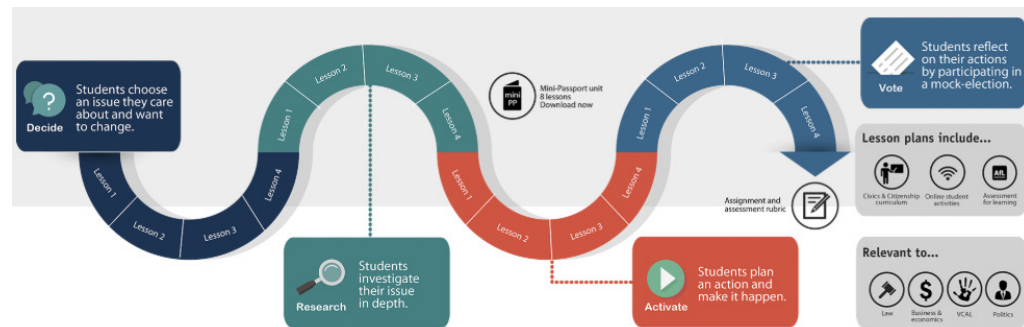
<sup>26</sup> Victorian Electoral Commission, *Submission No.12a*, p.2.

<sup>27</sup> Victorian Electoral Commission, *Submission No.12a*, p.6.

Passport to Democracy is divided into four modules: Decide, Research, Activate and Vote. Each module has a lesson plan containing learning activities with detailed instructions, online content and activity sheets. It can be delivered over six to eight weeks. A VEC Education Officer supports teachers through on-site professional development sessions. They also offer a mock election for students as part of the Vote module.

As shown in Figure 2.1, the four modules are;

**Figure 2.1** Passport to Democracy ‘Flow Chart’



Source: Victorian Electoral Commission, 'Passport to Democracy; Teachers', Victorian Electoral Commission, 2017. Accessed 2 February 2018 from <<http://passport.vec.vic.gov.au/teachers>>.

1. **Decide** – The Decide lesson plans expand on “students’ existing knowledge of community issues. In groups, students choose an issue they care about and an aspect relating to this they want to see changed. Before deciding, they are supported to understand the complex notions of issues, communities, power and influence, rights, government, responsibility and points of view”.<sup>28</sup>
2. **Research** – The Research lesson plans guide students to “understand the social context of their issue, to discover what others have done about it and to test their own assumptions and possible solutions. Student research into an issue can have multiple goals. The activities in this unit elevate students to complete the entire research process, and assists them to develop critical literacy skills, while considering how their local political representatives might help”.<sup>29</sup>
3. **Activate** – The aim of the Activate lesson plans is to “support students to choose actions that are achievable, appropriate and can have an impact on their chosen issue. These lessons contain many examples of active citizenship for inspiration, and they guide students to delegate tasks and campaign for awareness and support. Students can then use their research findings to plan and carry out an effective action”.<sup>30</sup>
4. **Vote** – The Vote lesson plans “allow students to evaluate the impact of their action and reflect upon any change it has sparked, as well as their own active citizenship learning. Students also experience the electoral process through a

28 EducationMattersMag, “Victorian Electoral Commission helps bring Civics and Citizenship Education to life”, EducationMattersMag, PrimeCreative. Accessed 12 February 2018 from <<http://educationmattersmag.com.au/victorian-electoral-commission-helps-bring-civics-and-citizenship-education-to-life>>.

29 EducationMattersMag, “Victorian Electoral Commission helps bring Civics and Citizenship Education to life”, EducationMattersMag, PrimeCreative. Accessed 12 February 2018 from <<http://educationmattersmag.com.au/victorian-electoral-commission-helps-bring-civics-and-citizenship-education-to-life>>.

30 EducationMattersMag, “Victorian Electoral Commission helps bring Civics and Citizenship Education to life”, EducationMattersMag, PrimeCreative. Accessed 12 February 2018 from <<http://educationmattersmag.com.au/victorian-electoral-commission-helps-bring-civics-and-citizenship-education-to-life>>.

complete sequence of electoral activities including candidate nominations, party platforms, campaign speeches, how to vote cards, a mock-election (including printed ballot papers) and a preferential vote count. Teachers completing a Passport to Democracy unit can request a free mock-election incursion run by the VEC (statewide, including metropolitan and rural areas) to demonstrate and celebrate students' democratic participation. Vote lesson plans can also be used independently of the Passport unit, if teachers wish to focus only on elections and campaigns".<sup>31</sup>

All lesson plans that comprise the Passport to Democracy program are aligned to the Victorian Curriculum and the Australian Curriculum for the teaching of Civics and Citizenship content across Years 5-10. In addition, the Passport to Democracy website ([passport.vec.vic.gov.au](http://passport.vec.vic.gov.au)) offers summative and formative assessment resources. It includes assignment instructions, a submission checklist and a curriculum-aligned matrix, plus a list of assessment for learning Passport activities.

Passport to Democracy also contains an additional resource, Partner Up, which has specifically been designed to be used in VCAL classes. It includes "quality assurance templates, teacher guides, student workbooks (available free from the VEC via online download and/or hard copy) and supporting video resources".<sup>32</sup>

#### Passport to Democracy – statistics

Overall, teachers from "185 separate education providers obtained one or more PTD resources in 2016, compared with 99 in 2015. Since the program's inception in 2008, the VEC estimates that the program has reached over 50,000 students across Victoria".<sup>33</sup> As a percent of total students in Victorian secondary schools, including government, catholic and independent schools, the committee estimates that Passport to Democracy has reached approximately 1.03 percent of Victorian secondary school students on an annualised basis; this is based on the figure of 403,840 students as of April 2018 who are currently in Victorian secondary education.

#### VEC's teacher professional development program

As noted in the VEC's submission, Passport to Democracy is

"supplemented by civics and citizenship professional development, which is delivered to teachers and pre-service teachers through the Civics and Citizenship Network, the Victorian Applied Learning Association and the Geography Teachers Association of Victoria on an annual basis. It also includes networks such as Koori Education Coordinators and Local Learning and Employment Networks".<sup>34</sup>

#### Richmond Emerging Aboriginal Leaders Program – Korin Gamadji Institute

Since 2011 the VEC has administered Richmond Emerging Aboriginal Leaders "(REAL) Program, delivered by the Richmond Football Club (and formerly the YMCA) at the Korin Gamadji Institute. The REAL Program is specifically designed for

31 EducationMattersMag, "Victorian Electoral Commission helps bring Civics and Citizenship Education to life", EducationMattersMag, PrimeCreative. Accessed 12 February 2018 from <<http://educationmattersmag.com.au/victorian-electoral-commission-helps-bring-civics-and-citizenship-education-to-life>>.

32 EducationMattersMag, "Victorian Electoral Commission helps bring Civics and Citizenship Education to life", EducationMattersMag, PrimeCreative. Accessed 12 February 2018 from <<http://educationmattersmag.com.au/victorian-electoral-commission-helps-bring-civics-and-citizenship-education-to-life>>.

33 Victorian Electoral Commission, *Submission No.12a*, p.7.

34 Victorian Electoral Commission, *Submission No.12a*, p.7.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people aged 14 – 17 years. The program engages youth from Year Nine level, and works with the participants across a number of years to develop their leadership skills”.<sup>35</sup>

The VEC’s submission provides further detail about the REAL program and how it operates;

“The REAL Programs are run as a four-day intensive workshop during school holiday periods and aim to support the development of young Indigenous people into confident and proud community leaders. Students are initially nominated by their teacher for good school attendance and the student’s leadership potential. The Program engages participants in interactive sessions that focus on leadership, participation, health and wellbeing, personal and career pathways and cultural pride and affirmation.

The VEC delivers sessions on active participation and how young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders can make a difference on an issue that is meaningful to them. The VEC component includes a particular focus on recognising the fight of Aboriginal elders to achieve recognition and the right to vote; a visit to Parliament House; encouragement to participate in Youth Parliament via a sponsored team (and create a bill for consideration); and opportunities for work at a real election (age-dependent). In total, participants are invited to return for a total of three camps over three or more years.

The Program was independently evaluated by Monash University in 2016, and included focus groups and surveys of program participants and Aboriginal youth who had not been through the program. Participants reported being more engaged and empowered as a result of the program. Some 75.7% of REAL participants were ‘somewhat confident’ to ‘highly confident’ of their ability to recognise the connection between politics and their own local and broader community issues. Education and cultural identity were seen to be major enablers of active participation. REAL participants indicated much higher levels of understanding around the electoral and voting system processes and acknowledge the program for developing this understanding”.<sup>36</sup>

Chapter Three explores the VEC’s Passport to Democracy program in greater detail including evidence from inquiry participants about the program. The chapter also considers evidence about the need for civics and citizenship education in light of research demonstrating a decline in electoral and civic participation amongst young people.

## 2.3 Informal voting

### 2.3.1 Background

As noted earlier, informal voting is one measure of electoral participation at Victorian state elections. In Victoria the Legislative Assembly electoral system is full preferential voting. Electors must number all preferences on their ballot paper, in consecutive numerical order, in order for the ballot to be deemed formal. Any ballot paper that is completed outside the parameters of the formality rules set out in legislation is considered informal. In Victoria s93 and s93A of the *Electoral Act 2002*

<sup>35</sup> Victorian Electoral Commission, *Submission No.12a*, pp.7-8.

<sup>36</sup> Victorian Electoral Commission, *Submission No.12a*, p.p.7-9.

(Vic) determine the formality rules for Legislative Assembly and Legislative Council ballot papers, and additional provisions determining whether a ballot paper will be accepted or excluded from an election count.

During the 58th Parliament and this inquiry, the committee has learnt that informal voting for the Legislative Assembly has increased at every Victorian state election since the 1999 Victorian state election. The rate of informal voting at the 2014 Victorian state election for the Legislative Assembly was 5.22 percent, the highest rate ever recorded for a Legislative Assembly election, or a 0.26 percent increase compared to the rate of informal voting for the Legislative Assembly at the 2010 Victorian state election.<sup>37</sup> Table 2.3 shows rates of informal voting by Legislative Assembly District at the 2014 Victorian state election. Further, Figure 2.2 shows rates of informal voting for the Legislative Assembly at Victorian state elections since 1999.

**Table 2.3** Informal voting at 2014 Victorian state election, by Legislative Assembly District

District	Informal vote	District	Informal vote	District	Informal vote
Albert Park	4.13	Forest Hill	4.27	Narre Warren South	5.63
Altona	5.45	Frankston	8.88	Nepean	4.97
Bass	5.41	Geelong	4.78	Niddrie	6.41
Bayswater	5.07	Gembrook	5.28	Northcote	4.22
Bellarine	4.84	Gippsland East	5.63	Oakleigh	4.56
Benambra	4.53	Gippsland South	5.5	Ovens Valley	4.49
Bendigo East	3.49	Hastings	5.89	Pascoe Vale	6.37
Bendigo West	4.4	Hawthorn	3.75	Polwarth	3.89
Bentleigh	5.24	Ivanhoe	4.59	Prahran	5.11
Box Hill	3.75	Kew	4.11	Preston	5.32
Brighton	3.61	Keysborough	6.06	Richmond	3.72
Broadmeadows	8.52	Kororoit	6.69	Ringwood	4.34
Brunswick	4.92	Lara	4.6	Ripon	6.38
Bulleen	4.91	Lowan	4.53	Rowville	5.54
Bundoora	4.54	Macedon	3.67	Sandringham	3.54
Buninyong	4.8	Malvern	4.02	Shepparton	5.84
Burwood	3.47	Melbourne	3.5	South Barwon	3.91
Carrum	5.12	Melton	8.13	South-West Coast	4.04
Caulfield	4.17	Mildura	7.05	St Albans	7.83
Clarinda	6.14	Mill Park	5.7	Sunbury	5.69
Cranbourne	6.56	Monbulk	5.16	Sydenham	6.62
Croydon	4.41	Mordialloc	6.44	Tarneit	8.08
Dandenong	8.3	Mornington	4.04	Thomastown	7.03
Eildon	5.23	Morwell	5.38	Warrandyte	4.72
Eltham	4.29	Mount Waverley	3.81	Wendouree	4.87

<sup>37</sup> Victorian Electoral Commission, "Report to Parliament on 2014 Victorian state election", Victorian Electoral Commission, Melbourne, September 2015, p.ii

District	Informal vote	District	Informal vote	District	Informal vote
Essendon	3.93	Mulgrave	5.18	Werribee	6.37
Euroa	4.68	Murray Plains	5.49	Williamstown	5.01
Evelyn	5.72	Narracan	4.22	Yan Yean	5.1
Ferntree Gully	4.71	Narre Warren North	6.75	Yuroke	6.5
Footscray	5.87				

Source: Victorian Electoral Commission, "Virtual Tally Room: 2014 Victorian state election", Victorian Electoral Commission, Melbourne, February 2016. Retrieved 4 April 2016 from <https://www.vec.vic.gov.au/Results/State2014/Summary.html>.

**Figure 2.2** Informal voting at Victorian state elections, 1999-2014



Source: Victorian Electoral Commission, "Report to Parliament on 2014 Victorian state election", Victorian Electoral Commission, Melbourne, September 2015, p.ii.

In contrast, informal voting for the Legislative Council has remained constant and lower than for the Legislative Assembly. Figure 2.2 also shows rates of informal voting for the Legislative Council since 1999. For instance, at the 2014 Victorian state election the rate of informal voting for the Legislative Council was 3.43 percent, 1.79 percent lower than the Legislative Assembly. The only spike in the informal voting rate of the Legislative Council occurred in 2006 when proportional representation was introduced following reforms to Victoria's Constitution. The VEC's submission notes that the difference in informal voting rates between the two Houses is mostly due to the different voting systems for the Legislative Assembly and the Legislative Council, whereby electors for the Legislative Council may elect to simply number one box above-the-line.<sup>38</sup> All boxes on the Legislative Assembly ballot paper must be completed to cast a formal vote.

### 2.3.2 Legislative Assembly and Legislative Council – types of informal ballots

Evidence received during this inquiry, and the committee's inquiry into the 2014 Victorian state election, highlighted results from the VEC's informal ballot paper survey of informal ballots. The VEC has completed an informal ballot paper survey each Victorian state election since 2006. These surveys allow the VEC to measure and assess the incidence of different types of informal voting across Victoria. In 2014, the VEC extended this analysis to every Legislative Assembly District and Legislative Council Region; the survey was published in the VEC's report to Parliament on the 2014 Victorian state election.

<sup>38</sup> Victorian Electoral Commission, *Submission No.12a*, p.11.

The VEC's informal ballot paper survey from the 2014 Victorian state election demonstrated that the largest category of informal District ballots at the 2014 Victorian state election was "ballots that were left blank", representing 30.30 percent of all informal District ballots. The second largest category of informal District ballots were those marked with a "1" only, representing 22.98 percent of informal District ballots. Other categories of informal District ballot papers included those papers which were informal due to an incomplete numerical sequence (9.80 percent of informal District ballot papers) and those which were apparently informal "deliberately" (6.65 percent of informal District ballot papers). These results reinforced similar findings from the 2010 Victorian state election".<sup>39</sup>

The VEC's informal ballot paper survey for the Legislative Council at the 2014 Victorian state election demonstrated that the largest category of informal Region ballots were those left "blank", "representing 49.76 percent of informal Region ballot papers. This was a 5.2 percent increase on the same category of informal Region ballot papers at the 2010 Victorian state election. The next largest category of informal Region ballot papers was those with writing which were apparently informal "deliberately" (14.21 percent of informal Region ballot papers). Similarly, these results reinforced findings from the 2010 Victorian state election".<sup>40</sup> Figure 2.3 shows categories of informal ballots for the Legislative Council at the 2010 and 2014 Victorian state elections.

**Figure 2.3** Categories used to classify informal ballots, VEC informal ballot paper survey, Legislative Council, 2010 and 2014 Victorian state elections

Category	Eastern Metro	Eastern Vic	Northern Metro	Northern Vic	South Eastern Metro	Southern Metro	Western Metro	Western Vic	Total
Blank	49.93	53.27	43.96	56.76	47.82	48.46	48.99	54.10	<b>49.76</b>
Total Writing	20.05	23.94	14.57	22.48	18.73	18.72	13.04	18.90	<b>18.13</b>
Total Numbers	21.74	17.02	31.44	13.87	22.98	25.54	18.26	17.42	<b>23.32</b>
Total Ticks/crosses	8.20	5.72	9.95	6.77	10.36	7.21	9.54	9.48	<b>8.69</b>
Total Deliberate	26.82	27.16	22.01	23.34	23.77	23.40	16.72	25.41	<b>23.09</b>
Total Deliberate including Blank	76.76	80.42	65.97	80.11	71.60	71.85	65.72	79.51	<b>72.85</b>
Total Preference	7.28	6.88	23.41	4.29	10.33	12.08	9.64	7.06	<b>11.16</b>
Total ATL	15.84	10.93	10.52	9.87	13.26	14.69	19.02	13.55	<b>13.50</b>
Total BTL	14.09	11.81	30.87	10.77	20.08	18.06	18.78	13.35	<b>18.51</b>

Source: Victorian Electoral Commission, "Report to Parliament on the 2014 Victorian state election", Victorian Electoral Commission, Melbourne, September 2015, p.60.

Referring to Figure 2.4, the committee also notes that the largest category of informal votes at Victorian state elections for the Legislative Assembly is ballots that have been left blank. The second largest is ballots that have a single preference, such as a "1" only. The VEC's submission to this inquiry notes that these types of voting are generally consistent with intentional forms of informal voting.

<sup>39</sup> Parliament of Victoria, Electoral Matters Committee, "Inquiry into the 2014 Victorian state election", Parliament of Victoria, Melbourne, May 2017, p.19.

<sup>40</sup> Parliament of Victoria, Electoral Matters Committee, "Inquiry into the 2014 Victorian state election", Parliament of Victoria, Melbourne, May 2017, p.19.



**Figure 2.4** Categories used to classify informal ballots, VEC informal ballot paper survey, Legislative Assembly, 2010 and 2014 Victorian state elections

Category	2010 (%)	2014 (%)	Change 2010-2014 (Percentage Points)
Blank	25.10	30.30	+5.20
Numbers – 1 only	23.70	22.98	-0.72
Numbers – insufficient	7.40	9.80	+2.40
Numbers – apparently deliberate	6.55	6.65	+0.10
Numbers – other	12.44	6.44	-6.00
Total numbers	50.10	45.87	-4.23
Ticks/crosses - preference	6.47	8.10	+1.63
Ticks/crosses – apparently deliberate	3.04	4.01	+0.97
Ticks/crosses – other	0.65	0.90	+0.25
Total ticks/crosses	10.16	13.01	+2.85
Writing – apparently deliberate	12.83	8.47	-4.36
Writing – other	1.06	2.14	+1.08
Total writing	13.9	10.71	-3.19
Total apparently deliberate	22.43	19.23	-3.20
Total apparently deliberate including blank	47.53	49.52	+1.99
Total preferences	37.57	40.88	+3.31

Source: Victorian Electoral Commission, *Submission No.12a*, p.12.

As noted earlier, the committee evaluated changes to the voting system for the Legislative Assembly and Legislative Council in its report on the 2014 Victorian state election, in order to reduce intentional and unintentional informal voting. After reviewing suggestions for reform from inquiry participants, the committee elected to monitor and review the operation of the *Commonwealth Electoral Amendment Act 2016* (Cwth), and how changes to the Senate's voting practices were implemented at the 2016 federal election. In light of this, the committee met with the AEC in September 2017. The committee also noted it would observe how the introduction of optional preferential voting above the line (ATL) impacts on the AEC. These matters were also discussed with the AEC in September 2017.

In this inquiry, the committee has evaluated methods to reduce informal voting based on non-systemic methods, such as community engagement and voter education. Chapter Four reviews evidence the committee received about the VEC's community and voter education programs designed to help address intentional informal voting, as well as other evidence from inquiry participants about non-systemic methods to reduce informal voting in preferential voting electoral systems.

## 2.4 Election staffing

As noted earlier, in Victoria the VEC employs two categories of casual staff for Victorian state elections; election casuals who work short-term for the VEC during the state election period and casual staff who belong to the VEC's Senior Election Official pool.

## 2.4.1 Casual election officials

### Statistics

During a Victorian state election the VEC’s workforce increases by more than 20,000 people. According to the VEC, the management of the “recruitment and selection campaign, the induction and training of appointees and casuals, and the health and safety of our workforce requires significant planning, coordination and ongoing evaluation”.<sup>41</sup>

At the 2018 Victorian state election, the VEC expects to hire approximately 25,000 casual election officials. The process of recruitment and selection is conducted by SEOs on a District and Region basis.<sup>42</sup>

### Administration

The VEC maintains a database of people interested in working casually at election time. At present, there are 30,000 people registered on this database. The VEC’s submission discusses the administration of the database and how casual staff are organised;

“Many of these people have a history of working for elections and that history is maintained within the personnel database. They are assessed each time they undertake a role and this assessment forms part of their work history. Conversely there is a high turnover in election staff due to the intermittent nature of the work; approximately one third of all staff for a major election would be new. The database is populated from an online registration process and personal details are managed by each registrant via their own self-service portal. Offers of work, appointment letters and pay advice documents are all communicated electronically through each person’s self-service portal. A Personnel Helpline is available year round during business hours for any staff requiring assistance with using or accessing their portal”.<sup>43</sup>

## 2.4.2 Senior Election Official pool

### Background

The VEC maintains a pool of approximately 300 SEOs to be appointed to management roles during a Victorian state election. At the 2018 Victorian state election, the roles of Election Manager, Assistant Election Manager, Region Coordinator, Assistant Region Coordinator and Election Support Officer will be appointed from the SEO pool. An “election office will be set up in each of the 88 districts with an Election Manager and Assistant Election Manager responsible for the operation of the election within that district. These roles will operate full-time for up to nine weeks and will also undertake intermittent responsibilities in the lead-up to the election, including reviewing proposed voting centres and sourcing an election office location”.<sup>44</sup>

<sup>41</sup> Victorian Electoral Commission, *Submission No.12a*, p.16.

<sup>42</sup> Victorian Electoral Commission, *Submission No.12a*, p.16.

<sup>43</sup> Victorian Electoral Commission, *Submission No.12a*, p.16.

<sup>44</sup> Victorian Electoral Commission, *Submission No.12a*, p.21.

## Demographics

In its submission, the VEC discussed the types of applicants it receives for the SEO pool:

“Traditionally applicants for SEO positions have come from people in semi-retirement or those who have the flexibility to balance their ongoing work/business with periods of employment for the VEC. Efforts have also been made to attract young professional parents who are having a career break due to child-minding responsibilities. This has been successful in ensuring a greater mix of people within the SEO pool”.<sup>45</sup>

## Appointment and training

The VEC’s submission outlines the appointment and training process for SEOs;

“Applicants undergo a rigorous recruitment and selection process in order to be included in the SEO pool. The recruitment process targets people with high level project management and people management skills that can be utilised within the election environment. Increasingly the SEO pool is required to be highly adaptable in using new technology and systems. The recruitment process, which is currently underway in preparation for the 2018 State election, focusses on testing applicants for learning agility, particularly with the use of new computer systems. SEO applicants must address the key selection criteria for the role, and short-listed applicants are invited to undertake a half-day interview process to assess their suitability. The final stage of the recruitment process involves four days of face-to-face orientation training on all aspects of election management.

At the conclusion of the orientation training applicants are assessed again to determine final acceptance into the SEO pool. Those accepted join the VEC’s experienced SEOs and will be considered for appointment to management roles for the next scheduled election. SEOs are appointed to management roles for each specific election; these appointments are not ongoing. Once appointed, further election specific training occurs in the lead up to the election. For the 2018 State election, it is anticipated that each SEO appointed to a management role will undertake a training program consisting of a minimum of three days face-to-face training, three days systems training within the election office environment, and a range of online preparation activities”.<sup>46</sup>

Chapter Five further discusses election staffing at Victorian state elections, including evidence about the VEC’s training practices for both the SEO pool and casual staff. It also evaluates strategies to recruit and retain election officials for Victorian state elections.

## 2.5 Electoral participation, and community engagement with parliamentary processes

In Victoria, as noted earlier, the VEC has traditionally referred to three electoral indicators — voter turnout, informal voting and the rate of electoral enrolment — to determine the health of Victoria’s electoral participation. In previous parliaments, the then Electoral Matters Committee referred to these indicators to assist its own

<sup>45</sup> Victorian Electoral Commission, *Submission No.12a*, p.21.

<sup>46</sup> Victorian Electoral Commission, *Submission No.12a*, p.p.21-23.

investigations into how fully Victorians participate in electoral processes. For this inquiry, the committee also considered electoral participation as defined by the terms of reference; Chapter Six specifically examines evidence the committee received about strategies to assist communities who traditionally experience barriers to electoral participation be more involved in electoral processes.

Chapter Six also reviews the VEC’s electoral and community engagement programs.

Further, community engagement is a priority of all three departments of the Parliament of Victoria. Substantively, community engagement is the responsibility of the Department of Parliamentary Services (DPS). The Community Engagement and Education unit was established in 2014 and is resourced by DPS, the Legislative Council and the Legislative Assembly. Unit staff design “programs to provide professional development for teachers and student teachers in all education sectors, as well as print and audio-visual resources produced for specific audiences and the community as a whole”.<sup>47</sup>

One of the Victorian Parliament’s six headline strategic objectives is to increase public awareness of, and opportunities for engagement with, the functioning of Parliament. Chapter Six evaluates the Parliament of Victoria’s engagement and education programs, and how parliaments in New Zealand and Canada offer these services.

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<sup>47</sup> Parliament of Victoria, Department of Parliamentary Services, *Annual Report 2016-17*, Department of Parliamentary Services, 2017, p.16.

# 3

## Civics and electoral education in Victoria and other jurisdictions

As introduced in Chapter Two, civics and electoral education involve two separate processes; civics, in Australia, is the study of Australian democracy, its history, traditions, structures and processes and democratic culture. In Australia, electoral education is a form of civics education focusing on instruction about Australia's electoral processes, including how parliaments are elected, their electoral systems, how to cast a vote in an Australian election and how to stand for election to parliament. Chapter Six addresses evidence the committee received about education and public awareness for other community groups, including Victorians with disabilities and Victorians for whom English is not their first language.

This chapter investigates civics and electoral education in Victoria, evidence from Australia's other electoral jurisdictions focusing on electoral education, and evidence the committee gathered from New Zealand and Canada about civics and electoral education in those jurisdictions. The chapter first discusses the committee's interest in civics and electoral education, based on the rationale that there is widespread evidence in Western democracies that young people have lower rates of electoral enrolment and voting than the general population, and are becoming increasingly disengaged from civic and electoral processes. Evidence from Australian and Victorian elections is presented, as well as discussion about political science theory establishing a link between age and voter turnout.

The chapter concludes with evidence and proposals from inquiry participants about changes to Victoria's civics and electoral education programs.

### 3.1 Definition of 'young people'

For the purposes of this report, the committee defines young people as those aged 18 to 24. Other parliamentary committees, such as the Commonwealth JSCEM during a 2007 inquiry into civics education, defined young people as those aged 17 to 25 years.<sup>48</sup> However, the committee notes 18 to 24 is the age cohort used by the VEC in its research into electoral participation. It is also the age cohort used by the ABS for Census purposes.

#### 3.1.1 Youth electoral participation – contextualising the problem

As in many Western democracies, there is a wealth of evidence suggesting that young people in Australia are less likely to vote in elections, and be enrolled to vote, than other age cohorts.

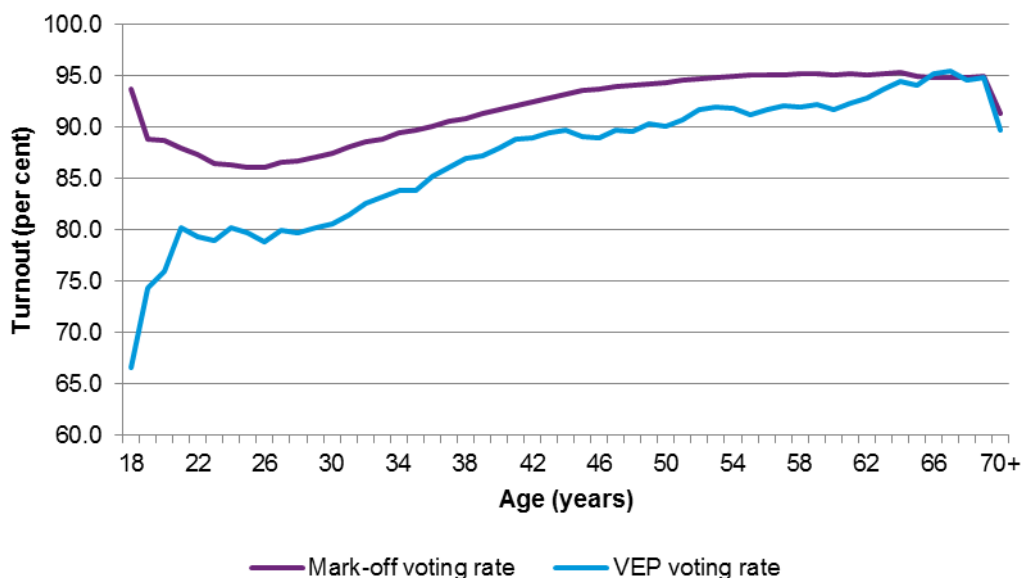
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<sup>48</sup> Commonwealth Parliament, Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters, "Inquiry into civics and electoral education", June 2007.

### Voting

Using data from the 2016 federal election, the AEC has shown that electors aged 18 to 26 years have much lower roll mark off rates than other age cohorts. For example, as shown in Figure 3.1, at the 2016 federal election approximately 80 percent of 22 year olds were marked off the roll compared to approximately 90 percent of 42 year olds.<sup>49</sup>

**Figure 3.1** Roll mark off and voting eligible population (VEP) figures, 2016 federal election



Source: Australian Electoral Commission, “Voter turnout; 2016 House of Representatives and Senate elections”, Australian Electoral Commission, 2016, p.14.

In terms of an overall participation rate, the 18 to 24 cohort has a lower participation rate than the general population. At the 2016 federal election, approximately 91 percent of eligible electors voted, whereas 86 percent of 18 to 24 year olds voted. In 2013 it was also estimated that 254,000 eligible electors aged 18 to 24 were not enrolled to vote.<sup>50</sup>

In Victoria, the Electoral Matters Committee in the 56th Parliament also investigated youth voter turnout extensively as part its 2009 inquiry into voter participation and informal voting; such research was the first, dedicated inquiry into youth electoral participation by a Victorian parliamentary committee. At the time, the committee found that young Victorians had a voter turnout rate approximately eight percent lower than the general voting population, and that youth turnout was approximately 10 percent lower than the general voting population at the 2007 federal election.<sup>51</sup>

In Victoria, young electors have lower rates of voter turnout for Victorian state elections compared to the general voting population, but the difference is less marked than for federal elections. At the 2014 Victorian state election approximately 89 per cent of voters aged 18 to 25 voted, compared with 93 per cent of all Victorian

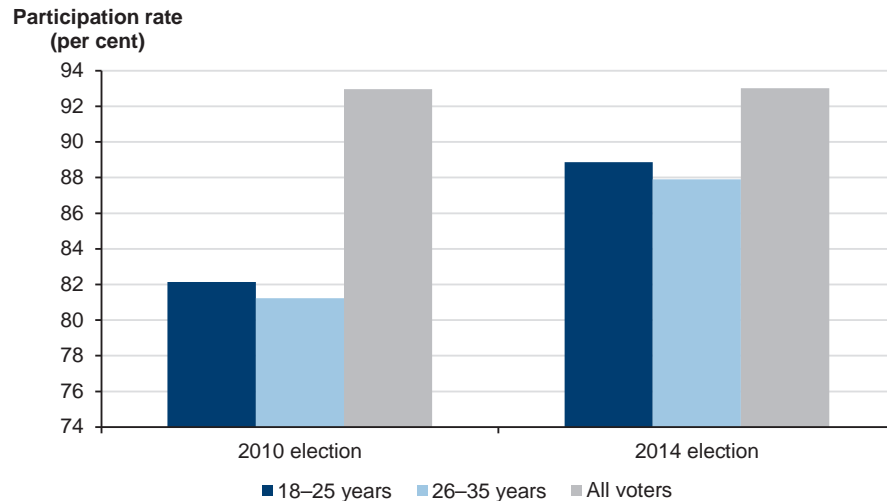
49 Australian Electoral Commission, “Voter turnout; 2016 House of Representatives and Senate elections”, Australian Electoral Commission, 2016, p.14.

50 Australian Electoral Commission, “Voter turnout; 2016 House of Representatives and Senate elections”, Australian Electoral Commission, 2016, p.15.

51 Parliament of Victoria, Electoral Matters Committee, “Inquiry into voter participation and informal voting”, Parliament of Victoria, July 2009, p.p.106-111.

voters.<sup>52</sup> In addition, as shown in Figure 3.2, participation rates for young electors have increased at recent Victorian state elections but remain below that of the general voting population. The committee also notes that participation rates for electors aged 26 to 35 are lower than the general voting population.

**Figure 3.2** Participation rates by age cohort, 2010 and 2014 Victorian state elections



Source: Victorian Auditor-General, “Victorian Electoral Commission”, Victorian Auditor-General, February 2016, p.26.

## Enrolment

As noted in Chapter Two, voting in periodic elections is one measure of electoral participation. In Australia and Victoria the number of eligible electors who are enrolled to vote is another.

### Federal

There has been longstanding concern, both amongst electoral commissions and commentators, in Australia and Victoria about rates of youth electoral enrolment. At the federal level, the percentage of eligible electors between 18 and 24 years old currently enrolled compared to the total number estimated to be eligible to enrol is 87.8 percent (as of December 2017).<sup>53</sup> On an average, yearly basis, according to the AEC, the youth enrolment rate has been approximately nine percent lower than the enrolment rate for the general voting population since 2005.<sup>54</sup>

There are also concerns about the number of people who should be on the electoral roll, but are not. As seen in Figure 3.3, in July 2016 the number of missing electors on the federal electoral roll in the 18 to 24 year cohort was 13.3 percent, or 8.3 percent higher than the figure for all electors aged 18 years or over. As documented in the committee’s report on the 2014 Victorian state election, concerns about ‘missing’ electors, and the ineffectiveness of traditional roll enumeration methods such as door-to-door canvassing by electoral commissions, led to the introduction of direct enrolment in NSW in 2009 and Victoria in 2010.<sup>55</sup>

<sup>52</sup> Warwick Gately AM, *Transcript of Evidence*, 24 October 2017, p.7.

<sup>53</sup> Australian Electoral Commission, “National Youth Enrolment Rate”, Australian Electoral Commission, 2017.

<sup>54</sup> Australian Electoral Commission, “National Youth Enrolment Rate”, Australian Electoral Commission, 2017.

<sup>55</sup> Parliament of Victoria, Electoral Matters Committee, “Inquiry into 2014 Victorian state election and matters related thereto”, Parliament of Victoria, May 2016, p.21.

Figure 3.3 National enrolment rates by age

National Enrolment Rates by Age - 02 July 2016					
Age	National Enrolment Rate	Federal Enrolment	Estimated Enrolment Eligible Population	Missing	% Missing
18	71.1%	192,063	270,308	78,245	28.9%
19	83.7%	228,404	272,899	44,495	16.3%
20-24	90.4%	1,237,618	1,369,310	131,692	9.6%
18-24	86.7%	1,658,085	1,912,517	254,432	13.3%
25-39	93.3%	3,881,545	4,162,036	280,491	6.7%
40-59	96.1%	5,476,251	5,696,375	220,124	3.9%
60+	98.7%	4,660,778	4,722,169	61,391	1.3%
<b>Total aged 18 and over</b>	<b>95.0%</b>	<b>15,676,659</b>	<b>16,493,096</b>	<b>816,437</b>	<b>5.0%</b>

Source: Australian Electoral Commission, "Australians enrolled by age for 2016 federal election", Australian Electoral Commission, Canberra. Accessed 4 July 2018 from <<https://twitter.com/auselectoralcom/status/739605661999202308>>.

Nevertheless, in recent times rates of youth electoral enrolment have increased against key targets. The AEC has a target youth enrolment rate of 80 percent.<sup>56</sup> As seen in Table 3.1, the rate of youth electoral enrolment has exceeded the target since March 2016.

Table 3.1 Target and actual enrolment rates, Australian Electoral Commission

	Enrolment rate at end of quarter (%)	Number enrolled as at end of quarter
December 2017	87.8	1,678,329
September 2017	88.5	1,693,431
June 2017	85.4	1,635,444
March 2017	85.7	1,639,036
December 2016	86.5	1,655,181
September 2016	87.1	1,667,272
June 2016	87.4	1,672,875
March 2016	81.3	1,556,463

Source: Australian Electoral Commission, "National Youth Enrolment Rate", Australian Electoral Commission, 2017.

In addition, there is also evidence that the Australian Marriage Survey – the enrolment entitlement date for the survey was 24 August 2017 – contributed to a significant increase in rates of electoral enrolment for both the general population and young electors. Between 8 and 24 August 2017 the AEC processed 933,592 enrolment transactions.<sup>57</sup> This compares to approximately 687,000 enrolment transactions during the close of rolls period at the 2016 federal election. According to the AEC, the majority of "enrolment transactions (87 per cent) were enrolment

<sup>56</sup> Australian Electoral Commission, "National Youth Enrolment Rate", Australian Electoral Commission, 2017.

<sup>57</sup> Australian Electoral Commission, "Enrolment processing for marriage survey complete", Australian Electoral Commission, Canberra, August 2017.



changes or updates. Changes to an existing enrolment and reenrolments were mostly associated with electors aged 25-39. There are over 98,000 people added to the roll, of which 65,000 [were] young electors aged 18 to 24”.<sup>58</sup>

Further, 18 year old electors tend to have higher rates of new enrolment than other age groups in the 18 to 24 year cohort. During the inquiry the committee met with the AEC and discussed youth electoral enrolment. The committee learnt that 18 year old participation increased from 51 percent to 71 percent between April and July 2016 prior to the 2016 federal election, mostly in response to the AEC’s programs to encourage 18 year olds to enrol and vote, including birthday text messages.

### Victoria

As shown in Figure 3.2 earlier, participation rates for Victorians aged 18 to 25 years increased between the 2010 and 2014 Victorian state elections. However, young people in Victoria still have lower rates of electoral enrolment than the general voting population. During the then Electoral Matters Committee’s report on voter participation and informal voting in 2009, the VEC advised that “while Victoria has one of the highest youth enrolment rates in Australia, (84.78 percent or 3.3 percent higher than the national average in 2007/08), the number of young Victorians enrolled is still eight percent below that of the general eligible population”.<sup>59</sup> The VEC has a general enrolment target for all age cohorts, and for electoral enrolment in general, of less than one percent of the national average.

The committee notes that the introduction of direct enrolment in 2010 has helped address this trend somewhat, and to increase the overall rate of electoral enrolment in Victoria. In 2017 the VEC prepared a report on the status of direct enrolment in Victoria. It noted that since its inception in 2010, direct enrolment has become one of the major sources of enrolment transactions in Victoria, generating more than 850,000 transactions in six years. The VEC also notes that “direct enrolment has been responsible for a steady rise in Victoria’s enrolment rate (electors as a proportion of the estimated eligible population), from 90.95 percent in 2010 to 95.4 percent in 2016”.<sup>60</sup>

Specifically, as shown in Figure 3.4, research by the VEC into the demography of electors who directly enrol has demonstrated that younger electors in the 18 to 19 cohort are more likely to use direct enrolment than other cohorts to newly register their enrolment and to update their address. In contrast, reinstatement of enrolments via the direct enrolment service was utilised more by older age cohorts. Overall, as noted by the VEC, “directly enrolled electors tend to be younger in general, and this younger age profile is a factor contributing to lower voter turnout by those directly enrolled”. In other words, young people aged 18 and 19 are enrolled to vote but are less likely to vote than other sectors of the population.

58 Australian Electoral Commission, “Enrolment processing for marriage survey complete”, Australian Electoral Commission, August 2017.

59 Parliament of Victoria, Electoral Matters Committee, “Inquiry into voter participation and informal voting”, Parliament of Victoria, July 2009, p.106.

60 Victorian Electoral Commission, “Direct Enrolment - Report”, Victorian Electoral Commission, 2017, p.5.

**Figure 3.4** Direct enrolment in Victoria, age cohort transactions by type

Age group	New enrolments		Address changes		Reinstatements
	Directly enrolled	Total enrolments	Directly enrolled	Total enrolments	
18-19	45.82%	44.88%	2.06%	2.12%	0.08%
20-24	22.87%	12.56%	15.3%	13.23%	5.64%
25-29	13.22%	11.21%	18.75%	17.32%	14.22%
30-34	8%	10.44%	15.81%	15.26%	18.02%
35-39	4.63%	6.62%	12.05%	11.57%	17.15%
40-44	1.99%	4.35%	10.21%	9.74%	16.11%
45-49	1.01%	2.99%	7.49%	7.31%	10.7%
50-54	0.76%	2.13%	5.97%	6.18%	7.62%
55-59	0.61%	1.46%	4.51%	5.05%	4.93%
60-64	0.46%	1.26%	3.34%	4.13%	2.81%
65+	0.64%	2.11%	4.5%	8.11%	2.72%

Source: Victorian Electoral Commission, "Direct Enrolment - Report", Victorian Electoral Commission, 2017, p.5.

In 2016 the Victorian Auditor-General completed its first performance audit of the Victorian Electoral Commission, focusing on the VEC's election planning systems, its performance across a range of indicators and its ability to engage the voting public and provide accessible services.<sup>61</sup> As part of this review the Auditor-General recommended that the VEC continue to evaluate, improve and measure its programs designed to "encourage participation by groups who are traditionally underrepresented in the electoral system", including monitoring its performance against key targets.<sup>62</sup>

In its report on the 2014 Victorian state election, the committee supported the Auditor-General's recommendations.<sup>63</sup> Given the statistics about youth voting and enrolment documented in this chapter, the committee also notes that there is a need for the VEC to document the actual and possible number of young people aged 18 to 24 who are enrolled to vote; this information is not contained in the VEC's *Annual Report 2016/2017*. Other Australian electoral commissions provide this data as part of their performance processes; for example, in September 2017 the committee met with Tom Rogers, Australian Electoral Commissioner, who discussed how the AEC tracks its enrolment performance for young electors aged 18 to 24 on its website and as part of its annual reporting. The committee believes the VEC should adopt a similar approach so that information about current rates of youth electoral enrolment in Victoria are easily available for public review.

**RECOMMENDATION 1:** The committee recommends the Victorian Electoral Commission include statistics about the enrolment rate of eligible Victorian electors aged 18 to 24 years in its annual report to Parliament, and in each report to Parliament on a Victorian state election, as per Figure 3.3.

<sup>61</sup> Victorian Auditor-General, "Victorian Electoral Commission", Victorian Auditor-General, February 2016, p.3.

<sup>62</sup> Victorian Auditor-General, "Victorian Electoral Commission", Victorian Auditor-General, February 2016, p.xii.

<sup>63</sup> Parliament of Victoria, Electoral Matters Committee, "Inquiry into 2014 Victorian state election and matters related thereto", Parliament of Victoria, May 2016, p.157.

### 3.1.2 Theory – age and electoral participation

Many Western democracies have lower rates of electoral participation amongst the young. This phenomenon is well-researched in political science; one of the most robust findings in the empirical voter turnout literature is the association between age and voting—the older a person, the more likely they are to vote in elections. Berry and McDonnall describe this relationship;

“Turnout is lowest in the beginning of the life cycle and slowly increases with the adoption of various adult roles. Participation remains high during middle age when church attendance, increased activity in the community and various organisations, stronger party attachment and growing income all contribute positively to turnout...”<sup>64</sup>

The AEC has also found that young people who do not vote when they are in the 18 to 24 cohort are more likely to remain non-voters as they age. According to the AEC, using turnout data from the 2016 federal election, “there is a clear relationship between age and turnout, suggesting that targeting turnout initiatives at people under the age of 40 would be a valid strategy for increasing overall turnout. However, age is not the only driver of differences in turnout at the state and territory level”.<sup>65</sup> In other words, according to Hannon-Morrow and Roden, “age is not the only variable that affects turnout in Australian federal elections. If it were, Australia’s aging population would result in higher turnouts, rather than the mild decline of recent elections”.<sup>66</sup>

Hannon-Morrow and Roden further summarise this problem in the Australian context, highlighting the importance of civics and electoral education;

“Even in the absence of a detectable generational effect, the very consistent and noticeable failure to vote amongst young enrolled voters, peaking at 25 years of age, remains to be explained. The current analysis does not allow us to reach any conclusions as to the cause of youth electoral disengagement, and most importantly, later reengagement, however we suggest lifecycle explanations may play a role. One particularly useful piece of further research, from the perspective of an electoral management body, would be the extent to which this age effect is susceptible to change through education or electoral practice, or whether it is particularly resistant to change and not a cost-effective problem to target”.<sup>67</sup>

#### Why should young people vote?

While voting constitutes only one form of political expression it is a major component of Australia’s and Victoria’s democratic culture. During the inquiry the committee was told why it is important for young people to participate in elections by several inquiry participants. The reasons offered included;

- Turnout. Dr David Zyngier, the VEC and the Youth Affairs Council Victoria all told the committee, to differing degrees, that young people should vote because it has a positive effect on turnout. The Youth Affairs Council specifically

<sup>64</sup> Democratic Audit UK, “Highly educated young people are less likely to vote than older people with much lower levels of attainment”, Democratic Audit UK, 2018. Accessed 4 July 2018 from <<http://www.democraticaudit.com/2014/03/13/in-britain-people-with-higher-educational-attainment-are-less-likely-to-vote-because-they-are-younger>>.

<sup>65</sup> Australian Electoral Commission, “Voter turnout; 2016 House of Representatives and Senate elections”, Australian Electoral Commission, 2016, p.14.

<sup>66</sup> Hannon-Morrow, S., Roden, M. (2014). “Gender, Age and Generational Effects on Turnout in Australian Federal Elections”. Paper presented at the Australian Political Science Conference, September 2014, p.19.

<sup>67</sup> Hannon-Morrow, S., Roden, M. (2014). “Gender, Age and Generational Effects on Turnout in Australian Federal Elections”. Paper presented at the Australian Political Science Conference, September 2014, p.19.

noted that “when the proportion of eligible people enrolled to vote and casting their votes is high, it suggests high levels of community engagement with the decisions that affect everyone”.<sup>68</sup>

- Political socialisation. It is well established in the political science literature that young people who vote early in life are more likely to have better electoral habits, and be more accustomed to participate in elections, as they age. Doing so ensures they become good democratic citizens and invested in Australia’s and Victoria’s civic and democratic culture. International IDEA released a paper about youth electoral participation in 1997. It noted:

“Young people should vote to develop a habit of voting from the start, and thus ensure high turnout in the future. Getting them to vote is part of their political socialisation. It encompasses two aspects: behavioural and attitudinal. Behavioural means acting politically on the basis of attitudes, preferences and opinions, such as by discussing politics with others, participating in political events, and through voting. Attitudinal involvement means acquiring knowledge about how government works and of public affairs, as well as developing an interest in and opinions on political issues of the day. The socialization argument is specific to young people. It considers the future adverse effects of inadequate political education. If young people fail to acquire habits of good citizenship and democratic responsibility in their formative years, the future of democracy may be in question”.<sup>69</sup>

Ensuring young people vote, and vote regularly, therefore has a positive effect on a jurisdiction’s overall democratic health.

- Substantive representation of youth issues. Several inquiry participants told the committee that young people have unique concerns and different perspectives on a range of public policy and social issues, and that their participation in elections, based on this unique perspective, is therefore essential. In its submission, the Youth Affairs Council Victoria wrote that “young people are a group of Victorians often excluded from community decision-making, we are eager to ensure young people’s full and meaningful participation in the electoral process”.<sup>70</sup>

## 3.2 Why are young people underrepresented in the electoral process?

Besides life cycle effects, during this inquiry the committee learnt about some of the reasons for youth underrepresentation in Australian and Victorian electoral processes. Two major themes emerged during the inquiry;

- Young people are disengaged from formal political processes; and
- Lack knowledge or access to information about the political and electoral process and how to participate in elections.

<sup>68</sup> Youth Affairs Council Victoria, *Submission No.9*, p.2.

<sup>69</sup> Democratic Audit UK, “Highly educated young people are less likely to vote than older people with much lower levels of attainment”, Democratic Audit UK, 2018. Accessed 4 July 2018 from <<http://www.democraticaudit.com/2014/03/13/in-britain-people-with-higher-educational-attainment-are-less-likely-to-vote-because-they-are-younger>>.

<sup>70</sup> Youth Affairs Council Victoria, *Submission No.9*, p.p.2-3.

## Disengagement from formal politics

Recent Australian-based survey research into youth electoral participation has found that young people are less likely than older age cohorts to vote in periodic elections. During the inquiry the committee discussed the findings from the Australian Election Study (AES) from 2010 and 2016. The AES aims to provide

“...a long-term perspective on stability and change in the political attitudes and behaviour of the Australian electorate. The surveys investigate the changing social and attitudinal bases of Australian politics as the society changes. In addition to these long-term goals, the AES examines the political issues and personalities in each specific election and evaluates their importance in shaping the election result”.<sup>71</sup>

Findings from the 2010 and 2016 surveys indicate that young people view formal participation in elections, or the act as voting, less favourably than others. In 2010 the AES asked respondents the following question: Would you have voted in the election if voting had not been compulsory? In 2010, “88 per cent of older people (aged 60 and over) said they would have voted but only 78 per cent of young people (aged 18–29) said they would have voted”.<sup>72</sup> Professor McAllister also advised the committee about similar findings from international jurisdictions about lack of interest in formal electoral processes amongst young people, particularly the 2005 International Social Survey Programme (ISSP). According to Dr Aaron Martin, Senior Lecturer, University of Melbourne;

“In 2005 the ISSP asked ‘how important is it to always vote in elections?’ Respondents were asked to respond on a scale of one to seven, one being ‘not at all important’ and seven being ‘very important’. In terms of those who responded that voting is ‘very important’ older people are twice as likely to say voting is very important (the respective figures being 84 and 42). So, young people do not seem to see voting as a civic duty in the way older generations do”.<sup>73</sup>

Further, as noted in Dr Zyngier’s submission, survey research demonstrates that many young Australians are ambivalent towards the democratic system of government and that they have lost faith in Australia’s democracy. According to Dr Zyngier,

“...polling has uncovered a surprising ambivalence amongst Australians about the value of democracy, despite Australia being one of the oldest continuous democracies in the world. In 2014, only 60 percent of Australians believe that ‘democracy is preferable to any other kind of government’. This confirms previous findings, with only 42 percent of 18 to 29 year-olds in 2014 view democracy as preferable to any other kind of government, compared with 65 percent of those 30 years and over”.<sup>74</sup>

Notwithstanding these findings, the committee also learnt during this inquiry that young people are not apathetic about elections and formal politics. According to the VEC, many young people are involved in alternative forms of political expression, such as single issue politics, “participating in demonstrations, sign petitions, join campaign groups and feel passionately about a range of issues - all things which could be seen in the context of small ‘p’ politics”...The problem from a young person’s perspective is with the formal political process”.<sup>75</sup>

71 Australian Election Study, “Australian Election Study”, Australian National University, 2017.

72 Aaron Martin, “Political Engagement among the Young in Australia”, Parliament of Australia, Occasional Paper, March 2014, p.3.

73 Aaron Martin, “Political Engagement among the Young in Australia”, Parliament of Australia, Occasional Paper, March 2014, p.4.

74 Dr David Zyngier, *Submission No.1*, p.5.

75 Victorian Electoral Commission, “Submission to the Inquiry into voter participation and informal voting”, Parliament of Victoria, June 2008, p.14.

### Lack of knowledge about formal political processes

A lack of knowledge about how to vote, how elections work and Australia's and Victoria's electoral system in general is another major factor explaining lower levels of voting amongst the young. The Youth Electoral Study was a four year national investigation led by a team of researchers from the University of Sydney and the Australian National University working in conjunction with the Australian Electoral Commission, designed to research youth voting behaviour. The survey was completed in 2004 by nearly 5,000 secondary school students. The principal purpose of the project was to determine why many young people do not register on the Australian electoral roll despite compulsory enrolment and voting provisions in legislation.

In terms of evidence about young people's preparedness to vote, the survey found that "about one-in-two students feel they lack the knowledge to understand the issues, the political parties, to make a decision about voting, and in general to vote".<sup>76</sup> Further, "young people do not perceive themselves generally as well prepared to participate in voting, and that generally, young people don't understand the voting system".<sup>77</sup> The VEC also advised the committee about this evidence during the then Electoral Matters Committee's 2009 inquiry into voter participation and informal voting. It noted:

"In terms of knowledge about the electoral process the Youth Electoral Study again provides some useful insights. When surveying young people about their preparedness to vote the study found that "about one in two students feel they lack the knowledge to understand the issues, the political parties, to make a decision about voting and in general to vote". The study also found that about half of the young people surveyed did not feel well prepared to participate in voting and generally don't understand the voting system".<sup>78</sup>

### Committee's view – youth electoral participation

The committee acknowledges that young people's electoral participation is a major concern in many Western democracies, and has been for several decades. Evidence received from inquiry participants during this inquiry, and previous inquiries in the 58th Parliament, suggests that the most appropriate method to combat declining levels of enrolment and voter turnout amongst young people – given that this is largely an age-effect, not a generational effect, as noted earlier – is civics and electoral education.

## 3.3 Evidence from other Australian jurisdictions about civics and electoral education

During the inquiry the committee investigated how the Commonwealth, NSW and Queensland jurisdictions provide civics and electoral education, in addition to the Victorian experience.

<sup>76</sup> Print, M, Saha, L, Edwards, K, "Youth Electoral Study: Report 1; Enrolment and Voting", December 2004, p.13.

<sup>77</sup> Print, M, Saha, L, Edwards, K, "Youth Electoral Study: Report 1; Enrolment and Voting", December 2004, p.13.

<sup>78</sup> Victorian Electoral Commission, "Submission to the Inquiry into voter participation and informal voting", Parliament of Victoria, June 2008, p.14.

### 3.3.1 Commonwealth

#### Civics education

The Australian Curriculum is the national curriculum and education standard set by the Australian Government for Australian school students from Foundation to Year 10. According to the Australian Government;

“The Australian Curriculum is designed to teach students what it takes to be confident and creative individuals and become active and informed citizens. It sets the goal for what all students should learn as they progress through their school life – wherever they live in Australia and whatever school they attend”.<sup>79</sup>

As part of the curriculum, students develop knowledge and skills in eight learning areas: English, Mathematics, Science, Health and Physical Education (HPE) Humanities and Social Sciences (HASS) The Arts, Technologies and Languages. The Australian Curriculum is organised into learning areas and subjects. Some learning areas bring a number of subjects together: Humanities and Social Sciences includes History, Geography, Civics and Citizenship, and Economics and Business; The Arts includes Dance, Drama, Media Arts, Music and Visual Arts; Technologies includes Design and Technologies and Digital Technologies. There is also a choice of 15 Languages.

From years six to 10 the Australian Curriculum offers a Civics and Citizenship component. Education authorities within each of the Australian states and territories hold responsibility for the implementation in schools and education systems of the Australian Curriculum: Civics and Citizenship. The aim of the module is to “foster understanding of, and commitment to, national values of democracy, equity and justice”.<sup>80</sup> It develops appreciation of Australian diversity and what it means to be a citizen. It explores ways to participate in Australia’s civic life and contribute positively as a local and global citizen.

#### Electoral education

The AEC is an independent statutory authority established by the Australian Government with a purpose to maintain an impartial and independent electoral system for eligible voters through active electoral roll management, efficient delivery of polling services, and targeted education and public awareness programs.

The AEC operates several electoral education initiatives. In September 2017 the committee met with Tom Rogers, Australian Electoral Commissioner, and other staff from the AEC to discuss some of these programs, focusing on the National Electoral Education Centre at Old Parliament House, and the AEC’s online resources.

#### National Electoral Education Centre

The National Electoral Education Centre at Old Parliament House in Canberra provides education programs for students visiting the national capital as part of their civics and citizenship studies. In 2016/2017 “the AEC hosted visitors from 149 electoral divisions, held 2,517 sessions, had 87,564 participants, of which 72,671 were primary students, 7,149 were secondary students and 7,744 were adults, and collected 265 new electoral roll enrolments”.<sup>81</sup> In 2016, the AEC renovated parts of the centre

<sup>79</sup> Australian Government, “The Australian curriculum; what you need to know”, Australian Government, 2017.

<sup>80</sup> Australian Government, “The Australian curriculum; what you need to know”, Australian Government, 2017.

<sup>81</sup> Australian Electoral Commission, *Annual Report 2016/2017*, Commonwealth of Australia, 2017, p.28.

to modernise both the presentation content and program spaces. The committee was advised that “the most dramatic change was a complete make-over of the foyer area using a blend of recent election information and historical items. The theatre presentation was updated with information to reflect the changes to Senate voting. In response to visitor feedback, the AEC also introduced new student activity books”.<sup>82</sup>

In September 2017 the committee visited the National Electoral Education Centre and viewed a mock election being conducted at the Centre for a class of visiting school children. Children were able to vote for their favourite fruit, pretending they were candidates for the House of Representatives, and then participate in the preferential vote count distribution so as to develop an understanding of the single transferrable vote. The committee was impressed with the quality of this mock election.

#### AEC’s website

The committee discussed the AEC’s online educational tools with Mr Rogers and his staff. The AEC’s website, *AEC for schools*, provides a range of education materials for classroom use. The site averages 9,000 visits a month. The new publication, *Voting in Australia*, remains the most requested resource. In addition, the AEC’s principal online resource for electoral education is ‘Get Voting’. The program provides materials for schools to conduct their own elections, in a similar way to the VEC’s Passport to Democracy. According to the AEC’s *Annual Report 2016/2017*, ‘Get Voting’ had “12,978 online visitors, 248 requests for election equipment packs, and helped conduct school elections for 35,064 students”.<sup>83</sup>

#### Professional training for teachers

The AEC delivers training to help teachers develop the knowledge and skills needed to teach electoral education in primary and secondary schools. For example;

“...in 2016–17 the AEC held seven workshops with 87 participants and two civic education conferences with 43 workshop participants. In 2016, the AEC also developed a one-hour online professional learning tool for teachers called ‘Voting in the classroom’. This module was launched in July 2016 and equips educators to run a classroom election that will help their students understand the decision-making processes of an election”.<sup>84</sup>

### 3.3.2 New South Wales

#### Civics education

In NSW, the NSW Education Standards Authority (NESA) replaced the Board of Studies, Teaching and Educational Standards NSW (BOSTES) on 1 January 2017. The NESA is responsible for developing syllabuses to be taught in New South Wales schools, from Kindergarten through to Year 12.

Civics and citizenship is taught in NSW as part of the History curriculum K-10. According to the NESA;

<sup>82</sup> Australian Electoral Commission, *Annual Report 2016/2017*, Commonwealth of Australia, 2017, p.28.

<sup>83</sup> Australian Electoral Commission, *Annual Report 2016/2017*, Commonwealth of Australia, 2017, p.28.

<sup>84</sup> Australian Electoral Commission, *Annual Report 2016/2017*, Commonwealth of Australia, 2017, p.29.



“In History students investigate and explore how their own and other societies have organised themselves, and how the ideals and practices of their own democratic society have evolved over time. Students engage with the fundamentals of the nature of community and citizenship and the development of democracy in Australia. A comparison with other civic societies enriches this knowledge and understanding of civic life. Students examine the changing role of citizens in the context of government systems and institutions as well as political and social life in the past and the present”.<sup>85</sup>

### Electoral education

In NSW, the NSW Electoral Commission is responsible for providing targeted education and public awareness programs about NSW state elections and local government elections. The commission engages with “targeted groups in the community through special-purpose content and support including”<sup>86</sup>;

- Easy Read Guides;
- Auslan assistance;
- Multilingual assistance;
- Braille ballot papers; and
- Other voter assistance at voting centres.<sup>87</sup>

The NSW Electoral Commission also collaborates with three reference groups as part of its community engagement and education efforts. These groups are the Equal Access to Democracy Disability Community Reference Group, the CALD Community Reference Group and the Aboriginal Community Reference Group.<sup>88</sup>

## 3.3.3

### Queensland

#### Civics education

In Queensland, schools are currently implementing the Australian Curriculum for English, Mathematics, Science and History in Prep to Year 10, the Queensland curriculum for the remaining areas of the curriculum in Prep to Year 10 and the Queensland Senior schooling curriculum for Years 11 and 12. The Australian Curriculum; Civics and Citizenship is currently endorsed by the Queensland Government and is yet to be implemented. The committee met with staff at the Queensland Parliament who provided a presentation on the work they do in civics education.

#### Electoral education

The Electoral Commission of Queensland (ECQ) is an independent statutory authority, established under the *Electoral Act 1992* (QLD) with functions specified in that Act and other legislation. As part of its major functions the ECQ promotes awareness of and participation in electoral matters strategies, including delivering robust and evolving community awareness programs.

<sup>85</sup> New South Wales Education Standards Authority, NSW Government, “Learning across the curriculum”, NSW Government, 2018.

<sup>86</sup> NSW Electoral Commission, Annual Report 2016-17, State of NSW, Sydney, 2017, p.22.

<sup>87</sup> NSW Electoral Commission, Annual Report 2016-17, State of NSW, Sydney, 2017, p.22.

<sup>88</sup> NSW Electoral Commission, Annual Report 2016-17, State of NSW, Sydney, 2017, p.22.

The ECQ assists secondary school students with the opportunity for short term work placement, contributing to the community by “offering an insight into industry and the workplace while providing an opportunity to observe and learn about the electoral system”.<sup>89</sup> In 2016-2017 the Commission also took part in the St James’ College year 10 students’ ‘Speed Careering’ event, where the Assistant Electoral Commissioner spoke to young people about future work across the public sector in Queensland. Discussion “also included their upcoming obligation towards the democratic system and voting”.<sup>90</sup>

## 3.4 Evidence from New Zealand and Canada about civics and electoral education

As noted in Chapter One, during the inquiry the committee completed study tours to New Zealand in October 2017, and Canada in April 2018.

### 3.4.1 New Zealand

#### Kids Voting program

Several inquiry participants the committee met with in New Zealand discussed, and were highly supportive of, Elections New Zealand’s Kids Voting program. The committee was impressed by the Kids Voting program and general enthusiasm for the program across a range of stakeholders in New Zealand.

Kids Voting is a class-based electoral module designed by Elections New Zealand to raise awareness among young people about New Zealand’s electoral processes. According to Elections New Zealand, “building first-hand experience of active participation by young people increases their personal understanding, belief and confidence in electoral participation”.<sup>91</sup> Schools registered with the commission are sent all the materials necessary to deliver the Kids Voting election, including a Teacher’s Guide, ballot box and other resources to support Kids Voting in the school.<sup>92</sup>

In contrast to Victoria’s Passport to Democracy, Kids Voting allows students to vote for the same candidates that are contesting the New Zealand general election. According to Professor Jennifer Curtin, University of Auckland, who the committee met with in Auckland, this gives the program considerable value in that students debate and vote on contemporary issues that are also being discussed in the context of the ‘real’ general election.

Over 148,000 students took part in Kids Voting for the 2017 New Zealand general election.<sup>93</sup>

<sup>89</sup> Electoral Commission of Queensland, *Annual Report 2016/2017*, Queensland Government, September 2017, p.11.

<sup>90</sup> Electoral Commission of Queensland, *Annual Report 2016/2017*, Queensland Government, September 2017, p.11.

<sup>91</sup> Elections New Zealand, “Kids Voting Programme”, New Zealand Government, 2017.

<sup>92</sup> Elections New Zealand, “Kids Voting Programme”, New Zealand Government, 2017.

<sup>93</sup> Elections New Zealand, “Kids Voting Programme”, New Zealand Government, 2017.

Administratively, Kids Voting ballot papers are sent electronically to teachers from two-and-a-half weeks before Election Day. Kids Voting “elections must be completed by the Tuesday immediately preceding Election Day. Teachers choose the amount of preparation and classroom time allocated to Kids Voting, although familiarity only takes one or two sessions of class time for teachers and students”.<sup>94</sup>

### **Kids Voting – Auckland City Council, 2017**

During its study tour to New Zealand the committee also met with Dale Ofoske, Managing Director, Election Services, who provided the committee with information and program evaluation data for the Kids Voting program at the 2016 Auckland City Council local government elections.

According Local Government New Zealand, the Kids Voting initiative “is aimed at 11-15 year old students (school years 7 to 10) to experience the election process first hand: considering and discussing key issues, voting for candidates on real issues, and being able to compare their results against the official election results”.<sup>95</sup>

Approximately 1,700 students from 56 schools participated in the program, with nearly 4,800 using the online voting platform offered in conjunction with the module for local government. All New Zealand local government authorities participated to some extent.<sup>96</sup>

Program evaluation found that 8 out of 10 students found the online voting easy to use, and 100 percent of teachers felt it was easy to use. Further, at the local government level,

“Kids Voting had a positive impact on the discussion of elections in the home. Before Kids Voting, 20 percent of student participants indicated they had spoken about local elections at home with their families. After Kids Voting, 46 percent of students had discussed elections with families. Eighty seven percent of teachers felt the programme encouraged them to vote”.<sup>97</sup>

### **New Zealand Parliament – Education Centre**

In October 2017 the committee visited the New Zealand Parliament and met with representatives from the organisation’s Education Services team. As part of the meeting, the committee was shown through the Parliament’s Education Centre. The Centre is set up as a ‘model’ Parliament, with a chamber mirroring the House of Representatives, Speaker’s Chair and other aspects of the Chambers. Students visiting the Centre engage in mock parliamentary proceedings in order to develop knowledge of New Zealand’s parliamentary processes, and understanding voting and democracy. The committee was impressed by the Education Centre’s functions and commitment to develop youth understanding of parliamentary processes.

<sup>94</sup> Elections New Zealand, “Kids Voting Programme”, New Zealand Government, 2017.

<sup>95</sup> Auckland City Council, “Kids voting”, New Zealand Government, 2018.

<sup>96</sup> Dale Ofoske, Managing Director, Election Services, *Correspondence*, 15 October 2017.

<sup>97</sup> Dale Ofoske, Managing Director, Election Services, *Correspondence*, 15 October 2017.

## 3.4.2 Canada

### Student Vote

#### About Student Vote

One of the major programs discussed by the committee and the organisations it met in Canada in April 2018 was CIVIX’s Student Vote program (Vote étudiant). Student Vote was founded in 2003 by CIVIX founders Taylor Gunn and Lindsay Mazzucco. Since its inception, more than 1.2 million ballots have been cast by students under the voting age in five elections across Canada.<sup>98</sup>

Administered by CIVIX, in conjunction with Elections Canada for federal elections and provincial electoral authorities for provincial elections and other partners, Student Vote is a non-partisan, parallel election program for students under the voting age. The program provides students with an opportunity to experience their “democracy first-hand and build a habit of voting that will last a lifetime”.<sup>99</sup> Registered schools receive a free election package that includes activity guides, posters, electoral district maps, ballot boxes, voting screens and ballots. On the day before general voting day for an election, schools host a Student Vote Day. Students take on the roles of voting officials and organize a parallel vote using the materials provided. As noted by Elections British Columbia, Student Vote is “identical to the official election, students have the opportunity to vote on local candidates in their electoral district, and are encouraged to learn about party platforms, local candidates, and foster dialogue among...their families”.<sup>100</sup>

During its meetings in Toronto with CIVIX, Elections Ontario and the Ontario Legislative Assembly, the committee discussed Student Vote at the forthcoming Ontario provincial elections, scheduled to be held on 7 June 2018. CIVIX and Elections Ontario informed the committee that more than 2,300 schools had registered to participate in Student Vote for the 2018 Ontario provincial elections, representing all 124 electoral districts throughout the province. Figures 3.5 and 3.6 show Student Vote in action at Canadian schools.

**Figure 3.5** Image from CIVIX website, Student Vote

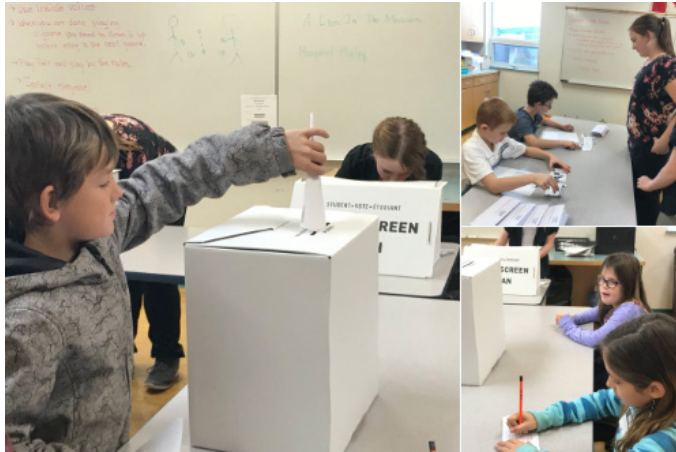


Source: CIVIX, “Student Vote 2015”, CIVIX, 2018. Accessed 4 July 2018 from <<http://studentvote.ca/federal2015>>.

<sup>98</sup> CIVIX, “Student Vote 2015”, CIVIX, 2018. Accessed 4 July 2018 from <<http://studentvote.ca/federal2015>>.

<sup>99</sup> CIVIX, “Student Vote 2015”, CIVIX, 2018. Accessed 4 July 2018 from <<http://studentvote.ca/federal2015>>.

<sup>100</sup> Elections British Columbia, “Student Vote; Learning about elections”, Elections British Columbia, 2018. Accessed 4 July 2018 from <<https://elections.bc.ca/resources/learning-about-elections>>.

**Figure 3.6** Student Vote in Maitland school, CIVIX

Source: CIVIX, "Student Vote 2015", CIVIX, 2018. Accessed 4 July 2018 from <<http://studentvote.ca/federal2015>>.

The committee considered Student Vote's application at the 2015 Canadian federal election. During National Student Vote Week (October 13-16), elementary and high school students "across Canada took on the roles of election officials and voted for the federal candidates running in their local riding. Their vote followed a series of instruction and activities focused on federal government, research into the candidates, parties and issues, as well as dialogue with family and friends".<sup>101</sup> In total, 922,000 students cast Student Vote ballots at the 2015 Canadian federal election from 6,662 schools representing all 338 ridings.<sup>102</sup>

### Support for Student Vote in Canada

One of the clear messages the committee received during its meetings in Canada was that Student Vote is strongly supported across Canada by schools, teachers, institutions and government agencies. CIVIX told the committee that Student Vote has a large number of supporters providing in-kind or financial support for the program, which is crucial to its success. CIVIX website lists the organisations which have supported Student Vote since 2013.<sup>103</sup> In Ottawa, the committee also discussed Student Vote with Elections Canada. Elections Canada strongly supported the program and its connection to its voter education campaigns; Elections Canada "has a legislated mandate to conduct voter education and information programs, particularly for those persons and groups most likely to experience difficulties in exercising their democratic rights".<sup>104</sup> Elections Canada also noted that research shows that civic education has a positive impact on key factors associated with voter turnout, such as political knowledge, interest, attitudes, civic participation and intent to vote. Given that Canada does not have compulsory voting, the committee noted Elections Canada's commitment to ensuring that people from priority groups were aware of their right to vote.

The committee also explored the support base for Student Vote amongst schools and educators directly. In Toronto the committee met with the Jarvis Collegiate Institute. The Jarvis Collegiate Institute was the first public high school in Toronto and has

<sup>101</sup> CIVIX, "Student Vote 2015; the results", CIVIX, 2018. Accessed 4 July 2018 from <<http://studentvote.ca/federal2015>>.

<sup>102</sup> CIVIX, "Student Vote 2015; the results", CIVIX, 2018. Accessed 4 July 2018 from <<http://studentvote.ca/federal2015>>.

<sup>103</sup> CIVIX, "Student Vote 2015", CIVIX, 2018. Accessed 4 July 2018 from <<http://studentvote.ca/federal2015>>.

<sup>104</sup> Elections Canada, "About Elections Canada", Elections Canada, Gattineau, 2018. Accessed 4 July 2018 from <<http://www.elections.ca/content.aspx?section=abo&lang=e&document=index>>.

a long tradition of academic excellence and student involvement. Michael Harvey, Jarvis Collegiate Institute’s principal, told the committee that Jarvis is “committed to providing a rich and varied program encouraging higher order thinking as well as research and communication skills; over 90 percent of Jarvis graduates attend university”.<sup>105</sup> During the meeting with the Jarvis Collegiate Institute the committee met Anastasia Gotus, the Institute’s Curriculum Leader, Social Sciences. She advised that the Institute and teachers were committed to providing Student Vote alongside their regular suite of civics education programs, and that it provided an important inquiry-based form of learning about elections based on practice. The teachers at the Institute were supportive of Student Vote and did not see it as a burden on their regular workload.

In Ottawa, the committee met with Canadian Teachers’ Federation (CTF) to explore directly with the Federation what teachers and educators felt about Student Vote. The CTF is a non-profit organisation and a national alliance of provincial and territorial member organisations that represent over 238,000 teachers across Canada.<sup>106</sup> CTF is also a member of Education International.

One of the themes for the evidence at the October 2017 public hearings for this inquiry was the effect of expanding Victoria’s civics education curriculum on teachers; in his submission, Dr David Zyngier noted that teachers were responsible for teaching about civics but that their workload was substantial.<sup>107</sup> The VEC noted that Passport to Democracy, the VEC’s electoral education platform, was built into the Victorian curriculum but that its implementation in schools was dependant on schools ‘buying in’ individually. The CTF told the committee that the organisation’s members supported Student Vote and were prepared to build extra time into their curriculum planning and teaching to offer the service.

#### Effect on Student Vote on encouraging political literacy in Canada

Given declining rates of political interest reported by the AES and the Canadian Election Study – the committee held discussions with Professor Andre Blais, lead investigator on the Canadian Election Study – the committee learnt that Student Vote has had a positive impact on political literacy and knowledge amongst the families of children who vote using Student Vote. Elections Canada told the committee that results from their evaluation of Student Vote at the 2015 general election found that “over 90 percent of parents reported an increase in their own political interest and knowledge as a result of their child’s participation in the program”.<sup>108</sup> Parents stated that the program provided their family with more opportunities to learn about and discuss politics. Among parents who voted, 28 percent reported that their child’s participation in Student Vote positively affected their decision to vote”.<sup>109</sup>

105 Jarvis Collegiate Institute, “About”, Toronto District School Board, Toronto, 2018. Accessed 4 July 2018 from <<http://www.tdsb.on.ca/Find-your/Schools/schno/5520>>.

106 Canadian Teachers Federation, “About CTF”, Canadian Teachers Federation, 2018. Accessed 4 July 2018 from <<https://www.ctf-fce.ca/en/Pages/About/CTF-Working-for-Teachers.aspx>>.

107 Dr David Zyngier, *Submission No.1*.






108 Malatest, “Student Parallel Election Program (Student Vote) Evaluation”, Prepared for Elections Canada, 2016, p.7.

109 Malatest, “Student Parallel Election Program (Student Vote) Evaluation”, Prepared for Elections Canada, 2016, p.7.






## Results

The committee noted the results of Student Vote at the 2011 Canadian general election. Figure 3.7 shows the results of the 2011 Canadian general election for the general vote and the Student Vote. CIVIX and Samara also noted to the committee that Student Vote had developed a reputation amongst political analysts and the broadcast media for ‘predicting’ electoral results.

**Figure 3.7** Results, 2011 Canadian federal election, general vote versus Student Vote

FEDERAL VOTE RESULTS			
PARTY	SEAT COUNT	VOTE COUNT	POPULAR VOTE PERCENT
 Conservative	167	5 832 401	39.6%
 NDP	102	4 508 474	30.6%
 Libéral	34	2 783 175	18.9%
 green <small>party of canada</small>	1	576 221	3.9%
 BLOC <small>QUÉBÉCOIS</small>	4	889 788	6.0%
Other	-	130 521	0.9%
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>308</b>	<b>14 720 580</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

STUDENT VOTE RESULTS			
PARTY	SEAT COUNT	VOTE COUNT	POPULAR VOTE PERCENT
 Conservative	128	150 636	30.8%
 NDP	113	127 007	26.0%
 Libéral	48	97 359	19.9%
 green <small>party of canada</small>	5	84 848	17.4%
 BLOC <small>QUÉBÉCOIS</small>	5	5 836	1.2%
Other	-	23 469	4.8%
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>299</b>	<b>489 155</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

Source: Youth Central, “Student Vote versus general federal vote results, 2011 general election”, Youth Central, May 2011. Accessed 5 July 2018 from <<https://www.youthareawesome.com/student-vote-vs-federal-election-results>>.

## Evaluation

Elections Canada also informed the committee about an evaluation of Student Vote it commissioned following the 2015 Canadian federal election. Findings indicated that students, teachers and parents all felt that Student Vote increased their political knowledge and knowledge of Canada’s democracy and electoral system. Specifically;

- Student Vote “had a limited impact on teacher outcomes. There were no pre-/ post-program differences with respect to teachers on knowledge of, or interest in, politics”.<sup>110</sup>
- As noted earlier, over 90 percent of parents reported an increase in their own political interest and knowledge as a result of their child’s participation in the program. Parents further stated that the program provided their family with more opportunities to learn about and discuss politics. Among parents who voted, 28 percent reported that their child’s participation in the Student Vote Program (SVP) positively affected their decision to vote.<sup>111</sup>
- Parents and teachers were “clear in their perceptions of the impact of Student Vote on political discussion and student engagement. The majority of parents indicated that Student Vote had motivated their child(ren) to discuss politics more”.<sup>112</sup>

The committee also notes that several organisations discussed the link between experiential learning and positive electoral outcomes via Student Vote.

### United States

The committee also notes there is a range of state-level student vote / mock election programs in the United States.

KidsVoting USA is one of the largest providers of mock election services. The organisation is a “nonpartisan, grassroots-driven voter education program committed to creating lifelong voting habits in children, increasing family communication about citizenship, and encouraging greater adult voter turnout”.<sup>113</sup> KidsVoting USA has affiliate organisations in each of the 50 states which are administratively responsible for mock elections in schools and providing support and material to teachers to conduct mock elections.<sup>114</sup>

In addition to KidsVoting USA, FairVote USA, a nonpartisan organisation advocating for voting and electoral reforms in the United States, advises that many states run student vote programs through their Secretary of State and Justice Departments.

### Committee’s view – Student Vote, Canada

Throughout this inquiry, the committee has examined various models of providing instruction on democracy, elections and other parliamentary democracy in schools. The VEC’s Passport to Democracy program is an active citizenship program which encourages secondary school students, senior VCAL students and primary-aged students to consider community-based issues important to them, teaching skills around voting and elections with an issue picked by students. As noted earlier, the AEC also offers an experiential program for electoral education.

<sup>110</sup> Malatest, “Student Parallel Election Program (Student Vote) Evaluation”, Prepared for Elections Canada, 2016, p.6.

<sup>111</sup> Malatest, “Student Parallel Election Program (Student Vote) Evaluation”, Prepared for Elections Canada, 2016, p.7.

<sup>112</sup> Malatest, “Student Parallel Election Program (Student Vote) Evaluation”, Prepared for Elections Canada, 2016, p.7.

<sup>113</sup> Kids Voting USA, “About Us”, Kids Voting USA, 2018. Accessed 5 July 2018 from <<https://www.kidsvotingusa.org/about-us>>.

<sup>114</sup> Kids Voting USA, “About Us”, Kids Voting USA, 2018. Accessed 5 July 2018 from <<https://www.kidsvotingusa.org/about-us>>.



Parallel voting programs like New Zealand's Kids Vote program and Canada's Student Vote program offer a point of difference to Passport to Democracy because the election is held using real candidates and real issues. The committee notes that running a parallel election to foster interest by young people in formal electoral processes, gives them the opportunity to vote in a 'proper' election and has been remarkably successful in Canada. Evaluation programs by Elections Canada have directly linked participation in Student Vote to electoral participation and encouraging political literacy and voting amongst families; as noted earlier, these factors are highly predictive of voter turnout. While Passport to Democracy encourages similar attributes, these outcomes are arguably superior under a parallel election program, and would certainly meet the criteria set by some inquiry participants, such as the Youth Affairs Council Victoria, to provide young people with 'real' opportunities to participate in formal political processes and elections.

Despite learning a great deal about the benefits of parallel elections for encouraging youth electoral participation and political literacy, the committee nevertheless continues to support the VEC's roll out of Passport to Democracy in Victorian schools. The committee notes that it would be impractical, and likely cost prohibitive, for the VEC to abandon Passport to Democracy in favour of a parallel election program. However, the committee strongly encourages the VEC to work closely with CIVIX, Elections Ontario and Elections Canada to understand more about Student Vote, with a view to migrating Passport to Democracy towards a parallel election platform as a complementary education program into the future.

The committee also notes that Student Vote has helped foster awareness amongst young Canadians about voting procedures and the process of voting. CIVIX told the committee that one of the key successes of Student Vote is that it replicates the polling place experience seen at polling places for Canadian general elections, and that this helped lessen the experiential barriers associated with voting that many first time electors cite as a deterrent to electoral participation. Accordingly, while the committee currently supports the continuation of Passport to Democracy, the committee also believes there is scope for the VEC to support elections that already happen in Victorian schools, such as elections for prefects and school councils, as part of a strategy to promote electoral participation amongst young Victorians. As the principal provider of electoral education in Victoria, the VEC should work closely with the Department of Education and Training to provide voting collateral for student representative positions for school council elections that replicate, as far as practicable, the experience of voting at a polling place at a Victorian state election. Materials should include ballot boxes, ballot booths and other election collateral; as part of this process the VEC should collaborate with CIVIX to learn more about what Student Vote resources and materials have been successful.

Another key message from this inquiry is that providing support for teachers is pivotal to the success of any student election program. CIVIX advised the committee about its Democracy Bootcamp program that offered support to Student Vote. Democracy Bootcamp is a professional development conference for teachers that explores the themes of democracy, government and elections, and better acquaints participants with political issues. The committee acknowledges that the VEC provides resources and support to teachers as part of Passport to Democracy. However, the committee sees benefit in the VEC adopting a similar approach to CIVIX in relation to Student Vote, in that Democracy Bootcamp is an interactive event which brings teachers together to discuss the resources and share opinions about Student Vote. As shown in Chapter Five, educators value opportunities to meet in person to discuss professional development opportunities linked to parliaments, civics and electoral participation.

**RECOMMENDATION 2:** The committee recommends the Victorian Electoral Commission learn more about CIVIX’s parallel election program Student Vote, with a view to integrating, over time, the practice and principles of a parallel election into Passport to Democracy.

**RECOMMENDATION 3:** The committee recommends the Victorian Electoral Commission work with the Department of Education and Training to provide material support for elections for student representative positions for school council elections in Victorian schools in the form of election collateral that reflects, as far as practicable, election material used at Victorian state elections.

**RECOMMENDATION 4:** The committee recommends the Victorian Electoral Commission, in connection with Passport to Democracy, hold professional development sessions for teachers who are using Passport to Democracy resources in their classrooms.

## 3.5 Evidence from Victoria about civics and electoral education

During the inquiry several inquiry participants provided evidence and proposals focused on Victoria’s civics and electoral education programs. The major themes in the evidence were;

- Evidence about the VEC’s Passport to Democracy program;
- Potential improvements to the teaching foundations of Victoria’s civics education curriculum;
- Evidence about how to engage young people in electoral processes, focusing on non-education based mechanisms;
- Professional training resources for teachers involved in civics and electoral education; and
- Proposals to allow students to vote in Victorian schools.

### 3.5.1 Evidence about Passport to Democracy

#### Victorian Electoral Commission

As noted in Chapter Two, Passport to Democracy, established in 2006, is an active citizenship education program, which provides humanities, Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning (VCAL) and primary school students with a positive experience of democracy.

As part of the inquiry the VEC provided a submission detailing the rationale for Passport to Democracy. The VEC advised that it has developed an “Enduring Framework for the Design, Implementation and Evaluation of Electoral Education and Awareness Programs (2014-2018). This framework covers the scope of the VEC’s work on public awareness in the period prior to elections, in addition to its grassroots education and community engagement work”.<sup>115</sup> As part of the framework, a Community Education and Electoral Inclusion Strategy 2017-2019, “sits under the

<sup>115</sup> Victorian Electoral Commission, *Submission 12a*, p.p.3-5.

high level framework, and is designed to target, deliver and evaluate education and inclusion programs and services". Passport to Democracy forms part of the VEC's year-round, deep engagement priorities.

The committee notes that the VEC did not offer specific recommendations about Passport to Democracy. However, in its submission, the VEC highlighted two recent extensions to the Passport to Democracy program implemented during the 2016 Victorian local government election cycle. These were; Partner Up and Be the Change.

Partner Up is a sequence of hands-on learning activities, launched in June 2016 in response to teacher demand for PTD activities aimed at senior students. According to the VEC;

"...it guides VCAL11 students to form community-based partnerships. Students are prompted to contact and partner with local councils and community organisations, to jointly implement a community...[In addition] Be the Change is an online game where players select from a number of democratic actions to achieve positive change in their local community. Actions include raising awareness, consulting, standing for nomination in elections, and more. This gameplay aims to equip young players with knowledge of practical ways to participate in Victoria's democratic landscape, and particularly highlights how direct electoral involvement, including voting and engaging with (or becoming) representatives, shapes communities".<sup>116</sup>

Several inquiry participants also commended the Passport to Democracy program. The Youth Affairs Council Victoria thanked the VEC for its focus on electoral education both in its submission and at the public hearings, calling Passport to Democracy a "strong resource encouraging active citizenship".<sup>117</sup> The Women's Electoral Lobby of Victoria welcomed Passport to Democracy in its submission.

### Evidence about saturation amongst schools

At the public hearings the committee and the VEC discussed how many schools in Victoria were using Passport to Democracy.

Alex Markham, Manager, Education and Inclusion, VEC told the committee that 185 separate education providers used the resource to October 2017. Ms Markham also advised that;

"Schools will download the resource, and it is used in different ways. As we know, civics education is delivered in very different ways in schools. Some schools will deliver it over a whole term, other schools will deliver it over a number of weeks, and some schools might do it in one day at the end of term".<sup>118</sup>

In its submission, the Youth Affairs Council also discussed Passport to Democracy's roll out numbers in Victorian schools. The Council said it was unsure about the current number of Victorian schools that use Passport's resources.<sup>119</sup>

On 14 December 2017, Warwick Gately AM, Victorian Electoral Commissioner, wrote to the committee to advise figures about the number of schools using Passport to Democracy resources following a question on notice at the 24 October 2017 public

<sup>116</sup> Victorian Electoral Commission, *Submission 12a*, p.7.

<sup>117</sup> Youth Affairs Council Victoria, *Submission No.9*, p.3.

<sup>118</sup> Alex Markham, Manager, Inclusion and Education, Victorian Electoral Commission, *Transcript of Evidence*, 24 October 2017, p.5.

<sup>119</sup> Youth Affairs Council Victoria, *Submission No.9*, p.4.

hearings. In 2017 VEC officers delivered 51 incursions in the form of a mock election to 3,212 primary and secondary students, or less than 0.5 percent of Victorian school students. This was an increase on 2016's figures, when 30 incursions were delivered to 1,492 students.<sup>120</sup> The VEC attributes this to the location of civics and citizenship in the Victorian Curriculum. Mr Gately also advised that in 2017, the Passport to Democracy website received 48,780 unique page views, a 41 percent increase on 2016.<sup>121</sup>

### Committee's view – Passport to Democracy

The committee supports comments from the VEC and other inquiry participants that direct provision of electoral education in schools is the most effective strategy to increase awareness amongst young people of the electoral process, how to vote and their rights and responsibilities to vote in periodic Australian and Victorian elections. Wherever possible, the committee encourages the VEC to roll out Passport to Democracy to as many Victorian schools as possible. Taking the approach recommended by the Victorian Auditor-General in the Auditor-General's 2016 performance audit of the VEC, the committee recommends these activities be benchmarked against a clear performance standard, so that the VEC and the Parliament can publicly monitor and evaluate Passport to Democracy's effectiveness and coverage in Victorian schools.

The committee also acknowledges that the Electoral Matters Committee has previously encouraged the VEC to expand Passport to Democracy's coverage in Victorian schools. As part of its final report into the future of Victoria's electoral administration in 2014, the then Electoral Matters Committee recommended that "the provision of civics education to primary and secondary students in Victoria be considered a priority by the Victorian Government and the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, in order to ensure that young Victorians develop positive attitudes and perceptions about the value of participation in electoral processes, and their role as citizens in an increasingly globalised world".<sup>122</sup> The committee's recommendation in this report builds on the Electoral Matters Committee's longstanding commitment to, and support for, direct electoral education in Victorian schools across the 56th, 57th and 58th Parliaments.

**RECOMMENDATION 5:** The committee recommends the Victorian Electoral Commission provide Passport to Democracy resources to all Victorian schools.

**RECOMMENDATION 6:** The committee recommends the Victorian Electoral Commission set an annual performance target for increasing the number and percentage of Victorian schools using Passport to Democracy resources as part of their civics education curricula. This target should be included in the VEC's Community Education and Electoral Inclusion Strategy 2017-2019 and the VEC's annual report to Parliament.

## 3.5.2 Potential improvements to Victoria's civics curriculum

During the inquiry some inquiry participants proposed general, teaching-based improvements to the provision of civics education in Australia, and Victorian schools.

<sup>120</sup> Warwick Gately AM, Victorian Electoral Commissioner, *Correspondence*, 14 December 2017, p.1.

<sup>121</sup> Warwick Gately AM, Victorian Electoral Commissioner, *Correspondence*, 14 December 2017, p.1.

<sup>122</sup> Parliament of Victoria, Electoral Matters Committee, "Inquiry into the future of Victoria's electoral administration", Parliament of Victoria, March 2014, p.90.

In his submission, Dr David Zyngier, Senior Lecturer, Monash University, called for a more holistic approach to civics education in Australia that emphasised the skills required for young people to become ‘good’ citizens. He called for a “more holistic and dynamic approach—pedagogical, experiential, political, social, economic and cultural—is a necessary step to attaining a more decent society—to produce citizens who are engaged, critical, and productive agents of positive change”.<sup>123</sup> Dr Zyngier supports civics education but argues that it should focus on social justice, and ensuring that students should be taught about the critical role they play in the democratic process and how participation can lead to positive democratic and social outcomes.

Dr Zyngier specifically recommended a civics program based on several principles;

- A revised curriculum based on social justice as part of the democratic process;
- A move away from viewing students as insecure “objects” to agentive “subjects”;
- Understanding and promoting democracy at both super-structural and microstructural levels;
- Centralising the participation of “critical citizens” in the process of becoming more democratic;
- Working for both conceptual and practical understandings of democracy in schools;
- Furthering the awareness of the power of “reflection-action” and praxis;
- The generation of contextual teaching spaces; and
- Analysis of mass-media as part of political/democratic literacy.<sup>124</sup>

### Committee’s view

The committee thanks Dr Zyngier for his evidence. The committee acknowledges that civics education is a complex area involving various teaching methods which encompass more than just electoral education and an understanding of how Australian and Victorian governments work and how to enrol and vote. However, it would not be appropriate for the committee to recommend changes to Victoria’s current civics program based on Dr Zyngier’s research around social justice given that the committee’s purview for this inquiry specifically relates to electoral education. As described earlier in this chapter, the committee’s focus on electoral education is also predicated on improving young people’s rates of electoral enrolment and voter turnout.

## 3.5.3 Engaging young people through civics and electoral education

### Non-school education mechanisms for encouraging young people to vote

Some inquiry participants told the committee that the VEC and the Parliament could help encourage young people to enrol and vote outside of traditional education communities.

<sup>123</sup> Dr David Zyngier, *Submission No.1*, p.3; p.26.

<sup>124</sup> Dr David Zyngier, *Submission No.1*, p.26.

In its submission, the Youth Affairs Council Victoria discussed the success of online and public relations-based campaigns to attract young people to vote;

“...In the past, campaigns of interest have included the 2013 “Rock Enrol” campaign, where the Australian Electoral Commission worked with [T]riple J to promote voting enrolment at live music festivals, and ran media campaigns through [T]riple J radio and website, answering young people’s questions about enrolling and voting. This built on the 2012 “Count Me In” campaign (AEC) which used a Facebook birthday campaign to promote enrolment to young people turning 18. ‘Count Me In’ prompted 37,180 enrolment transactions”.<sup>125</sup>

In 2016 the Youth Affairs Council Victoria, in partnership with the Victorian Government, also ran youth forums in 12 communities, engaging 472 young people. One recommendation made by the participants was that schools provide greater training in “life skills”, including how to engage with elections and vote.<sup>126</sup>

The value of providing non-school opportunities for electoral engagement was summarised by the League of Women Voters’ of Victoria submission, who discussed how some young people have responded well to non-school events where they are introduced to Victorian parliamentary and government processes. The League of Women Voters noted:

“In 2011 the League of Women Voters arranged a morning program for Year 8 and 9 students at the Parliament to celebrate the 100th anniversary of women voting for the first time in a Victorian State election, with the participation from six government secondary schools – Brauer College (Warrnambool), Buckley Park, Caroline Springs (Creekside), Elwood College, Preston Girls Secondary College, and Melton Secondary College... this [enables] a fuller range of young people to participate in elector information programs, so as draw on their capacity to educate others”.<sup>127</sup>

The League of Women Voters’ submission also mentioned the ‘My Vote, My Voice’ event held at the Parliament of Victoria. This is an annual event organised by National Council of Women of Victoria with the support of a number of its affiliate organisations. Students from Victorian schools are invited to list themselves to make brief three-minute presentations on the theme of the day, ‘My Vote, My Voice’, to an invited audience of students of diverse backgrounds, community members and the League of Women Voters’ panel of eminent women.<sup>128</sup> The submission noted that one goal of the event is to help “students who attend – as speakers, and as audience - ...to better grasp the intricacies of our democratic system, and that the others in attendance will have an opportunity to reflect on the assertion that ‘Gen Y’ and ‘Gen Next’ are disinterested in the democratic process”.<sup>129</sup> A number of Civics and Citizenship awards are made to individuals and school teams judged by the Panel to have made outstanding contributions to the event.

### Committee’s view – non-school education mechanisms

Referring to Dr Zyngier’s research, the VEC’s evidence to the inquiry and prevailing findings in the political science literature about what motivates young people to enrol and vote, the committee recognises that young people are not apathetic about politics in general, just formal political institutions and electoral processes.

<sup>125</sup> Youth Affairs Council Victoria, *Submission No.9*, p.2.

<sup>126</sup> Youth Affairs Council Victoria, *Submission No.9*, p.2.

<sup>127</sup> League of Women Voters, *Submission No.10*, p.p.9-10.

<sup>128</sup> League of Women Voters, *Submission No.10*, p.11.

<sup>129</sup> League of Women Voters, *Submission No.10*, p.11.

Events like ‘Rock Enrol’ and ‘Count Me In’, and the League of Women Voters’ celebration at Parliament House, draw young people into the democratic process in a practical, non-classroom based way. Research completed by the VEC, the AEC and other Australian electoral commissions suggests that making politics relevant to young people in non-traditional ways might stimulate interest in elections.

In this area, the committee acknowledges that making democracy relevant can help stimulate interest in what can be seen as old-fashioned electoral processes. In 2014 the VEC advised the then Electoral Matters Committee that it wished to discontinue the Election Night Tally Room due to lack of public interest, cost and the preference of television broadcasters, such as the ABC, to establish their own facility. In response to the VEC’s recommendation, the then committee recommended that Election Night held many important traditions associated with Victoria’s democratic practice, and that the VEC should, if it discontinued the Tally Room, establish an alternative place to celebrate Victoria’s democracy on Election Night at Federation Square. In place of the Tally Room, the VEC hosted a public event at Federation Square. A professional events company (RBK Productions) was contracted to organise the event. The event commenced at 6.30 pm and ran through to 10.30 pm in terms of activity, which included street performers, a cover band, a coffee cart and live crosses to election coverage on the ABC on the giant screen in Federation Square. Several thousand members of the public attended the event, some for brief periods of time and some staying longer to enjoy the entertainment and coverage – up to the concession and acceptance speeches. The event organiser recorded many positive comments in relation to the event, and the VEC has committed to host the event again at the 2018 Victorian state election.

For the committee, this policy initiative demonstrates that interest in electoral processes can be encouraged, and reinvigorated, by new public engagement approaches.

**RECOMMENDATION 7:** The committee recommends the Victorian Electoral Commission, and the Victorian Government, explore non-school based opportunities to promote electoral engagement, including working with relevant peak organisations such as the Youth Affairs Council Victoria.

### 3.5.4 Professional resources for civics teachers

Several inquiry participants gave evidence about resources available to teachers of civics and electoral education in Victoria.

In its submission, the VEC outlined its professional development program for teachers;

“The Passport Program is supplemented by civics and citizenship professional development, which is delivered to teachers and pre-service teachers through the Civics and Citizenship Network, the Victorian Applied Learning Association and the Geography Teachers Association of Victoria on an annual basis. It also includes networks such as Koori Education Coordinators and Local Learning and Employment Networks”.<sup>130</sup>

In addition, the second component of Dr David Zyngier’s submission documented findings from his research into what teachers think about democracy, and how this relates to how they teach civics. The research is based on a case study of teachers

<sup>130</sup> Victorian Electoral Commission, *Submission No.12a*, p.p.7-8.

collected over a period of 5 years (2009, 2011, 2013) from a number of teachers in a variety of public schools across Victoria, primary and secondary, urban and rural high and low income areas. Dr Zyngier found that “voting and elections were seen as an essential defining component of democracy by 92 percent of the respondents. While 8 percent thought that the electoral system and voting was somewhat important no participants believed that voting was an unimportant part of democracy”.<sup>131</sup> On this basis, he argues for greater resources for civics-based education.

### 3.5.5 Proposal to allow students to vote in Victorian schools

In its submission, Victorian Trades Hall Council suggested that allowing students to vote on school grounds could help stimulate young people’s voter turnout. The submission noted that “a program that included VEC staff visiting secondary schools in the week before Election Day would ensure that all students who had just turned 18 would be able to cast their ballot”. According to Victorian Trades Hall Council, this is likely to significantly reduce absenteeism amongst the cohort who are generally less engaged in the electoral process and as a result less likely to go out of their way to attend a voting place”.<sup>132</sup>

The committee explored the administrative and logistical issues associated with voting in schools with representatives from Victorian Trades Hall Council at the public hearings on 24 October 2017. Wil Stracke, Industrial and Campaigns Officer, Victorian Trades Hall Council, said that a potential school voting booth would not operate in the same way as a regular polling centre;

“I am assuming you would have to, surely, in the same way that you do in hospitals. What you do in hospitals, for example, is you do not actually have the full shebang. What you have are the how-to-vote cards. So what you do is you have the booth and you have the political parties’ how-to-vote cards. You have them available so that people understand how they actually complete their ballot paper to ensure that it is a formal vote. So whether you take everybody out there — probably not. I would envisage it running a little bit like the hospital booths, where you have the materials and you have a VEC person who is there to oversee and make sure that it is done appropriately”.<sup>133</sup>

To the committee’s knowledge, no other Western democracy establishes voting services for eligible school students during an election period.

The committee also discussed the limitations of establishing polling places at Victorian schools, particularly in terms of resource limitations on the VEC. Ms Fiona Patten MLC said:

“I am going back to the bussing in of students at 400 high schools around the state. It is one thing to be going around to nursing homes and hospitals because the numbers are not to quite that level, but bringing students on an excursion to early polling, you might have to put some sausages on. I like the idea of that fear of missing out and I like the idea of seeing your peers do something, and I think there is something really good about that, but I think trying to get the VEC around to over 400 schools might be a bit of a challenge in the three-week early polling period that they have”.<sup>134</sup>

<sup>131</sup> Dr David Zyngier, *Submission No.1*, p.p.2-4.

<sup>132</sup> Victorian Trades Hall Council, *Submission No.4*, p.6.

<sup>133</sup> Wil Stracke, Industrial and Campaigns Officer, Victorian Trades Hall Council, *Transcript of Evidence*, 24 October 2017, p.6.

<sup>134</sup> Fiona Patten MLC, *Transcript of Evidence*, 24 October 2017, p.7.



# 4 Non-systemic methods to reduce informal voting in Victorian state parliamentary elections

As introduced in Chapter Two, informal voting has increased slightly at Victorian state elections over the past two decades. During the 58th Parliament and this inquiry, the committee learnt that informal voting has been increasing at Victorian state elections since 1999. Informal voting for the Legislative Assembly has increased at every Victorian state election since the 1999 Victorian state election. The rate of informal voting at the 2014 Victorian state election for the Legislative Assembly was 5.22 percent, the highest rate ever recorded for a Legislative Assembly election.<sup>135</sup>

During this inquiry, the committee evaluated methods to reduce informal voting based on non-systemic methods, such as community engagement and voter education; this chapter specifically discusses evidence the committee received about methods to reduce informal voting which do not involve changes to Victoria's voting system. However, this is not the first time the committee has considered the upward trend in informal voting in the 58th Parliament. The committee evaluated changes to the voting system for the Legislative Assembly and Legislative Council in order to reduce intentional and unintentional informal voting. As noted in Chapter Three, the committee agreed to monitor changes to the Senate voting system during the inquiry into 2014 Victorian state election and met with the AEC in September 2017 to discuss these matters. In addition, during its inquiry into electronic voting, the committee evaluated the potential for various models of remote electronic voting, including NSW's iVote system, to reduce informal voting in that these systems warn electors that they are about to cast an informal vote.<sup>136</sup>

As briefly discussed in Chapter Two and more fully in this chapter, many Victorians attempt to cast a valid vote at Victorian state elections but fail to do so. Since 2006, the VEC has conducted research into the causes of informal voting at Victorian state elections, using ballot data from informal ballot papers to compile a list of several determinants of both intentional and unintentional informal voting. Intentional informal voting correlates with social exclusion, age and disinterest in electoral politics, whereas the VEC's 2014 report into the 2014 Victorian state election found that "districts with high proportions of ballot papers incorrectly marked with ticks and crosses correlates to high proportions of residents speaking languages other than English".<sup>137</sup> This chapter explores evidence about both types of informal voting.

The chapter firstly defines informal voting and outlines the incidence of informal voting at Victorian state elections focussing separately on the Legislative Assembly and Legislative Council, and the committee's previous work in this area. It then

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<sup>135</sup> Parliament of Victoria, Electoral Matters Committee, "Inquiry into the 2014 Victorian state election", Parliament of Victoria, Melbourne, May 2016, p.18.

<sup>136</sup> Parliament of Victoria, Electoral Matters Committee, "Inquiry into electronic voting", Parliament of Victoria, Melbourne, May 2017.

<sup>137</sup> Victorian Electoral Commission, "Report to Parliament on 2014 Victorian state election", Victorian Electoral Commission, Melbourne, September 2015, p.ii

discusses research findings from the VEC and other Australian jurisdictions about the causes and trends in intentional and unintentional informal voting. The chapter then addresses evidence from inquiry participants focusing on these research areas.

## 4.1 Definition of informal voting

In Victoria, the Legislative Assembly electoral system is full preferential voting. Electors must number all preferences on their ballot paper, in consecutive numerical order, in order for the ballot paper to be deemed formal.

Voting for the Legislative Council, electors may place the number 1 in the square in relation to the group for which the elector votes as first preference or the number 1 opposite the name of the candidate for whom the elector votes as first preference and at least the numbers 2, 3, 4 and 5 opposite the names of the remaining candidates so as to indicate by unbroken numerical sequence the order of preference of contingent votes. If an elector has marked a tick or cross in a square printed on a ballot-paper in relation to a group, the voter is taken to have placed the number 1 in the square.

Any ballot paper that is completed outside the parameters of the formality rules set out in legislation is considered informal.

In Victoria s93 and s93A of the *Electoral Act 2002* (Vic) determine the formality rules for Legislative Assembly and Legislative Council ballot papers, and additional provisions determining whether a ballot paper will be accepted or excluded from an election count.

## 4.2 Incidence of informal voting at Victorian state elections

Informal voting at Victorian state elections is best analysed by separating the Legislative Assembly figures from the Legislative Council figures, given the different voting systems for each House. The committee also reported these figures during its inquiry into the 2014 Victorian state election.

### 4.2.1 Legislative Assembly

The rate of informal voting for the Legislative Assembly has increased at every Victorian state election since the 1999 Victorian state election. Figure 4.1 shows rates of informal voting for the Legislative Assembly at Victorian state elections since 1999. The rate of informal voting at the 2014 Victorian state election for the Legislative Assembly was 5.22 percent, the highest rate ever recorded for a Legislative Assembly election, or a 0.26 percent increase compared to the rate of informal voting for the Legislative Assembly at the 2010 Victorian state election.<sup>138</sup>

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<sup>138</sup> Parliament of Victoria, Electoral Matters Committee, "Inquiry into the 2014 Victorian state election", Parliament of Victoria, Melbourne, May 2016, p.18.

**Figure 4.1** Informal voting at Victorian state elections, 1999-2014

Source: Victorian Electoral Commission, "Report to Parliament on 2014 Victorian state election", Victorian Electoral Commission, Melbourne, September 2015, p.ii.

#### 4.2.2 Legislative Council

Since the introduction of proportional representation in 2006, informal voting in the Legislative Council has always been lower than in the Legislative Assembly. The rate of informal voting at the 2014 Victorian state election was 3.43 percent, an increase of 0.05 percent compared to the 2010 Victorian state election. Figure 4.1 also lists the rate of informal voting for the Legislative Council at Victorian state elections since 1999.<sup>139</sup>

### 4.3 Trends in informal voting – findings from Victoria and other Australian jurisdictions

The committee learnt that several trends underpin informal voting, not just at Victorian state elections, but also federal and state elections in other Australian jurisdictions.

#### 4.3.1 Victoria

##### Informal ballot paper surveys

One of the major sources of information about informal voting at Victorian state elections is the VEC's informal ballot paper surveys. These surveys have been completed by the VEC since the 2006 Victorian state election. The survey allows the VEC to measure and assess the incidence of different types of informal voting across Victoria. For the first time ever, in 2014 the VEC extended this analysis to every Legislative Assembly District.<sup>140</sup>

As noted in Chapter Two, the largest category of informal District ballots at the 2014 Victorian state election were ballots that were left blank, representing 30.30 percent of all informal District ballots. The second largest category of informal District ballots were marked with a '1' only, representing 22.98 percent of informal District ballots. Other categories of informal District ballot papers included those papers which were

<sup>139</sup> Parliament of Victoria, Electoral Matters Committee, "Inquiry into the 2014 Victorian state election", Parliament of Victoria, Melbourne, May 2016, p.ii.

<sup>140</sup> Victorian Electoral Commission, "Report to Parliament on 2014 Victorian state election", Victorian Electoral Commission, Melbourne, September 2015, p.55.

informal due to an incomplete numerical sequence (9.80 percent of informal District papers) and those which were apparently informal deliberately (6.65 percent of informal District ballot papers).<sup>141</sup>

The committee notes that the results of the VEC's 2014 informal ballot paper survey reflect trends in informal voting from previous Victorian state elections. At the 2010 Victorian state election, the largest category of informal ballots, as in 2014, were informal ballots marked 'blank', representing 25 percent of all informal District ballots.<sup>142</sup> In addition, the second largest category were ballots marked with a single '1', representing 23.7 percent of all informal District ballots. Informal ballots with an incomplete numerical sequence comprised 7.4 percent of all informal District ballots.<sup>143</sup>

Overall, as noted in the committee's report on the 2014 Victorian state election, the surveys have consistently demonstrated a number of trends;

- The largest category of "informal District ballots is those that are blank. These types of ballots have been either deliberately left blank, or left blank by the elector due to some other reason;
- The percentage of ballots marked with a '1' only has decreased slightly at the past two Victorian state elections;
- The percentage of ballots that were informal due to an incorrect numerical sequence has increased at the past two Victorian state elections; and
- The average of the total proportion of ballots that could potentially be included if Victoria had a system of OPV is 33.6 percent of all informal District ballots. At the 2014 Victorian state election, this would have been 61,500 votes".<sup>144</sup>

### 4.3.2 Potential causes of informality in Victoria

As a result of the informal ballot survey, the VEC has been able to draw a number of conclusions about the potential links between informal voting and electoral, cultural and broader socio-economic factors in Victoria and Australia.

#### The number of candidates in a Legislative Assembly District

As part of its report on the 2014 Victorian state election, the VEC noted that informal voting was highest in Districts with high numbers of candidates. For instance, there were 14 candidates in Frankston District, which recorded the state's highest informal voting rate of 8.88 percent.<sup>145</sup> Tarneit District, where 10 candidates stood, also had a high informal voting rate of 8.08 percent. There was a 26 percent increase in the number of candidates for the Legislative Assembly at the 2014 Victorian state election compared to the 2010 Victorian state election.<sup>146</sup>

<sup>141</sup> Victorian Electoral Commission, "Report to Parliament on 2014 Victorian state election", Victorian Electoral Commission, Melbourne, September 2015, p.55.

<sup>142</sup> Victorian Electoral Commission, "Report to Parliament on 2014 Victorian state election", Victorian Electoral Commission, Melbourne, September 2015, p.56.

<sup>143</sup> Victorian Electoral Commission, "Report to Parliament on 2014 Victorian state election", Victorian Electoral Commission, Melbourne, September 2015, p.56.

<sup>144</sup> Parliament of Victoria, Electoral Matters Committee, "Inquiry into the 2014 Victorian state election", Parliament of Victoria, Melbourne, May 2016, p.98.

<sup>145</sup> Parliament of Victoria, Electoral Matters Committee, "Inquiry into the 2014 Victorian state election", Parliament of Victoria, Melbourne, May 2016, p.18.

<sup>146</sup> Parliament of Victoria, Electoral Matters Committee, "Inquiry into the 2014 Victorian state election", Parliament of Victoria, Melbourne, May 2016, p.18.

## Intentional

A key question in the VEC's informal ballot survey is "how many were the consequence of mistakes by voters who were trying to cast a real vote, and how many appeared to be deliberately informal".<sup>147</sup> According to the VEC's analysis of informal ballots from the 2014 Victorian state election, there was a slight decrease in the total number of apparently deliberately informal ballots, from 22.43 percent of informal votes at the 2010 Victorian state election to 19.23 percent at the 2014 Victorian state election. But when including blank ballots in the total number of apparently deliberately informal ballots – the VEC considers that the majority of blank ballots are left blank deliberately – there was a slight increase, from 47.53 percent at the 2010 Victorian state election to 49.52 percent at the 2014 Victorian state election.<sup>148</sup>

The VEC suggests that there is some commonality between Districts with a majority of deliberately informal ballot papers, based on data from 2014. In the VEC's report on the 2014 Victorian state election, the VEC noted;

"The 47 districts which had an absolute majority of deliberately informal votes were scattered across the State, including inner urban, affluent, strongly ethnic, outer suburban, regional urban and rural areas. The 16 districts where preference informal votes outnumbered the deliberately informal votes were similarly mixed".<sup>149</sup>

## Unintentional

The VEC's findings regarding unintentional informal voting suggest socio-economic factors are often correlated with unintentional informal voting. Broadly, at recent Victorian state elections, there has been a link between high rates of informal voting in Districts with a high percentage of electors from non-English speaking backgrounds; as noted by the VEC in its report to Parliament on the 2014 Victorian state election, these areas are typically located in the north, west and south-eastern suburbs of Melbourne. Dandenong District recorded an informal voting rate of 8.3 percent. St Albans District recorded an informal voting rate of 7.83 percent.<sup>150</sup>

There is also evidence that certain types of informal voting are correlated at the District-level with socio-economic factors. From the 2014 data there was a statistical relationship between ballots that were informal due to incomplete numbering and Districts with lower proportions of English-only speakers. The VEC identified this relationship at the 2010 and 2014 Victorian state elections. Similarly, in a submission to this inquiry, the VEC noted that increases in unintentional informal voting due to the use of ticks and crosses may be linked to migration;

"...increases in unintentional informal voting across some districts can be mapped against the increase in migration to these areas over a period of several State elections. The VEC's 2014 State election report suggest that districts with high proportions of ballot papers incorrectly marked with ticks and crosses correlates to high proportions of residents speaking languages other than English - perhaps a reflection of the method of voting in the countries of origin of many residents".<sup>151</sup>

<sup>147</sup> Victorian Electoral Commission, "Report to Parliament on 2014 Victorian state election", Victorian Electoral Commission, Melbourne, September 2015, p.56.

<sup>148</sup> Victorian Electoral Commission, "Report to Parliament on 2014 Victorian state election", Victorian Electoral Commission, Melbourne, September 2015, p.56.

<sup>149</sup> Victorian Electoral Commission, "Report to Parliament on 2014 Victorian state election", Victorian Electoral Commission, Melbourne, September 2015, p.56.

<sup>150</sup> Victorian Electoral Commission, "Report to Parliament on 2014 Victorian state election", Victorian Electoral Commission, Melbourne, September 2015, p.56.

<sup>151</sup> Victorian Electoral Commission, *Submission 12a*, p.26.

A 2009 report by the VEC also identified a lack of English literacy as a major barrier to formal voting, particularly amongst the Chinese and Vietnamese communities. The report noted;

“Although some migrants and refugees wish to participate, their lack of English literacy may result in incorrect completion of the ballot paper and an informal vote. This is evidenced by research into barriers to enrolment and voting in the Chinese and Vietnamese communities, which recommended in-language electoral literacy seminars in the lead up to the election, due to considerable variation amongst community in their understanding of how to indicate their preferences on a ballot paper”.<sup>152</sup>

### 4.3.3 Federal elections, Australian Electoral Commission

As noted in earlier chapters, during the inquiry the committee met with Tom Rogers, Australian Electoral Commissioner, and other staff from the AEC in September 2017. The committee discussed informal voting, amongst other matters, including the AEC’s research into informal ballot papers.

Like the VEC, the AEC has a strong interest in reducing informal voting. In a research paper analysing informal voting at the 2016 federal election, the AEC noted that the “informality rate is a key measure of democratic health, and that analysis of the levels and types of informal voting is fundamental to the AEC’s role in supporting electoral integrity”.<sup>153</sup>

Informal voting at the two most recent federal elections has decreased slightly. The rate of informal voting for the House of Representatives “decreased from 5.9 percent (811,143 informal votes) in 2013 to 5.1 percent (720,915 informal votes)”.<sup>154</sup> While the AEC notes that “volatility in informal voting means that it is difficult to reliably determine trends”, informality has increased at seven out of the twelve federal elections held since the introduction of major electoral reforms in 1984.<sup>155</sup> Figure 4.2 shows informal voting at House of Representative elections since 1925.

Further, on a state and territory basis for federal elections, Victoria has the third highest rate of informal voting. The highest rates of informal voting at the 2016 federal election were in the “Northern Territory (7.3 percent), New South Wales (6.2 percent), and Victoria (4.8 percent), while the lowest informality rates were in the Australian Capital Territory (2.8 percent), Tasmania and Western Australia (both 4.0 percent)”. Rates of informal voting also decreased in every state and territory other than the Northern Territory, where it increased by one percentage point (from 6.3 percent in 2013 to 7.3 percent in 2016).<sup>156</sup>

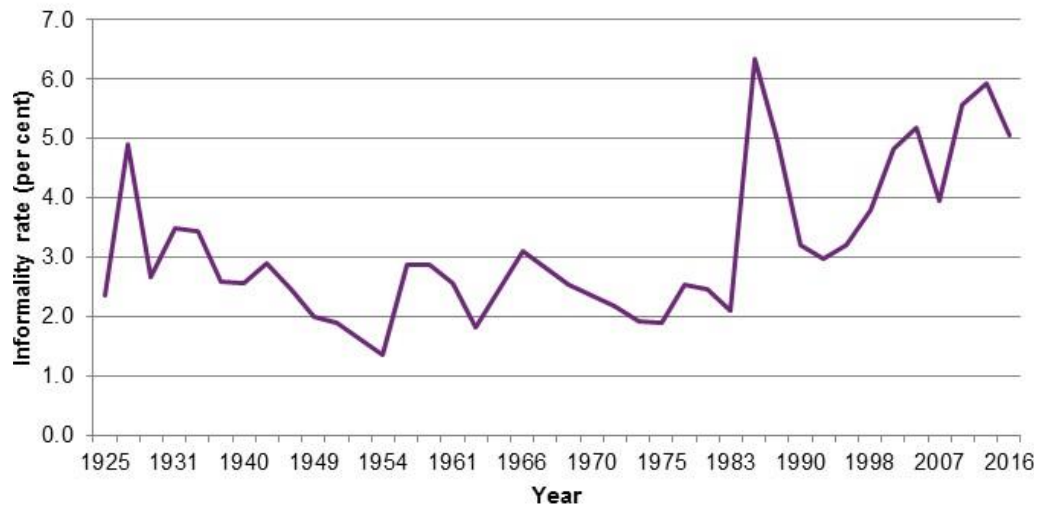
<sup>152</sup> Victorian Electoral Commission, *Submission 12a*, p.26.

<sup>153</sup> Australian Electoral Commission, Australian Electoral Commission, “Informal voting: 2016 House of Representatives elections”, Australian Electoral Commission, Canberra, 2016, p.3.

<sup>154</sup> Australian Electoral Commission, Australian Electoral Commission, “Informal voting: 2016 House of Representatives elections”, Australian Electoral Commission, Canberra, 2016, p.3.

<sup>155</sup> Australian Electoral Commission, Australian Electoral Commission, “Informal voting: 2016 House of Representatives elections”, Australian Electoral Commission, Canberra, 2016, p.3.

<sup>156</sup> Australian Electoral Commission, Australian Electoral Commission, “Informal voting: 2016 House of Representatives elections”, Australian Electoral Commission, Canberra, 2016, p.3.

**Figure 4.2** Informal voting at federal House of Representatives elections, 1925-2016

Source: Australian Electoral Commission, "Informal voting: 2016 House of Representatives elections", Australian Electoral Commission, Canberra, 2016, p.5.

### Key findings from the 2016 federal election

Many of the AEC's key findings reflect the VEC's research into what affects informal voting. The AEC also offers additional insights into the socio-economic drivers of informal voting, and the attitudinal basis for deliberate/intentional informal voting.

#### Socio-economic advantage/disadvantage

Using data from the 2013 and 2016 federal elections, the AEC has found that measures of social exclusion and disadvantage using Census data are strong predictors of informal voting at federal elections. For instance, a "correlation analysis conducted for Sydney [House of Representatives] Divisions suggested that 65 percent of the variation in informality rates was explained by relative socio-economic advantage and disadvantage".<sup>157</sup> In addition, in 2013, analyses of results from the 2013 federal election showed "that areas with higher levels of unintentional informality appeared to be associated with characteristics such as higher proportions of people speaking a non-English language at home and lower levels of educational attainment (particularly females who had not attended school)".<sup>158</sup>

The committee notes these findings reflect the VEC's informal ballot paper survey findings.

#### Candidate numbers

As in Victoria, variations in candidature numbers at the Divisional level can predict informal voting. While findings from the 2016 federal election were inconclusive, findings from the 2013 federal election "indicated that a higher number of candidates

<sup>157</sup> Australian Electoral Commission, Australian Electoral Commission, "Informal voting: 2016 House of Representatives elections", Australian Electoral Commission, Canberra, 2016, p.11.

<sup>158</sup> Australian Electoral Commission, "Informal voting: 2016 House of Representatives elections", Australian Electoral Commission, Canberra, 2016, p.11.

is likely to increase the number of ballot papers ruled informal due to non-sequential or incomplete numbering, and that voters were more likely to make an error in their numbering than they were to simply stop numbering their ballot paper”.<sup>159</sup>

#### Voter confusion about different electoral systems

The committee notes differences between state and territory and federal electoral systems may have an impact on informal voting. Using data from the 2013 federal election, the AEC found that higher proportions of ballot papers with a number ‘1’ only, or showing a tick or cross as the first preference may be influenced in part by state and territory electoral systems, notably Queensland (until 2017) and NSW where optional preferential voting is used for Legislative Assembly elections. The VEC conducted similar research following the 2006 Victorian state election, following constitutional changes introducing proportional representation for the Legislative Council. The VEC found evidence of a slight increase in informal voting in both Houses due to the change in voting systems, although this effect was stronger in the Legislative Council.<sup>160</sup>

#### Intentional informal voting and attitudes to politics and elections

The AEC’s 2016 research into informal voting suggests that “voters’ attitudes to and opinions of the electoral system or politics in general may contribute to (or even override) any of the other factors influencing unintentional informality”.<sup>161</sup> For instance, the paper cites findings from the 2016 AES – as noted in Chapter Two, the committee met with one of the AES’s chief investigators, Professor Clive Bean, in Brisbane in November 2017 – that there was a record low level of voter interest in the 2016 federal election, and record low levels of satisfaction with democracy and trust in government. The paper notes;

- Only “30 percent of respondents took a good deal of interest in the 2016 federal election, down from 33 percent in 2013, 34 percent in 2010 and 40 percent in 2007.
- 40 percent of respondents were not satisfied with democracy in Australia, the lowest level since the 1970s.
- About one in five respondents believed that who people vote for would not make any difference, up from 17 percent in 2013, 14 percent in 2010 and 13 percent in 2007”.<sup>162</sup>

### 4.3.4 New South Wales

During the inquiry, in November 2017 the committee met with John Schmidt, NSW Electoral Commissioner, to discuss informal voting amongst other matters.

In contrast to Victoria, the method of voting for the NSW Legislative Assembly is known as optional preferential voting. Optional preferential voting is a form of ‘savings provision’ because it allows some votes to be saved and admitted to the

<sup>159</sup> Australian Electoral Commission, “Informal voting: 2016 House of Representatives elections”, Australian Electoral Commission, Canberra, 2016, p.12.

<sup>160</sup> Victorian Electoral Commission, “Report to Parliament on the 2010 Victorian state election”, Victorian Electoral Commission, Melbourne, August 2011, p.79.

<sup>161</sup> Australian Electoral Commission, “Informal voting: 2016 House of Representatives elections”, Australian Electoral Commission, Canberra, 2016, p.10.

<sup>162</sup> Australian Electoral Commission, “Informal voting: 2016 House of Representatives elections”, Australian Electoral Commission, Canberra, 2016, p.10.



final election count in a preferential voting system that would otherwise be deemed informal. To cast a formal vote “for the NSW Legislative Assembly, the elector must place the number ‘1’ in the square next to their first choice candidate. They have the ‘option’ to show further preferences by placing the number ‘2’ in the square next to their second choice candidate, the number ‘3’ next to their third choice and so on. The elector may number as many or as few squares as they wish”.<sup>163</sup>

The committee closely analysed NSW’s voting system during its inquiry into the 2014 Victorian state election.

Despite the differences between Victoria and NSW’s Lower House electoral systems, the two states share some commonality in relation to trends in informal voting. Like Victoria, informal voting has increased slightly at recent NSW state elections from 3.2 percent at the 2011 NSW state election to 3.4 percent at the 2015 NSW state election.<sup>164</sup>

The NSW Electoral Commission has found a link between socio-economic factors and informal voting, despite optional preferential voting and the ostensibly ‘easier’ electoral system. According to the NSW Electoral Commission’s report on the 2015 NSW state election, nine of the ‘top ten’ Districts for informal voting (excepting Holsworthy District) had a higher than average proportion of Aboriginal or culturally and linguistically diverse residents. Six Districts also had “some of the highest informality rates in the 2011 NSW state election (Bankstown, Lakemba, Auburn, Fairfield, Liverpool and Mount Druitt), echoing the AEC’s finding that informal voting is likely linked to socio-economic disadvantage”.<sup>165</sup>

### 4.3.5 Queensland

The committee notes that the 2017 Queensland state election was the first Queensland state election to be conducted using compulsory preferential voting since 1992. Preliminary review of Queensland’s electoral results suggest that the re-introduction of preferential voting had a negative effect on formal voting, with the rate of informal voting of 4.16 percent nearly double the informal voting rate of 2.11 at the 2015 Queensland state election.<sup>166</sup> The committee also notes that some Districts saw a significant increase in informal voting at the 2017 Queensland state election; for instance, the rate of informal voting in Ipswich District increased 3.2 percent from the 2015 Queensland state election.<sup>167</sup>

The committee will continue to monitor the impact of the re-introduction of compulsory preferential voting in Queensland on rates of informal voting.

<sup>163</sup> NSW Electoral Commission, ‘Optional Preferential’, NSW Electoral Commission, NSW Government, Sydney, 2014. Accessed 30 April 2018 from <[http://www.elections.nsw.gov.au/about\\_elections/voting\\_and\\_counting\\_systems/optional\\_preferential](http://www.elections.nsw.gov.au/about_elections/voting_and_counting_systems/optional_preferential)>.

<sup>164</sup> NSW Electoral Commission, ‘Optional Preferential’, NSW Electoral Commission, NSW Government, Sydney, 2014. Accessed 30 April 2018 from <[http://www.elections.nsw.gov.au/about\\_elections/voting\\_and\\_counting\\_systems/optional\\_preferential](http://www.elections.nsw.gov.au/about_elections/voting_and_counting_systems/optional_preferential)>.

<sup>165</sup> NSW Electoral Commission, “Report on the conduct of the 2015 State General Election”, NSW Electoral Commission, NSW Government, 2011, p.19.

<sup>166</sup> Electoral Commission of Queensland, “2017 state election results”, Electoral Commission of Queensland, Brisbane, 2017. Accessed 30 April 2018 from <<https://www.ecq.qld.gov.au/elections/2017-state-general-election2/2017-state-election-results>>.

<sup>167</sup> Electoral Commission of Queensland, “2017 state election results”, Electoral Commission of Queensland, Brisbane, 2017. Accessed 30 April 2018 from <<https://www.ecq.qld.gov.au/elections/2017-state-general-election2/2017-state-election-results>>.

## 4.4 Evidence and proposals from inquiry participants focusing on non-systemic methods to reduce informal voting

During the inquiry the committee received evidence and proposals from inquiry participants related to non-systemic methods to reduce informal voting. Evidence generally addressed the broad topics of intentional and unintentional informal voting, specifically focusing on four key areas;

Intentional informal voting

- Elector attitudes to politics and elections.

Unintentional informal voting

- Socio-economic disadvantage.
- Migration and associated factors, including the impact of low levels of English literacy and unfamiliarity with Australia's voting systems.
- Increases in the number of candidates for Lower House elections.

### 4.4.1 Intentional informal voting

Several inquiry participants discussed methods to address intentional informal voting.

#### Advertising and intentional informal voting

The VEC's submission detailed how the impact of a new advertising campaign for the 2014 Victorian state election focussed on young and disengaged electors. The submission noted;

“Prior to the 2014 State election, the VEC moved to introduce a new advertising campaign. The campaign was obviously for all voters, but made particular efforts to engage young people through messaging and concepts derived from research. Research conducted for the VEC in 2013 amongst young, disengaged voters highlighted the major attitudinal barrier that they are just one person – what difference can their one vote make? They were surprised to learn of the small number of votes that had determined a number of election outcomes over the years. Comments were that they thought they would now be less likely to leave their ballot papers blank. As a result, the television advertising campaign produced for the 2014 State election (and which will be utilised again in 2018) included information about specific elections where the outcome was determined by a small number of votes and emphasised the value of every single vote”.<sup>168</sup>

A major focus of the campaign was providing information about how to vote correctly;

“Other advertisements produced for the campaign, which appeared across television, print and radio included taglines and key messaging to ensure a focus on participation and voting correctly...your vote could make a difference this Saturday

<sup>168</sup> Victorian Electoral Commission, *Submission No.12a*, p.13.

– make sure you vote correctly. Do you need assistance to vote? Election staff can help. Do you need language assistance when you vote? (this appeared in 13 different languages in ethnic media). It’s important that you vote correctly this Saturday”.<sup>169</sup>

In addition to this advertising, the VEC also conducted targeted outreach sessions focusing on Districts and areas where participation was low and informal voting high at the 2010 Victorian state election. Two hundred and forty nine community “information outreach sessions were delivered to priority community groups, 30 enrolment sessions were delivered to homelessness agencies and mobile voting services were conducted at 20 community outreach venues”.<sup>170</sup>

The Youth Affairs Council Victoria also supported using advertising as a way to disseminate knowledge about how to cast a formal vote at Victorian state elections, on the basis that young people are “not apathetic” and seek out information on how to vote correctly when they choose to participate in electoral processes.<sup>171</sup>

Similarly, the ECCV’s submission noted the potential of broadcast media, particularly television, to carry messages about how to vote formally at Victorian state elections. The ECCV recommended;

“...programs during election time would also help with short messages that focus on how to avoid casting invalid votes. For example, the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) and the Special Broadcasting Service (SBS) could deliver programs in community languages as part of ethno-specific TV programs. Similarly, local community newspapers, like ‘Leader’ that covers all of Victoria, should be used in the lead up to elections to display easily accessible information on informal voting. This is particularly important in regions where only limited assistance is available at polling centres.

That [the] VEC implements specific education and information strategies for the 2018 Victorian State election to reduce informal voting rates within vulnerable ethnic community populations, including through the provision of culturally responsive information through a range of culturally appropriate communication mediums”.<sup>172</sup>

### Committee’s view, advertising and intentional informal voting

The committee acknowledges the importance of providing clear and informed communication messages to communities who are disengaged from electoral processes, and communities who traditionally experience high levels of informal voting due to language, literacy or other cultural background. The VEC should continue to work with existing electoral advisory groups to develop education and information strategies for the 2018 Victorian state election which provide clear and unambiguous information about how to cast a formal vote at Victorian state elections.

The committee recognises that the VEC presently exceeds the Victorian Government’s guideline that all government agencies place at least five percent of its advertising placement spend on multicultural media. The VEC’s minimum is 10 percent in recognition of the compulsory nature of enrolment and voting and the multicultural nature of the Victorian community.

<sup>169</sup> Victorian Electoral Commission, *Submission No.12a*, p.13.

<sup>170</sup> Victorian Electoral Commission, *Submission No.12a*, p.13.

<sup>171</sup> Youth Affairs Council Victoria, *Submission No.9*, p.2.

<sup>172</sup> Ethnic Communities’ Council of Victoria, *Submission No.24*, p.p.3-4.

The committee also notes a recent paper by Professor Lisa Hill and Serrin Rutledge-Prior, University of Adelaide, which found that young people aged 18 to 24 are more likely to ‘waste’ their vote by voting informal intentionally given a positive correlation at the Divisional level between informal voting and Divisions with higher proportions of young people.<sup>173</sup> While these results relate to federal elections, the committee accepts that this trend is likely evident at Victorian state elections and notes that some young people see voting informally as a valid voting choice.

Understanding what young Victorians think about electoral processes, and their views about casting a valid vote, is an important step in addressing the problems identified in this chapter, in Chapter Three about young people and electoral disengagement, and Professor Hill’s and Ms. Rutledge-Prior’s paper. Accordingly, the committee encourages the VEC to conduct further research into the relationship between age and informal voting, and to include this information in its annual reporting program.

**RECOMMENDATION 8:** The committee recommends the Victorian Electoral Commission develop a detailed communication and information strategy for the 2018 Victorian state election, and future Victorian state elections, in conjunction with the relevant electoral advisory groups to disseminate information about how to cast a formal vote at Victorian state elections and in Districts with high levels of informal voting. The VEC’s strategy should focus on disengaged electors, and electors who have additional language, literacy or cultural needs for information about formal voting.

**RECOMMENDATION 9:** The committee recommends the Victorian Electoral Commission conduct further research into the relationship between age and informal voting at Victorian state elections, focusing on electoral Districts identified by the VEC as requiring particular attention. The VEC should benchmark its performance in relation to encouraging young people to cast formal votes in the VEC’s annual report to Parliament.

#### 4.4.2 Unintentional informal voting

As noted earlier, unintentional informal voting accounted for 40 percent of total informal votes at the 2014 Victorian state election. A similar proportion of informal votes at the 2016 federal election were also unintentional. Several inquiry participants discussed strategies to address unintentional informal voting.

##### Direct community engagement

The VEC’s submission discussed several initiatives designed to increase awareness of enrolment, voting and how to cast a valid vote at the 2014 Victorian state election. ‘Driving Votes’ was a multifaceted event run by the VEC;

“Driving Votes campaign consisted of a number of components – a mobile presence with a 1.5 tonne van wrapped with the 2014 campaign creative, a number of static site activities, capitalising on the larger footprint available utilising elements from the existing set from the 2010 campaign, and a website created specifically for the 2014 campaign with a competition to drive people to the website. Driving Votes resulted in over 27,000 general engagements with the public, with 2,002 of these being in-depth conversations, exceeding the target of 10,000 direct interactions with electors. Visitor feedback was overwhelmingly positive, praising the convenience factor and the

173 Hill, L. and Rutledge-Prior, S. (2016). “Young People and Intentional Informal Voting in Australia”. *Australian Journal of Political Science*. 51; 400-417.

VEC's willingness to put a public face on the electoral process. "I saw you last week in St Kilda. Good to see you're still at it. I went home and we actually discussed the election and who we were going to vote for because of you guys".<sup>174</sup>

In addition, the VEC also conducts electoral information outreach sessions for priority community groups, with an emphasis on those areas with poor participation/high informality. These "sessions focus on teaching participants about the three levels of government and the role of each level, how to enrol and how to vote correctly (practice ballot paper completion). Easy English Guides are provided to support those with literacy or English language difficulties".<sup>175</sup>

The ECCV's submission also discussed concerns around unintentional informal voting. The submission noted that;

"the issue of informal voting among culturally diverse communities continues to be a critical and persistent issue. This is the case despite the fact that election research identified that many of the apparently culturally-related factors associated with higher levels of informal voting appear to be associated with assumed unintentional informal voting".<sup>176</sup>

The key plank of the ECCV's evidence about unintentional informal voting in Victoria relates to training. The ECCV advised of the need for wider and more diverse training options to reduce informal voting by Victorians from multicultural communities. The ECCV specifically called for "targeted education campaigns which include detailed information on informal voting, which could be integrated into general state election training".<sup>177</sup> Information should also be made available in community languages. Another initiative involved training CALD community members as types of 'formal voting ambassadors'. These people would "then be employed by VEC to work as casual employees";

"For example, 'community ambassadors' from each identified target group could participate in training sessions. These participants can then be prepared to run community forums in their local communities, for example, mock voting sessions with a focus on how to avoid informal voting. Given appropriate resources, these sessions could be replicated by other community organisations and delivered at multiple community events. Importantly, community ambassadors who deliver these sessions need to be remunerated for their participation and training before and during election time. In addition, training participants should be provided with incentives for committing their time to learn about the state election process".<sup>178</sup>

### Committee's view, unintentional informal voting

During this inquiry and the throughout the 58th Parliament, the committee examined unintentional informal voting at Victorian state elections. Unintentional informal voting accounted for approximately 40 percent of informal votes at the 2014 Victorian state election and is something the VEC specifically noted as a cause for concern in their submission to the inquiry and the VEC's report to Parliament on the 2014 Victorian state election. In numerical terms, this means nearly 74,000 electors unknowingly cast an informal vote at the 2014 Victorian state election. If informal

174 Victorian Electoral Commission, *Submission No.12a*, p.15.

175 Victorian Electoral Commission, *Submission No.12a*, p.15.

176 Ethnic Communities' Council of Victoria, *Submission No.24*, p.p.4-6.

177 Ethnic Communities' Council of Victoria, *Submission No.24*, p.4.

178 Ethnic Communities' Council of Victoria, *Submission No.24*, p.p.4-7.

voting is a good measure of the health of a jurisdiction’s electoral participation, as the AEC told the committee in 2017, then Victoria needs to do more to assist people to cast a valid vote according to legislation.

Several inquiry participants advised the committee about communication and information strategies to address unintentional informal voting. Given the VEC’s concern about these matters, and the evidence the committee received during this inquiry, the committee supports the VEC’s efforts to increase public knowledge of how to cast a formal vote. Direct community engagement seems the most appropriate strategy in light of evidence from the VEC and the ECCV. The committee notes the VEC should target engagement with Districts with the greatest need.

The committee also supports the ECCV’s recommendation about ‘formal voting ambassadors’. Expanding the network of people in the Victorian CALD community who have knowledge of Victoria’s voting system is a sound idea.

**RECOMMENDATION 10:** The committee recommends the Victorian Electoral Commission work with its CALD electoral advisory group to recruit and deploy ‘formal voting ambassadors’ for the 2018 Victorian state election and future Victorian state elections. The VEC should be responsible for the funding and administration of these personnel, and the logistics of the program.

**RECOMMENDATION 11:** The committee recommends the Victorian Electoral Commission continue its Driving Votes campaign focussing on electoral Districts where electors are under-represented in the electoral process, and report these findings in the VEC’s annual report to Parliament.

# 5

## Election staffing for Victorian state parliamentary elections

Staffing is one of the VEC’s biggest logistical exercises for Victorian state elections, with the VEC hiring more than 20,000 casual electoral officials just for Election Day. As noted in Chapter Two, the VEC also maintains a pool of Senior Election Officials who are selected to fill returning officer roles for Victorian local government elections, and Election Manager roles for Victorian state elections. Overall, the VEC “aims to employ and develop people who represent the diversity of the Victorian community, demonstrate impartiality and integrity, and are committed to delivering the highest standard of professional and effective electoral services”.<sup>179</sup>

This chapter examines the VEC’s recruitment processes for both casual election officials and the Senior Election Official pool for Victorian state elections. The chapter first details the VEC’s current election staffing arrangements for casual election officials and the Senior Election Official pool, including position descriptions, roles and responsibilities and how each group is recruited. The chapter then addresses evidence received during the inquiry in two key areas; recruitment and retention, and staff training. Both sections include evidence the committee gathered in New Zealand and Canada.

### 5.1 Types of election officials in Victoria

In Victoria the VEC employs two categories of staff for Victorian state elections; election casuals and election officials who work short-term for the VEC during the state election period and staff who belong to the VEC’s Senior Election Official pool.

As noted in the VEC’s submission, election casuals are employed to undertake a short-term role for the election. The “bulk of this employment involves work in voting centres on Election Day and requires approximately 16,500 election officials for a Victorian state election. Other available casual roles may involve office work in the lead-up to Election Day and vote counting in the post-election period”.<sup>180</sup> As documented shortly, election casuals fall into two sub-categories.

Senior Election Officials (SEOs) are people appointed to management positions – Election Managers – for a full-time role of approximately nine weeks.<sup>181</sup> The VEC has around 300 SEOs available for appointment at any time. As explored below, the methods used to attract and train SEOs and other casual staff differ.

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<sup>179</sup> Victorian Electoral Commission, “Employment”, Victorian Electoral Commission, Melbourne, 2017. Accessed 11 May 2018 from <<https://www.vec.vic.gov.au/Employment/Default.html>>.

<sup>180</sup> Victorian Electoral Commission, *Submission No.12a*, p.16.

<sup>181</sup> Victorian Electoral Commission, *Submission No.12a*, p.15.

## 5.1.1 Casual election staff and election officials

Casual election officials are recruited for Victorian state elections to complete tasks in one of 15 dedicated roles. According to the VEC's guide for casual election officials, there are two sub-groups within the broader election casual classification. Election casuals are appointed to roles before, on and after Election Day, and staff may work in election offices, Region recheck centres, early voting centres and mobile voting centres. Election officials are appointed to roles in voting centres on Election Day.<sup>182</sup>

The VEC appoints election casuals for up to 15 different roles, and election officials for 12 roles. Figure 5.1 lists the position titles for casual roles and election official roles.

**Figure 5.1** Election casual and election official roles, VEC, 2018

Election casual role	Election official role
Extraction Officer (Local Govt. postal)	Voting Centre Assistant
Scrutiny Assistant (Election Office)	Support Officer (part day am)
Office Assistant L1	Count Support Officer (part day pm)
Office Assistant L2	Support Officer/Count Support Officer
Office Assistant L3	Ordinary Issuing Officer <sup>1</sup>
Early Voting Centre Officer	Enquiry/Dec/Absent Issuing Officer <sup>2</sup>
Early Voting Centre Manager	Assistant Voting Centre Manager
Mobile Voting Officer	Voting Centre Manager L1
Mobile Voting Manager	Voting Centre Manager L2
Counting Officer	Voting Centre Manager L3
Counting Team Leader	Voting Centre Manager L4
Computer Count Team Leader	Election Liaison Officer
Data Entry Operator	
Team Leader Special Projects	
Election Casual Consultant L1	
Election Casual Consultant L2	
Democracy Ambassador	

Source: Victorian Electoral Commission, "Employment guide for election casuals and officials", Victorian Electoral Commission, Melbourne, 2018, p.p.9-10.

<sup>182</sup> Victorian Electoral Commission, "Employment guide for election casuals and officials", Victorian Electoral Commission, Melbourne, 2018, p.10.



## Responsibilities and expectations of casual election staff and election officials

All casual election staff and election officials are expected, like all VEC employees, to “uphold a high degree of integrity in their conduct during their employment”.<sup>183</sup> As noted in the VEC’s employment guide for casual election officials, “the professional conduct of elections maintains the public’s trust and confidence in Victoria’s electoral processes”.<sup>184</sup>

Casual election staff are expected to uphold the VEC’s code of conduct for election casuals. The code has four key areas;

### General behaviour

Election casuals or election officials must:

- carry out duties in accordance with VEC procedures and instructions
- treat everyone equally, fairly, consistently and with respect, regardless of a person’s age, gender, disability, ethnic origin or religion
- act with openness, honesty and integrity toward all clients
- promote confidence in electoral procedures and processes
- promote inclusiveness and diversity in employment
- provide timely and responsive service and respond to customer needs
- be accessible and available and
- demonstrate high standards of communication, interpersonal skills, demeanour, punctuality and diligence.<sup>185</sup>

### Confidentiality

- honour the confidentiality of information available to them as part of their duties consistent with the VEC’s Privacy Policy
- not make any unauthorised audio, video or photographic recording inside a VEC operated venue
- only access information necessary for the successful completion of their duties and only when access to that information is authorised.

### Impartiality

- not associate with political parties, candidates or lobby groups, other than as required through the performance of their duties
- refrain from commenting on political matters
- disclose any and all interests that may impact on [their] impartiality and urgently update any previous disclosures if anything changes

<sup>183</sup> Victorian Electoral Commission, “Employment guide for election casuals and officials”, Victorian Electoral Commission, Melbourne, 2018, p.2.

<sup>184</sup> Victorian Electoral Commission, “Employment guide for election casuals and officials”, Victorian Electoral Commission, Melbourne, 2018, p.2.

<sup>185</sup> Victorian Electoral Commission, “Employment guide for election casuals and officials”, Victorian Electoral Commission, Melbourne, 2018, p.2.

- decline gifts or hospitality offered in the performance of [their] duties.<sup>186</sup>

### Social media

- consider the consequence of any comment post[ed] to social media if it becomes available to a global audience before posting the comment
- exercise extreme care when participating in social media discussions so as to not explicitly or implicitly suggest an official position of the VEC.

The VEC’s election casual employment guide contains duty statements for the 12 election official positions.<sup>187</sup>

### Disclosure of political activities

All potential employees of the VEC including election casuals and Senior Election Officials must complete a disclosure of political activities. As noted on the VEC’s website, “a justified community perception of political neutrality is critical to ensuring a high level of public trust and confidence in the independence and impartiality of the VEC”.<sup>188</sup> Accordingly, prospective employees and other appointees are asked to disclose their political memberships and activities prior to employment.

Under Section 17A of the *Electoral Act 2002* (Vic) the VEC may discriminate against a person in relation to offering employment, or appointment as a member of the Audit Committee of the VEC, on the basis of political belief or activity. This discrimination is lawful under the *Equal Opportunity Act 2010* (Vic).

All applicants are asked to declare whether they:

- are or have been a member of any political party in the State, Territory or Commonwealth in the past 15 years
- have been involved in a course of conduct within the past 15 years directed to supporting the aims of a political party or an independent candidate in a State, Territory or Federal election
- have held the office of councillor for a Victorian council within the past 15 years
- have been involved in a course of conduct directed towards supporting the political aims of a Victorian councillor within the past 15 years
- have publicly engaged in conduct promoting a political position in respect of an issue currently before the electorate in the election for which they are to be employed
- are a member of a lobby group (not being a union or professional association), which promotes a political position in respect of an issue currently before the electorate in the election for which they are to be employed.<sup>189</sup>

<sup>186</sup> Victorian Electoral Commission, “Employment guide for election casuals and officials”, Victorian Electoral Commission, Melbourne, 2018, p.2.

<sup>187</sup> Victorian Electoral Commission, “Employment guide for election casuals and officials”, Victorian Electoral Commission, Melbourne, 2018, p.p.10-12.

<sup>188</sup> Victorian Electoral Commission, “Employment guide for election casuals and officials”, Victorian Electoral Commission, Melbourne, 2018, p.5.

<sup>189</sup> Victorian Electoral Commission, “Employment”, Victorian Electoral Commission, Melbourne, 2017. Accessed 11 May 2018 from <<https://www.vec.vic.gov.au/Employment/Default.html>>.

Any declaration against points one to three will automatically exclude a person from election employment. A person may appeal against a decision by the VEC on the grounds of s17 of the *Electoral Act 2002* (Vic) by writing directly to the VEC, which has an internal process for these employment appeals, or by contacting the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal (VCAT) in the case of a request for an external review.<sup>190</sup>

### Recruitment and selection

The VEC's submission discusses how election casuals are recruited through a central database maintained by the VEC.

“The VEC maintains a database of people interested in working casually at election time. Currently there are just over 30,000 people registered on this database. Many of these people have a history of working for elections and that history is maintained within the personnel database. They are assessed each time they undertake a role and this assessment forms part of their work history...The database is populated from an online registration process and personal details are managed by each registrant via their own self-service portal. Offers of work, appointment letters and pay advice documents are all communicated electronically through each person's self-service portal. A Personnel Helpline is available year round during business hours for any staff requiring assistance with using or accessing their portal”.<sup>191</sup>

Once in the VEC's database, Election Managers for each of the 88 Legislative Assembly Districts and eight Legislative Council Regions are responsible for selecting election casuals from the VEC's database. Detailed information on how to conduct this recruitment process is included in the Election Manual provided to Election Managers during pre-election training conducted by the VEC. For instance, for the 2016 Victorian local government elections, the Election Manual for postal elections featured a chapter entitled 'Personnel' with information on recruiting, appointing, training and assessing staff.<sup>192</sup>

The Election Manual advises that to work for the VEC, a person must:

- be an Australian Citizen, or a Permanent Resident, or hold a work visa
- be a minimum of 18 years, except scrutiny assistants or extraction officers (in an election office) who must be at least 16
- have registered online through the appointments link on the VEC website.

Election Managers are given detailed steps to follow to employ casual staff using the VEC's Election Management System. Managers are advised to recruit staff from within the District, to recruit on merit and to select staff from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander backgrounds wherever possible. Similar instructions are given to Managers in Districts with high-levels of non-English speaking electors to employ casuals who speak relevant community languages.<sup>193</sup>

<sup>190</sup> Victorian Electoral Commission, "Employment", Victorian Electoral Commission, Melbourne, 2017. Accessed 11 May 2018 from <<https://www.vec.vic.gov.au/Employment/Default.html>>.

<sup>191</sup> Victorian Electoral Commission, *Submission No.12a*, p.19.

<sup>192</sup> Victorian Electoral Commission, "Election Manual – Postal, 2016 Victorian local government elections", Victorian Electoral Commission, Melbourne, 2016, p.52.

<sup>193</sup> Victorian Electoral Commission, "Election Manual – Postal, 2016 Victorian local government elections", Victorian Electoral Commission, Melbourne, 2016, p.p.52-54.

The committee understands that Election Managers are also able to draw up a report using the Election Management System of casual staff on the VEC's database who were previously employed in the District at the 2014 Victorian state election. The committee learnt there is a high turnover of election casuals in the VEC's database; approximately "one third of all staff for a major election event would be new".<sup>194</sup>

## 5.1.2 Senior Election Officials

As noted earlier and in Chapter Two, the VEC maintains a pool of approximately 300 Senior Election Officials for Victorian state elections and Victorian local government elections. Pool members are appointed to management roles during an election but the appointments are not ongoing and cease after each election.

At the 2018 Victorian state election, the roles of Election Manager, Assistant Election Manager, Region Coordinator, Assistant Region Coordinator and Election Support Officer will be appointed from the pool. An election office will be set up in each of the 88 Districts with an Election Manager and Assistant Election Manager responsible for the operation of the election within that District. These roles will "operate full-time for up to nine weeks and will also undertake intermittent responsibilities in the lead-up to the election, including reviewing proposed voting centres and sourcing a site office location for the election".<sup>195</sup>

### Recruitment and selection

Unlike election casuals, Senior Election Officials are appointed to the VEC's pool following a more rigorous recruitment process. The VEC's submission documents this process;

"Applicants undergo a rigorous recruitment and selection process in order to be included in the SEO pool. The recruitment process targets people with high level project management and people management skills that can be utilised within the election environment. Increasingly the SEO pool is required to be highly adaptable in using new technology and systems. The recruitment process, which is currently underway in preparation for the 2018 State election, focusses on testing applicants for learning agility, particularly with the use of new computer systems.

SEO applicants must address the key selection criteria for the role, and short-listed applicants are invited to undertake a half-day interview process to assess their suitability. The final stage of the recruitment process involves four days of face-to-face orientation training on all aspects of election management. At the conclusion of the orientation training applicants are assessed again to determine final acceptance into the SEO pool. Those accepted join the VEC's experienced SEOs and will be considered for appointment to management roles for the next scheduled election".<sup>196</sup>

### Responsibilities and expectations of Senior Election Officials

Senior election officials are expected to follow the same code of conduct as all VEC employees. They are also required to complete the Disclosure of Political Activities process as part of their employment for each election they are employed.

<sup>194</sup> Victorian Electoral Commission, *Submission No.12a*, p.15.

<sup>195</sup> Victorian Electoral Commission, *Submission No.12a*, p.20.

<sup>196</sup> Victorian Electoral Commission, *Submission No.12a*, p.20.

The VEC’s submission provided a detailed position summary for an Election Manager;

“The Election Manager reports to the Election Support Officer. The Election Manager is responsible for managing all aspects of the election for the District/s for which they are appointed. The Election Manager will conduct the election in an impartial, efficient and professional manner and will demonstrate by example excellent customer service practice and VEC values”.<sup>197</sup>

### 5.1.3 Election Support

The VEC’s submission discussed the forms of head office support provided to Election Managers during state elections, including the Election Support Officer role;

“During the election period the VEC maintains head office support and oversight of each election via a team of Election Support Officers (ESOs). ESOs are experienced election practitioners drawn either from head office staff or from the SEO pool. ESOs provide procedural guidance to each Election Manager on a daily basis. In addition, a Helpdesk operates to provide any technical and system support for Election Managers and their teams”.<sup>198</sup>

5

## 5.2 Evidence received from inquiry participants about election staffing

The terms of reference for this inquiry required the committee to consider how the VEC employs and trains casual staff for Victorian state elections, “including the roles and responsibilities of the VEC’s casual election staff in light of changing technological and societal demands”.<sup>199</sup> Evidence received from inquiry participants broadly addressed two main themes relating to the changing context of election work;

- Recruitment of election casuals and Senior Election Officials; and
- Training and performance management for election casuals and Senior Election Officials.

In terms of recruitment, the committee received evidence and proposals relating to;

- How to attract young people in the 18-24 age cohort to election casual work, and to generate interest in this type of casual employment amongst young people;
- Evidence relating to the willingness of young people to engage in election employment;
- How the VEC recruits election casuals from communities who experience barriers to electoral participation, including CALD communities relevant to the linguistic and cultural needs of particular Districts and Regions, people with disabilities and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities; and
- Strategies to attract and retain staff for the Senior Election Official pool, based on evidence from inquiry participants and evidence the committee received from New Zealand and Canada.

<sup>197</sup> Victorian Electoral Commission, *Submission No.12a*, p.22.

<sup>198</sup> Victorian Electoral Commission, *Submission No.12a*, p.22.

<sup>199</sup> Parliament of Victoria, Electoral Matters Committee, “Terms of reference”, Parliament of Victoria, Melbourne, 2017.

In terms of training and performance, the committee received evidence and proposals relating to;

- The cost of training for election casuals; and
- The experiences of other Australian electoral jurisdictions, such as Queensland, who have recently discontinued in person election training in favour of online training.

## 5.2.1 Recruitment of election officials and Senior Election Officials

### Attracting young people to election casual work

During the 57th and 58th Parliaments, the Electoral Matters Committee has learnt that the majority of people undertaking election casual work for the VEC for Victorian state elections are older Victorians. While the committee did not receive direct evidence about the average age of election casuals for Victorian state elections, the committee was told by the AEC in September 2017 that the average age of an election casual at the 2016 federal election was more than 50 years of age. The committee understands there would be similarities between the demographic profile of the AEC's and VEC's databases. The VEC's report to Parliament on the 2016 Victorian local government elections also recorded the results of internal feedback sessions with Returning Officers; the report noted that 21 percent of election staff were under 21, 32 percent were aged 35 to 44 and 47 percent were aged 55 and over.<sup>200</sup>

The committee notes evidence it considered during its study tour to the United States in September 2016 about the age of poll workers in the United States. The committee learnt that the average age of a poll worker for a US general election was 72 years, with more than 2 million people employed in this capacity for the 2016 US presidential election. According to the US League of Women Voters, there is also a critical shortage of poll workers for US general elections, "which has directly affected the enfranchisement of many voters and forced many county elections bodies to widen their search for poll workers".<sup>201</sup>

The committee also notes that the VEC's Senior Election Official pool is comprised mostly of older Victorians. The VEC's submission to the inquiry described the SEO pool;

"Traditionally applicants for SEO positions have come from people in semi-retirement or those who have the flexibility to balance their ongoing work/business with periods of employment for the VEC. Efforts have also been made to attract young professional parents who are having a career break due to child-minding responsibilities. This has been successful in ensuring a greater mix of people within the SEO pool".<sup>202</sup>

As a result of this evidence, the VEC and several other inquiry participants discussed the possibility of broadening recruitment efforts for election casuals, and to a lesser extent for Senior Election Officials, and strategically encourage younger people to apply for election work. Several different proposals were aired;

<sup>200</sup> Victorian Electoral Commission, Report on 2016 local government elections, Victorian Electoral Commission, Melbourne, 2017, p.34.

<sup>201</sup> League of Women Voters NYS, "Recruiting college-age poll workers", League of Women Voters, 2007, p.1.

<sup>202</sup> Victorian Electoral Commission, *Submission No.12a*, p.21.

### Election Millennials @VEC

The VEC's submission outlined how the VEC attempted to encourage young people under the age of 25 to take up work as election casuals. The project, entitled Election Millennials @VEC, was initiated following the publication of the VEC's report to Parliament on the 2016 Victorian local government elections. A key finding from the report based on internal feedback and a survey of election staff "identified the need to attract and employ more young people under the age of 25".<sup>203</sup>

Election Millennials @VEC had two main components. The first was providing support and training for Election Managers to employ staff from this particular demographic. The VEC's submission reported on the first stage of the pilot project trialled at the Greater Geelong City Council election in October 2017;

"As part of the Election Millennials @VEC project, a pilot program was trialled with the Greater Geelong City Council election in October 2017. The Returning Officer, who holds accountability for staff appointments for that election, will be trained and supported to source a pre-determined minimum percentage of staff under 25. As well as offering employment to this demographic, there will be a focus on the promotion and leadership opportunities available to younger staff. It is envisaged at this stage that a video case study following the employment of some younger staff at the Greater Geelong City Council election will be used to promote opportunities to under 25s, as well as to train our Senior Election Officials in the benefits of employing staff from this demographic".<sup>204</sup>

The Election Millennials @VEC was also supported by a social media marketing campaign designed to encourage young people to register on the VEC's election personnel database. According to the VEC;

"Promotional material via targeted youth events and relevant social media (Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram) will encourage young people to register for work. The promotional material has a focus on peer-to-peer encouragement via word-of-mouth and social media sharing. Direct quotes from young people who have worked for the VEC are utilised in promotional material".<sup>205</sup>

### Broadening Senior Electoral Official pool

In addition to these efforts, during the inquiry the VEC also advised the committee that it is attempting to broaden the demographic profile of the Senior Election Official pool. While the majority of members of the pool are still semi-retired professionals or older Victorians who have flexibility to manage a substantial period of casual work alongside other employment, the VEC has attempted to encourage a young cohort of people joining the pool. The VEC's submission noted it has recruited parents who are on a career break due to child caring responsibilities.<sup>206</sup> During the 57th Parliament the VEC also told the committee that it was interested in appointing younger people to the pool in order to keep up with the changing pace of technology, and young people's capacity to adapt quickly to new information technology and computer systems.<sup>207</sup>

<sup>203</sup> Victorian Electoral Commission, Report on 2016 local government elections, Victorian Electoral Commission, Melbourne, 2017, p.34; Victorian Electoral Commission, *Submission No.12a*, p.17.

<sup>204</sup> Victorian Electoral Commission, *Submission No.12a*, p.17.

<sup>205</sup> Victorian Electoral Commission, *Submission No.12a*, p.17.

<sup>206</sup> Victorian Electoral Commission, *Submission No.12a*, p.17.

<sup>207</sup> Parliament of Victoria, Electoral Matters Committee, "Inquiry into the 2010 Victorian state election", Parliament of Victoria, May 2012.

## Young people, social responsibility and election employment

As discussed extensively in Chapter Three, during the inquiry the committee learnt that many young people in Australia and Victoria are disengaged from electoral processes, as reflected in lower rates of voter turnout and electoral enrolment in the 18 to 24 age cohort. However, evidence received by the committee also suggests that young people are not disengaged from all forms of political and civic activity, and are instead more likely to participate in alternative forms of political expression such as joining a protest or signing a petition.

During its study tour to Canada in April 2018 the committee met with Samara, a charitable organisation which promotes increased civic engagement and a more positive public life across all levels of Canadian society. One of the programs Samara discussed with the committee was its Democracy 360 report card.<sup>208</sup> The report is an assessment of the overall status of Canadians' civic and political engagement, including the views of young people on electoral participation and voting. The committee was told that one of the key messages from the Democracy 360 report, "Message Not Delivered: The Myth of Apathetic Youth and the Importance of Contact in Political Participation", was that younger Canadians, when "it comes to rates of participation in political and civic life beyond voting", score 11 percentage points higher, on average, than their older counterparts across 18 forms of participation, including socially responsible employment.<sup>209</sup> Younger people were thus more willing than their older cohorts to take on work which might have a civic or social benefit, such as election casual employment.

A similar finding about young people's enthusiasm for election work was conveyed to the committee during its meeting with the City of Ottawa's City Clerk, Rick O'Connor who has responsibility for conducting elections in Ottawa in a comparable fashion to the VEC in Victoria. When discussing some of the challenges associated with staffing, including a decline in staff availability due to retirements, the City Clerk told the committee that engaging more broadly with the community, in particular young people did have a positive effect. Young people were as equally interested in election work as other age cohorts.

Reflecting these messages, during the inquiry the committee also learnt that young people in Victoria are interested in election casual work. A survey of election casuals at the 2016 Victorian local government election revealed that 100 percent "of under 25 year olds were interested in future election work and were the only age group to find out about working for the VEC via Facebook".<sup>210</sup> In addition, an associated, positive benefit of young people working as election casuals was also suggested by the VEC in relation to the problem of youth turnout, as discussed in Chapter Three. Beyond young people's strong skills in information technology and capacity to deal with new election technologies like election roll mark off, young people who have worked at elections were also highly likely to encourage someone in their age cohort to vote. According to the VEC's 2016 local government election staff survey, 77 percent of "18 to 24 year olds who [had] worked for the VEC have encouraged another young person to register for election work...This encouragement was without any specific suggestion from the VEC to do so – suggesting they are the VEC's best advocates for increasing youth employment in elections".<sup>211</sup>

208 Samara Canada, "2017 Democracy 360", Samara Canada, 2017. Accessed 11 May 2018 from <<http://www.samaracanada.com/research/2017-democracy-360>>.

209 Samara Canada, "Message Not Delivered: The Myth of Apathetic Youth and the Importance of Contact in Political Participation", Samara Canada, 2017. Accessed 12 May 2018 from <<http://www.samaracanada.com/research/active-citizenship/message-not-delivered>>.

210 Victorian Electoral Commission, Report on 2016 local government elections, Victorian Electoral Commission, Melbourne, 2017, p.34; Victorian Electoral Commission, *Submission No.12a*, p.17.

211 Victorian Electoral Commission, *Submission No.12a*, p.17.



### Committee's view – young people and election work

The committee acknowledges the administrative and logistical complexities facing the VEC in hiring more than 20,000 election casuals for Victorian state elections. Ensuring that business requirements are met and that election offices are staffed with the correct number of appropriately resourced personnel to ensure timely election outcomes is a major undertaking, as is ensuring the election casual workforce is renewed and maintained over the four-year state election cycle.

As a result of evidence received during this inquiry and evidence gathered during the committee's study tour in Canada, the committee accepts that more needs to be done to encourage young people to get involved in election work in Victoria. Consistent with the evidence the committee received around youth electoral participation, it is likely that young people are not apathetic about election work. Rather, they require specific marketing approaches and tools to raise their awareness of the opportunities associated with this form of casual employment. Programs like the VEC's Election Millennials @VEC should form a central part of the VEC's strategy to recruit young people to election work on an ongoing basis. This makes sense given the VEC's evidence about the great contributions of young people who do work for the VEC at election time.

The committee also notes that involving more young people in election work may have the associated benefit of creating a new channel to increase youth voter turnout.

For the committee, a key message during this inquiry around recruiting young people for election work was the value – indeed necessity – of social media. Elections Canada advised the committee that social media is successful at encouraging young people to 'tune in' to electoral messages because it is information pitched to young people in a way, and a place, they understand. To this end, the committee also sees great value in the VEC using demographic-appropriate strategies to encourage young people to join the VEC's personnel database, including messages on university social media channels.

**RECOMMENDATION 12:** The committee recommends the Victorian Electoral Commission re-establish, promote and expand its pilot program, Election Millennials @VEC, and make the program an ongoing part of its recruitment strategies to recruit young people aged 18 to 24 to join the VEC's election personnel database.

**RECOMMENDATION 13:** The committee recommends the Victorian Electoral Commission prioritise and improve their social media as a marketing tool to communicate with and encourage young Victorians aged 18 to 24 about opportunities for casual election work.

**RECOMMENDATION 14:** The committee recommends the Victorian Electoral Commission place targeted advertising about casual election work at Victorian universities, including student email bulletins, in the lead up to Victorian electoral events, including by-elections and local government elections.

**RECOMMENDATION 15:** The committee recommends the Victorian Electoral Commission continue to expand its efforts to recruit election staff from communities who experience barriers to electoral participation and report on this as part of the VEC's annual report to Parliament.

### Recruiting people from communities who experience barriers to electoral participation; CALD communities, people with disabilities and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities

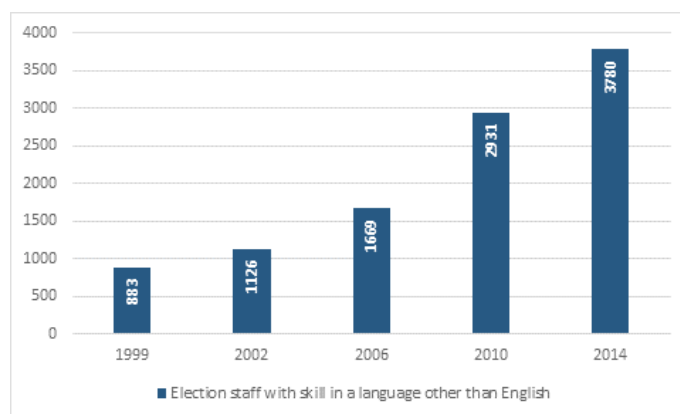
The VEC is committed to recruit people from diverse backgrounds for election work. The VEC’s submission notes three principles for employing staff for Election Managers:

- staffing should reflect the demographics of the electorate
- inclusiveness and diversity should be employment considerations
- appointment of staff from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and CALD communities is strongly encouraged.

Further, the VEC’s Election Manuals for Returning Officers and Election Managers contains a section for recruiting staff with specific attributes. According to the Election Manuals for the 2016 Victorian local government elections, “the VEC is committed to engaging groups in the community who historically have been less likely to participate in elections. A key influencing factor in achieving this is the recruitment of people from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander backgrounds, people with a disability, or people from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds”.<sup>212</sup>

At the 2010 Victorian state election approximately 17 percent of all election casuals spoke a language other than English. As seen in Figure 5.2, an extra 3,000 staff who could speak a language other than English were employed between the 2006 and 2014 Victorian state elections.<sup>213</sup>

**Figure 5.2** Election staff with skills in a language other than English, 1999-2014 Victorian state elections



Source: Victorian Electoral Commission, “Report to Parliament on the 2014 Victorian state election”, Victorian Electoral Commission, Melbourne, August 2011, p.57.

The VEC’s Election Manual outlines how the Election Management System allows Election Managers to filter staff for specific attributes, including community language skills in large non-English speaking areas and indigeneity;

<sup>212</sup> Victorian Electoral Commission, “Election Manual – Postal, 2016 Victorian local government elections”, Victorian Electoral Commission, Melbourne, 2016, p.p.52-54.

<sup>213</sup> Victorian Electoral Commission, “Report to Parliament on the 2010 Victorian state election”, Victorian Electoral Commission, Melbourne, August 2011, p.57, email 9 July 2018 from Liz Williams, Deputy Electoral Commissioner, Victorian Electoral Commission.

“The search function in Personnel allows office staff to filter on persons who are enrolled in their residing municipality and x are of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander background, x have a disability and x are fluent in languages in addition to English. In areas with large non-English speaking communities every attempt must be made to appoint staff with appropriate community language skills”.<sup>214</sup>

Further to this, the VEC also has a stated commitment to providing Victorians with differing levels of abilities, including physical and other disabilities, with access to the electoral process and access to electoral work. The VEC’s Disability Action Plan outlines the VEC’s commitment to improve physical access to voting accessibility, clarity of information and access to election employment and voting services. At the 2016 Victorian local government elections, around three percent of total staff employed for the election had some form of disability. Figure 5.3 is from the VEC’s submission and identifies the number of election staff who had a disability at the 2016 Victorian local government elections. Further, as seen in Figure 5.4, approximately 361 members of the VEC’s election casual workforce for the 2010 Victorian state election had a disability. Approximately 177 identified as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander.<sup>215</sup>

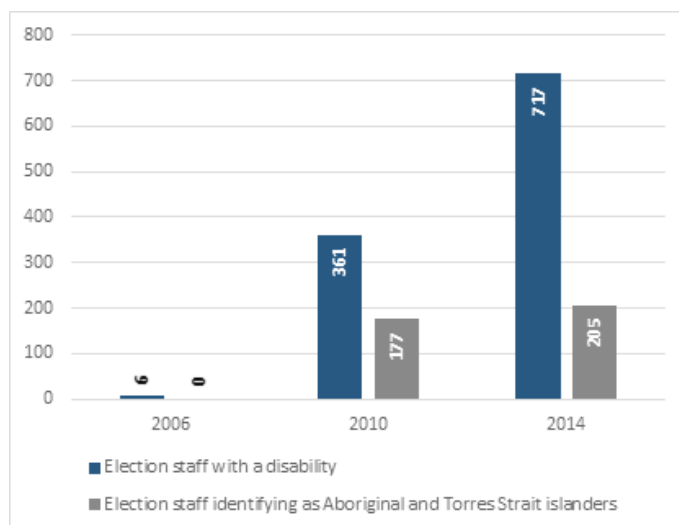
**Figure 5.3** Election staff with disabilities, 2016 Victorian local government elections

Category	SEOs	Head Office election casuels	Election office casuals	Total
<b>Acquired Brain Injury</b>	-	-	2	2
<b>Autism Spectrum Disorder</b>	-	1	3	4
<b>Hearing Impairment</b>	-	-	20	20
<b>Neurological Impairment</b>	-	-	7	7
<b>Other</b>	1	1	71	73
<b>Physical Impairment</b>	1	1	43	45
<b>Psychiatric Impairment</b>	-	-	4	4
<b>Vision Impairment</b>	-	-	15	15
<b>Total</b>	2	3	165	170

Source: Victorian Electoral Commission, *Submission No.12a*, p.19.

<sup>214</sup> Victorian Electoral Commission, “Election Manual – Postal, 2016 Victorian local government elections”, Victorian Electoral Commission, Melbourne, 2016, p.p.52-54

<sup>215</sup> Victorian Electoral Commission, “Report to Parliament on the 2010 Victorian state election”, Victorian Electoral Commission, Melbourne, August 2011, p.57.

**Figure 5.4** People identifying as belonging to specific groups, 2006-2014 Victorian state elections

Source: Victorian Electoral Commission, "Report to Parliament on the 2010 Victorian state election", Victorian Electoral Commission, Melbourne, August 2011, p.57.

The VEC's Election Manuals also strongly encourage Election Managers to appoint people from Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander communities as election casuals;

"In addition, every effort should be made to appoint Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander background applicants from the area. In the Performance Review completed by ROs there is scope to provide evidence of the effort made to engage staff from a variety of backgrounds".<sup>216</sup>

The committee also explored how Canadian electoral authorities recruit Aboriginal Canadians. Elections Canada told the committee it has undertaken a number of outreach initiatives to encourage Aboriginal electoral participation over the past decade. The committee learnt about the Aboriginal Community Relations Officer Program and Aboriginal Elder and Youth Program.<sup>217</sup> Both programs commenced in 1997 and involve enhanced accessibility for Aboriginal electors by having an Elder and a youth present at polling stations to assist, and translate for, Aboriginal electors. Further, the Aboriginal Community Relations Officer Program was specifically introduced to address the "needs of Aboriginal communities and encourage participation by arranging polling stations in communities, recruiting and training Aboriginal deputy returning officers and acting as a liaison between the community and the returning officer".<sup>218</sup> The committee learnt both programs have been successful. The committee learnt that more than 80 percent of eligible districts participated in the Aboriginal Community Relations Officer Program in the 2015 general election.

Elections Canada also advised the committee about its efforts to promote Aboriginal electoral participation and engagement through employment for the forthcoming 2019 federal election. In addition to "consulting local leaders to plan electoral services, Elections Canada was also working with "local returning officers in

<sup>216</sup> Victorian Electoral Commission, "Election Manual – Postal, 2016 Victorian local government elections", Victorian Electoral Commission, Melbourne, 2016, p.62.

<sup>217</sup> Elections Canada, "The Electoral Participation of Aboriginal People", Elections Canada, 2007. Accessed 5 July 2018 from <[http://elections.ca/res/rec/part/paper/aboriginal/aboriginal\\_e.pdf](http://elections.ca/res/rec/part/paper/aboriginal/aboriginal_e.pdf)>.

<sup>218</sup> Elections Canada, "The Electoral Participation of Aboriginal People", Elections Canada, 2007. Accessed 5 July 2018 from <[http://elections.ca/res/rec/part/paper/aboriginal/aboriginal\\_e.pdf](http://elections.ca/res/rec/part/paper/aboriginal/aboriginal_e.pdf)>.

28 ridings...[so that they could establish] additional contacts with Indigenous communities by, for example, taking part in local events in order to build stronger relationships with communities”.<sup>219</sup>

### Discussion about the VEC’s efforts to employ CALD communities

At the public hearings the committee and the VEC discussed the VEC’s attempts to employ people from CALD backgrounds in areas with high numbers of non-English speakers. A committee member asked the VEC about the effectiveness of their recruitment activities;

**Committee Member** — ...we heard from the ethnic communities’ council before that there should be a greater emphasis in relation to the employment of casual staff and ensuring that those staff reflect the diversity of the community et cetera. I have noted in your submission that your policies already say that. Certainly coming from the Northern Metropolitan Region, where those types of ethnic communities are represented, I do not think we saw the diversity that represents the community in the people that were working on the election. How does that policy actually come into play, and how do you ensure that you do get that diversity in the people you employ?<sup>220</sup>

Representing the VEC, Michelle Templeton, Manager, Election Staff Capability, said that while it had specific processes in place to ensure that Election Managers adhere to the procedures outlined in the relevant Election Manual for hiring election casuals with specific capabilities, there was no feature in the VEC’s Election Management System to track what offers have been made, and to whom;

**Ms TEMPLETON** — It is working reasonably well and it is an area for improvement and it is an area that we have a particular focus on each time. One of the problems that we do have is that we cannot measure within our system what offers have been made; we can only say, ‘Okay, these are the people that we’ve employed’. So there is a lot of work that actually goes on to offer positions to people. They may not want to take them up for various reasons and we cannot measure that at the moment, and ideally we would be able to measure that. It is an area that we continue to focus on, and we do have from our election managers fairly strong reporting back that where they do have staff that reflect the communities, it makes their job so much easier and it makes the election run so much more smoothly. People are wanting to do that, but it is an area of ongoing focus.<sup>221</sup>

The ECCV also discussed the VEC’s efforts to employ election staff from CALD communities at the public hearings. While the ECCV was broadly supportive of the VEC’s work in this area, they encouraged the VEC to continue building awareness amongst CALD communities of the availability of casual election work for people with language and cultural skills. The ECCV noted that this was a publicity issue more than a programmatic issue;

**Mr MICALLEF** — ...When you go out and talk to communities, present that the opportunity is there for people to apply for positions in that case, and when you know when the electoral process is going to be, the VEC could let us know they are

<sup>219</sup> Rinne, G., “Elections Canada consults with Indigenous voters”, Thunder Bay News, 21 March 2018. Accessed 4 July 2018 from <<https://www.tbnewswatch.com/local-news/elections-canada-consults-with-indigenous-voters-868276>>.

<sup>220</sup> Lizzie Blandthorn MP, *Transcript of Evidence*, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 24 October 2017, p.4.

<sup>221</sup> Michelle Templeton, Manager, Election Staff Capability, Victorian Electoral Commission, *Transcript of Evidence*, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 24 October 2017, p.4.

advertising for those positions and people can apply. My sister has been doing it for many years. She is a former electorate secretary as well so she understands the process. Look, I think that process is just underutilised.<sup>222</sup>

### **Committee's view – recruiting staff from communities who traditionally experience barriers to electoral participation**

The committee notes the VEC's efforts in its election manuals, election procedures and training practices to ensure that Victorians from all backgrounds, including Victorians who typically face barriers to electoral participation, are aware of election work opportunities. The committee also accepts that many of the challenges associated with encouraging these communities to vote also apply to encouraging them to seek election work.

Based on the VEC's evidence, the committee notes there is potential for the VEC to improve its Election Management System in terms of how the system provides information about how many offers of employment were made to people from the VEC's focus communities. The VEC is currently unable to benchmark the number of employment offers made in relation to the number of people who successfully go on to accept an offer to work at an election. Building this functionality into the VEC's Election Management System is an appropriate response to this programmatic issue. Furthermore it will allow the VEC to more accurately monitor and assess its efforts to recruit inclusively.

Further, evidence from the ECCV suggests that the VEC could improve how it liaises with CALD community groups and peak bodies like the ECCV in order to provide information about election work. As noted during the public hearings only benefit can accrue where the VEC strengthens the relationships it holds with CALD groups through its CALD Electoral Advisory Group. As for recommendation 17, using social media to communicate election work opportunities within CALD communities seems to be the most logical approach in this regard.

**RECOMMENDATION 16:** The committee recommends the Victorian Electoral Commission include functionality in its Election Management System so that the VEC can track the number of employment offers made to specific community groups against the number of offers which are accepted.

**RECOMMENDATION 17:** The committee recommends the Victorian Electoral Commission strengthen its relationships with CALD community groups so that information about election work opportunities is provided in clearer and more regular formats. Social media should be the priority channel wherever possible for communicating offers to CALD communities.

**RECOMMENDATION 18:** The committee recommends the Victorian Electoral Commission considers Elections Canada's strategies to recruit and retain election casual staff and returning officers for Canadian federal elections. The VEC should liaise with Elections Canada to learn more about its Aboriginal Community Relations Officer and Aboriginal Elder and Youth Programs.

<sup>222</sup> Eddie Micallef, Chairperson, Ethnic Communities' Council of Victoria, *Transcript of Evidence*, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 24 October 2017, p.3.

## Strategies to attract and retain staff for the Senior Election Official pool

During the inquiry the committee learnt that the VEC launched a recruitment campaign to replenish the Senior Election Official pool for each Victorian state election and local government election cycle. The VEC told the committee that it advertised for potential applicants in major newspapers and in some social media channels.

As noted earlier, in April 2018 the committee met with the City of Ottawa City Clerk during its Canadian study tour. The City Clerk advised the committee about some of the City's recruitment strategies for its returning officers; the City faces many of the same challenges as the VEC in terms of having an older workforce for its senior election official positions and regular retirements as a result of the demographic composition of its staffing pool.

One strategy the City employs to reach out to potential employees is to attend at the Ottawa Home and Garden Show, one of Ottawa's largest publicly attended exhibition-style events. The City told the committee about this program's success in generating interest in election work;

“Over the course of the four days, approximately 1060 people stopped at the Elections booth for information and we received a total of 217 applications for a variety of different Election Worker roles. We also gave out information cards about the upcoming Municipal Election as well as recruitment cards for those that did not want to fill out the paper application on the spot, which totalled to 884 cards given out”.<sup>223</sup>

The committee noted the City's overall approach to election staff recruitment was revamped in 2017 following a corporate restructuring process in the City of Ottawa's election office. The Elections Department received additional resources and funding as a result of elections being deemed a priority corporate service, meaning that the Elections body now receives full City administrative support in an election year. As a result of this process, the City Clerk was able to execute more sophisticated election staff recruitment techniques, such as the Home and Garden Show event, taking a more proactive approach to recruitment focused on target groups such as university students, retirees and people with an interest in election work.<sup>224</sup>

Engaging with appropriate audiences to secure potential, long-term election staff was also a key theme during the committee's study tour to New Zealand in October 2017. The committee met with Dale Ofoske, Election Services New Zealand. Election Services New Zealand is an independent company responsible for running many of the New Zealand's local government elections. Mr Ofoske has approximately 25 years experience as a returning officer and electoral official. Mr Ofoske told the committee that it was important when looking for long-term election staff to ensure that marketing opportunities were relevant to the age group being hired.

### Committee's view – recruitment strategies for Senior Election Official pool

The committee supports the VEC's Senior Election Official pool as a way to recruit and retain a core group of people with the appropriate work and leadership experience necessary for Returning Officers and Election Managers. However, during this inquiry, evidence the committee received suggested that the VEC could improve how it

<sup>223</sup> City of Ottawa, *Private Correspondence*, 24 April 2018, p.1.

<sup>224</sup> City of Ottawa, Presentation to Electoral Matters Committee, 13 April 2018, Ottawa, Canada, p.22.

recruits and retains staff for senior election casual roles. In particular, the committee encourages the VEC to adopt a proactive recruitment approach similar to the City of Ottawa's overall election staff recruitment program, with its focus on recruiting university students, retirees and people who have a general interest in election work. With this strategy, the VEC will be able to develop a pool of election managers from a wider cross-section of the community.

**RECOMMENDATION 19:** The committee recommends the Victorian Electoral Commission adopt a recruitment approach for the Senior Election Official pool based on the City of Ottawa's proactive approach to election staff recruitment. The committee also recommends the VEC further examine the City of Ottawa's election staff recruitment and strategy around inclusivity, and adopt some of the principles underpinning the City's corporate strategies for staff recruitment such as attending large exhibition style/community events.

### 5.3 Training and performance for election staff

In addition to evidence about recruitment processes for election casuals, during the inquiry the committee also received evidence about training for election staff, and evidence relating to performance management processes for election staff.

This inquiry is not the first time the Electoral Matters Committee has considered how the VEC trains election casuals for Victorian state elections. During the 57<sup>th</sup> Parliament the then committee examined the VEC's practices at early voting centres as part of the inquiry into the 2010 Victorian state election, following significant increases in early voting between the 2006 and 2010 Victorian state elections. The then committee received evidence from the VEC and other inquiry participants about how election staff working in early voting centres were trained. The committee made a series of recommendations that the VEC strengthen its quality assurance programs to ensure that election staff were implementing the training they received effectively and that the training accurately reflected the VEC's electoral procedures.<sup>225</sup>

During this inquiry, the committee received evidence from the VEC and inquiry participants about two main themes relating to training and performance for election staff;

- The VEC's current training programs; and
- The comparison between in person and online election training, including evidence from other Australian jurisdictions, notably Queensland.

#### 5.3.1 The VEC's current staff training programs

The VEC's submission outlines current training programs for election casuals and the Senior Election Official pool.

<sup>225</sup> Parliament of Victoria, Electoral Matters Committee, "Inquiry into the 2010 Victorian state election", Parliament of Victoria, May 2012.



## Election casuals

Election casuals are required to complete different levels of training for each role held for a state election. In general, the VEC told the committee that “each person employed would be provided with a manual outlining the procedures for their role and be expected to read the manual and undertake relevant training”.<sup>226</sup>

The VEC offers a mix of training solutions and training delivery methods. The VEC’s submission noted;

“Training solutions take the form of online modules, face-to-face training sessions and on-the-job coaching. Depending on the complexity of the role, a person may undertake any or all of the solutions mentioned. For example, at the 2014 Victorian state election, all election officials employed at a voting centre were sent a manual and introductory video, and were required to complete online training relevant to their role. In addition, Voting Centre Managers, Assistant Voting Centre Managers, Declaration Vote Issuing Officers and Election Liaison Officers attended a face-to-face training session at their local election office”.<sup>227</sup>

The VEC’s submission also discussed the overall approach the VEC takes to providing specialised training for election staff who are required to perform complex or technical tasks, such as Data Entry Operators or people using electronic roll mark-off facilities;

“While some roles involve simple processes, such as the manual counting of votes, there are a number of roles requiring a higher level of capability in the use of electronic systems. Election Officials using electronic roll mark-off..., Computer Count Team Leaders and Data Entry Operators are examples of roles where comfort, skill or experience using computer systems is required to successfully perform the role. In these instances, the selection of staff must target appropriate skill sets matched to the role”.<sup>228</sup>

Where particular skill sets require specialist expertise, the VEC may also outsource recruitment activities to a recruitment agency with expertise in recruiting technical staff. This practice has been used to secure data entry operators for the Legislative Council count, and for Victorian local government elections.

## Election Manual

The committee also notes that returning Officers and Election Managers are given comprehensive instructions for the delivery of staff training for Victorian state elections in the Election Manager’s Election Manual. For example, for the 2016 Victorian local government elections, the VEC’s Election Manuals contained a chapter 10 pages in length on staff training, including advice on how to train staff, provide inductions for new starters, effectively monitor staff activities and workloads in the office and information about remuneration and entitlements. The Manual notes there is an Induction Handbook on the VEC’s Election Management System which Election Managers can access. Using this Manual, Election Managers are tasked with providing Office Assistants who staff the election office during the state election period with a briefing about the election, noting key facts about the election, such as the number of

<sup>226</sup> Victorian Electoral Commission, “Employment guide for election casuals and officials”, Victorian Electoral Commission, Melbourne, 2018, p.4.

<sup>227</sup> Victorian Electoral Commission, *Submission No.12a*, p.22.

<sup>228</sup> Victorian Electoral Commission, *Submission No.12a*, p.22.

seats being contested, the election timeline, key milestones and activities in the office and other important information about their role, such as the VEC's code of conduct policies.<sup>229</sup>

### Senior Election Officials

Senior Election Officials are required to complete several training exercises for each Victorian state election at which they are appointed.

The VEC's submission notes that Senior Election Officials effectively receive two sets of training; one during their initial recruitment process for the pool and another when they have been offered an election-specific appointment. The VEC's submission describes both sets of training;

“The final stage of the [initial] recruitment process involves four days of face-to-face orientation training on all aspects of election management. At the conclusion of the orientation training applicants are assessed again to determine final acceptance into the SEO pool. Those accepted join the VEC's experienced SEOs and will be considered for appointment to management roles for the next scheduled election...

[Senior Election Officials] are appointed to management roles for each specific election; these appointments are not ongoing. Once appointed, further election specific training occurs in the lead up to the election. For the 2018 Victorian state election, it is anticipated that each SEO appointed to a management role will undertake a training program consisting of a minimum of three days face-to-face training, three days systems training within the election office environment, and a range of online preparation activities”.<sup>230</sup>

Throughout the course of 2018 the VEC also notes in its 2018 Victorian state election 'Election Plan' that Senior Election Officials are required to participate in webinars and some short evaluation activities in connection to their roles.<sup>231</sup>

### Staff evaluation and training evaluation

The VEC has several staff evaluation processes as part of its training for election casuals and Senior Election Officials. Staff are also offered opportunities to evaluate the VEC's training as part of the VEC's post-election evaluation activities.

In terms of staff evaluation, there are different processes for different roles. For election casuals, staff evaluation is usually conducted by the Election Manager following prescribed procedures in the Election Manager's Election Manual. Staff are given a rating which is assigned to their staff profile in the VEC's Election Management System. This rating is then used at future electoral events to assist Returning Officers and Election Managers to determine the person's suitability for election rolls based on past performance and other key attributes. According to the VEC's 2016 Victorian local government Election Manuals;

<sup>229</sup> Victorian Electoral Commission, "Election Manual – Postal, 2016 Victorian local government elections", Victorian Electoral Commission, Melbourne, 2016.

<sup>230</sup> Victorian Electoral Commission, *Submission No.12a*, p.p.17-22.

<sup>231</sup> Victorian Electoral Commission, "2018 Victorian state election plan", Victorian Electoral Commission, Melbourne, 2017, p.12. Accessed 12 May 2018 from <<https://www.vec.vic.gov.au/files/StateElectionServicePlan2018.pdf>>.

“The criteria used to assess staff when deciding on the rating vary according to the position. Honest and accurate staff ratings are vital to ensure poor performing staff are not re-employed and high performing staff are appropriately appointed at subsequent elections”.<sup>232</sup>

A three-point rating scale is used to rate all election casuals and officials who worked. Table 5.1 shows the rating table; each descriptor is customised in the VEC’s Election Management System for each type of election casual role, with the overall rating “derived automatically from assessments entered in Personnel against criteria specific to each position”. Election Managers are also able to enter comments in a comment box accompanying the rating descriptor menu.

**Table 5.1** The VEC’s election casual rating system

Rating	Descriptor
3	Exceeded requirements
2	Met requirements
1	Improvement required
0	Not Assessed (did not attend work)
NA	Not applicable (Office Assistant only or where insufficient information to recommend suitable for promotion)

Source: Victorian Electoral Commission, “Election Manual – Postal, 2016 Victorian local government elections”, Victorian Electoral Commission, Melbourne, 2016, p.60.

For Senior Election Officials, the VEC’s submission notes that Senior Election Officials “undergo a more detailed performance review, which involves providing their own evidence against Key Performance Indicators. They are assessed by their supervising Election Support Officers and this information is held within the VEC’s central record management system (HPRM)”.<sup>233</sup> According to the VEC’s 2016 Victorian local government Election Manuals, Senior Election Official appointments are completed using a template in the VEC’s Election Management System, with the individual completing their own review initially.

#### Migration to central ratings system

The VEC’s submission noted that the VEC is planning to migrate election staff performance ratings into one centralised database. This will “enable greater visibility and tracking of staff appointments, performance and training all in the one place”.<sup>234</sup>

In terms of training evaluation, the VEC’s submission advised that training evaluation activities conducted by the VEC, such as surveys, show that election casuals find election training useful. According to the VEC;

“Election casuals and officials are invited to participate in an online survey in relation to their experience working for the VEC after each major election event. Their satisfaction with the training and support provided is measured to assist with continuous improvement. After the 2016 Victorian local government elections, 40 percent of staff responded to the survey”.<sup>235</sup>

<sup>232</sup> Victorian Electoral Commission, “Election Manual – Postal, 2016 Victorian local government elections”, Victorian Electoral Commission, Melbourne, 2016, p.60.

<sup>233</sup> Victorian Electoral Commission, *Submission No.12a*, p.22.

<sup>234</sup> Victorian Electoral Commission, *Submission No.12a*, p.22.

<sup>235</sup> Victorian Electoral Commission, *Submission No.12a*, p.1

As shown in Figure 5.5, with a rating out of five being extremely satisfied and one being extremely dissatisfied, the six indicators all scored above four, indicating that the majority of staff were very satisfied with the training provided.

**Figure 5.5** VEC staff training evaluation survey results, 2016 Victorian local government elections

Training method	2016 rating	2014 rating	Rating change
<b>Supervisor support</b>	4.32	4.17	+ 0.15
<b>Manual</b>	4.18	4.20	- 0.02
<b>Online training</b>	4.17	3.80	+ 0.37
<b>On-the-job instruction</b>	4.15	4.12	+ 0.03
<b>Face to face training</b>	4.10	3.96	+ 0.14
<b>Overall</b>	4.18	4.05	+ 0.13

Source: Victorian Electoral Commission, *Submission No.12a*, p.18.

### 5.3.2 In person compared to online training

As noted above, the VEC uses a mix of training modes for Victorian state elections and Victorian local government elections, including in person training, face-to-face modules and online training and online modules for training evaluation.

During the inquiry the committee received a submission from the Electoral Commission of Queensland (ECQ), which advised that the Commission recently migrated all election casual training online, becoming the first electoral commission in Australia to do so. The ECQ's submission advised that the general impetus for moving to online training related to the high training costs for the 2015 Queensland state election, and the ECQ's general commitment to modernise its training approach for the 2016 Queensland local government elections.

The ECQ's submission outlined the development of its Learning Management System;

“[Learning Management System] facilitated reduction of training costs of more than \$200,000; better oversight i.e. able to monitor course completion and other statistics; standardisation of content and deliver; removed responsibility for training staff from ROs, allowing them to focus on the conduct of the election.

Electoral staff were required to undertake an assessment at the end of each module to check understanding. Each online program also included a feedback survey.<sup>236</sup>

According to the ECQ's submission, the roll out was deemed successful “given the dramatic cost reduction, and surveys showed the majority of users were either satisfied or highly satisfied with the system. The ECQ also used this information as the basis to introduce a live webinar style training platform for the 2016 Queensland local government elections”.<sup>237</sup> The committee notes that the VEC has also used live webinars for some Senior Election Official training activities and is planning on rolling out further training using this delivery method.

<sup>236</sup> Electoral Commission of Queensland, *Submission No.7*, p.p.2-3.

<sup>237</sup> Electoral Commission of Queensland, *Submission No.7*, p.p.2-3.

The committee also received evidence from Elections Canada about its commitment to ongoing staff training. In contrast to the VEC, Elections Canada appoints Returning Officers and Assistant Returning Officers for an ongoing, 10-year term who report directly to the Chief Electoral Officer of Elections Canada, who like the Victorian Electoral Commissioner reports directly to Parliament. Returning Officers are required to carry out a range of functions during the electoral cycle, including engaging in regular training provided by Elections Canada. Elections Canada told the committee that ongoing staff engagement was a key principle in their staff planning, both for Returning Officers and casual election staff.

### Committee's view – recruitment and staff training

The committee acknowledges the VEC's efforts to provide training and performance management services for Victorian state elections and local government elections. Ensuring these systems work effectively and efficiently for thousands of employees is a complex task that requires considerable planning. Wherever possible, the committee encourages the VEC to use technology to streamline how staff are trained and how performance evaluations are conducted. The committee is particularly encouraged by and supports the VEC's plans to migrate staff evaluation activities into a centralised database.

The committee notes the Electoral Commission of Queensland's recent migration to online-only training delivery. The committee notes the cost savings to the ECQ and will continue to monitor the performance of this system into the future. The committee also recommends the VEC continue to work with the ECQ and other Australian electoral commissions to evaluate and assess the benefits of conducting online training for election casuals and Senior Election Officials. At this time, the committee supports the VEC's current approach to staff training based on a mixture of training methods, including in person training.

**RECOMMENDATION 20:** The committee recommends the Victorian Electoral Commission use technology to streamline election staff training and evaluation activities wherever possible. The committee also recommends the VEC implement a centralised staff evaluation database to provide greater clarity around staff performance and training, as per the information provided in the VEC's submission to the inquiry.

**RECOMMENDATION 21:** The committee recommends the Victorian Electoral Commission monitors the Electoral Commission of Queensland's system migration to online-only training delivery for election staff, with a view to gradually expanding online training opportunities for future Victorian state elections.

**RECOMMENDATION 22:** The committee recommends the Victorian Electoral Commission adopt an ongoing staff engagement model for the Senior Election Official pool based on Elections Canada's staff engagement practices, such as regular training and longer employment terms, as well as more generalised training and engagement for the election casual pool.



# 6 Electoral participation, and community engagement with parliamentary processes

As noted in Chapter Two, the committee has an ongoing commitment to encouraging electoral participation at Victorian state elections. During the 57th and 58th Parliaments, the committee conducted six inquiries into different electoral matters. One of the key features of all these inquiries has been the review of VEC initiatives to encourage electoral participation by all eligible Victorian electors, particularly electors who experience barriers to electoral participation. While Victoria has one of the highest rates of voter turnout and electoral enrolment in the developed world some Victorians still experience difficulties participating in elections and require programmatic assistance to ensure they have an equal opportunity to cast a ballot. Reviewing what the VEC does to make the Victorian electoral process as inclusive as possible has become an important, and regular, component of the Electoral Matters Committee's work. This 'stocktake' of Victorian electoral participation is often welcomed by many inquiry participants – during this inquiry, the ECCV, Vision Australia and the Youth Affairs Council Victoria noted the committee's ongoing interest in these matters.<sup>238</sup>

Examining how the Parliament of Victoria engages the community with the work of Parliament, and electoral processes more generally, is one of the committee's newer interests. Although the committee in the 57th Parliament briefly examined the Parliament of Victoria's community engagement programs as part of its inquiry into the future of Victoria's electoral administration, this inquiry sought specific evidence about how the Parliament informs people about its work and the links between community engagement, civics and electoral education.<sup>239</sup>

This chapter firstly reviews the subject of electoral participation. It describes electoral participation in Victoria, and addresses evidence received during the inquiry from the VEC and other inquiry participants about the six priority groups the VEC focuses its engagement on for Victorian state elections. Evidence about the VEC's research into emerging trends in electoral participation is also discussed. The chapter then addresses evidence about the Parliament of Victoria's community engagement and education programs respectively, including evidence the committee gathered from the Parliament of Queensland, the Parliament of New Zealand, the Parliament of Canada and the Ontario Legislative Assembly.

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238 Ethnic Communities' Council of Victoria, *Submission No.24*; Vision Australia, *Submission No.11*; Youth Affairs Council Victoria, *Submission No.9*.

239 Parliament of Victoria, Electoral Matters Committee, "Inquiry into the future of Victoria's electoral administration", March 2014.

## 6.1 Electoral participation

### 6.1.1 Definition

As noted in Chapter Two, as part of its inquiry into the 2014 Victorian state election the committee reviewed some of the key markers of electoral participation in Victoria. The committee noted that electoral participation can mean different things in different electoral systems, and that electoral authorities also measure electoral participation in different ways. Nevertheless, broadly speaking, given that voting in Australia and Victoria is compulsory for all eligible citizens, electoral participation in Australia is taken to mean participation through the act of voting in periodic, parliamentary elections.

In Victoria, the VEC has traditionally referred to three electoral indicators — voter turnout, informal voting and the rate of electoral enrolment — to determine the health of Victoria’s electoral participation. In previous parliaments, the then Electoral Matters Committee referred to these indicators to assist its own investigations into how fully Victorians participate in electoral processes. For this inquiry, the committee also considered electoral participation as defined by the terms of reference; this chapter specifically examines evidence the committee received about strategies to assist communities who traditionally experience barriers to electoral participation be more involved in electoral processes.

## 6.2 The VEC and electoral engagement

Alongside its main responsibility to ensure that Victorian elections are conducted fairly, the VEC also has a statutory responsibility pursuant to s8 of the *Electoral Act 2002* (Vic) “to promote public awareness of electoral matters that are in the general public interest by means of the conduct of education and information programs”. The VEC’s submission noted that electoral participation is not equal for all Victorian communities;

“Despite a compulsory voting environment, the VEC recognises – through electoral data, qualitative research and anecdotal evidence – that electoral participation is not equal across all Victorians who are eligible to vote. Providing inclusive electoral services - via an appropriately skilled election workforce, which reflects the diversity of the electorate and provides assistance in a culturally responsive manner, in line with societal expectations - is critical in ensuring that every eligible Victorian has the knowledge, skills and opportunity to participate in elections”.<sup>240</sup>

The VEC’s submission also outlined the VEC’s electoral engagement strategy, noting where the strategy sits within the VEC’s corporate planning framework;

“The VEC has developed an Enduring Framework for the Design, Implementation and Evaluation of Electoral Education and Awareness Programs (2014-2018). This framework covers the scope of the VEC’s work on public awareness in the period prior to elections, in addition to its grassroots education and community engagement work. The latter is further defined by a Community Education and Electoral Inclusion Strategy 2017-2019 (the Strategy), which sits under the high level

240 Victorian Electoral Commission, *Submission No.12a*, p.1.



framework, and is designed to target, deliver and evaluate education and inclusion programs and services. The Strategy was developed using a ‘program theory’ approach”.<sup>241</sup>

## 6.2.1 Priority community groups for electoral participation

As explored in Chapter Three, there are a range of factors influencing electoral participation. According to the VEC,

“Circumstances such as financial position, social status, environmental and sociopolitical events can provide motivation or deter people from participating in formal political processes. A perception of the effectiveness of representative democracy as a political system can influence how and when people choose to participate. Other reasons for non-participation can be lack of interest, lack of reward to participate, lack of perceived influence e.g. one vote will not change anything, and dissatisfaction with the political style of candidates or current representatives. In addition to this, cultural and/or physical barriers may prevent or influence levels of political participation”.<sup>242</sup>

As a result of these barriers, the VEC’s Education and Electoral Inclusion Strategy identifies the following priority communities for the VEC’s education and outreach efforts:

- young people
- people living with a disability
- people from CALD backgrounds
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders
- people experiencing homelessness; and
- people in prison.<sup>243</sup>

The next part of the chapter addresses evidence received during the inquiry from the VEC and other inquiry participants about these priority communities’ experiences with electoral participation.

### Young people

Chapter Three documented concerns around low levels of youth electoral participation in Victoria and Australia relative to other age cohorts, contextualising the problem in relation to declining voter turnout and low rates of electoral enrolment compared to older aged cohorts. The chapter noted the strong link in the theoretical literature between electoral education and the likelihood of a person voting and remaining a voter for life. The chapter also noted that young people are not apathetic and have high levels of participation in alternative forms of political and civic engagement, such as joining a protest. Evidence about the utility of non-school education mechanisms for encouraging young people to vote was discussed.

<sup>241</sup> Victorian Electoral Commission, *Submission No.12a*, p.2.

<sup>242</sup> Victorian Electoral Commission, *Submission No.12a*, p.24.

<sup>243</sup> Victorian Electoral Commission, *Submission No.12a*, p.27.

This chapter explores alternative ways to stimulate youth interest in electoral participation that do not necessarily involve electoral and civics education. The committee received evidence from the VEC and several other inquiry participants in the following areas;

- Systemic efforts by electoral commissions to facilitate electoral participation;
- Including young people and students in formal political consultations, such as the state budget;
- Teaching young people skills to navigate news media; and
- Training young people to recognise and reward people who make a difference to democratic processes through daily life.

### Systemic efforts to facilitate electoral participation

During the inquiry the VEC told the committee that the direct enrolment of eligible electors was an effective tool to increase the number of young people aged 18 to 24 on the electoral register. Direct enrolment was introduced in Victoria in August 2010 by the passage of the *Electoral Amendment (Electoral Participation) Act 2010* (Vic). Direct enrolment allows the VEC to update details or directly enrol a person without the person having to initiate the action. This process requires the VEC to notify the person in writing regarding the VEC's awareness of entitlement and its intention to enrol the person unless notified of any ineligibility. If notification of ineligibility is not received, within a specified period of at least 14 days, the VEC places the person on the Victorian register of electors and advises that person in writing.

The VEC's focus on direct enrolment for young electors is complemented by its birthday card program. The VEC has run this program since 2007 and was the first Australian electoral commission to contact young electors in this way.<sup>244</sup> Upon receiving information from the Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority about a young person's birthday, the VEC mails a birthday card to young people on their 17th birthday, when they are eligible to provisionally enrol. This "means that once they turn 18, they are automatically included on the roll for any electoral events".<sup>245</sup> Although response rates have declined recently, the VEC notes that around 25 percent of respondents replied to the card.

The committee notes that the VEC released a detailed research report on direct enrolment in 2017 based on data from the 2014 Victorian state election. Chapter Three reported some results from this research. Amongst other findings, the report found that while most directly enrolled electors are young, "directly enrolled electors aged 18 and 19 had a higher voter turnout (79 percent) than other directly enrolled electors over the age of 20".<sup>246</sup> This suggests that the VEC's efforts to generate interest in voting via direct enrolment and the birthday card program amongst first-time electors has been successful relative to the 20 to 24 age cohort.

### Committee's view – direct enrolment

The committee notes that direct enrolment has added many young Victorians to the electoral register, and has been particularly successful at generating enrolment amongst first-time voters. While the VEC's report on direct enrolment noted that some electors object to being automatically placed on the electoral roll by government, the

<sup>244</sup> Victorian Electoral Commission, *Submission No.12a*, p.28.

<sup>245</sup> Victorian Electoral Commission, *Submission No.12a*, p.28.

<sup>246</sup> Victorian Electoral Commission, "Report on direct enrolment", Victorian Electoral Commission, Melbourne, 2017, p.12.

committee notes that many of the 4,000 electors surveyed by the VEC following the 2014 Victorian state election supported the direct enrolment program. Given that young Victorians presently have lower rates of voter turnout and electoral enrolment compared to the general voting population, as noted in Chapter Three, the committee supports the VEC's continued efforts to enrol young people.

### Including young people in formal political consultations

As discussed in Chapter Three, during the inquiry the committee travelled to Canada and met with CIVIX, a non-partisan national charity based in Toronto which seeks to build the skills and habits of active and engaged citizenship among young Canadians. One of CIVIX's key programs is the Student Budget Consultation. According to CIVIX:

“The Student Budget Consultation program is a civic and financial literacy program... that provides youth with an opportunity to learn about the government's revenues and expenditures, discuss important political issues and suggested policies and offer their insights on the priorities of the upcoming budget. Student opinions are collected through a survey and results are shared with the Department or Ministry of Finance.

This program is linked to a wide variety of subject areas including: citizenship education, social studies and government, personal finance, economics, current affairs and media studies. The program aims to increase knowledge about government and public policy, improve financial literacy and encourage informed and active citizenship”.<sup>247</sup>

To date, CIVIX has conducted six Student Budget Consultations. Five thousand students participated in each of the 2013, 2014 and 2015 federal consultations and 1,300 were engaged in the Ontario provincial consultation in 2012. More than 7,000 students participated in both the 2017 and 2018 Student Budget Consultation projects.<sup>248</sup> The results of the survey are collected by Vox Pop Labs and shared with the Canadian Department of Finance.

### Teaching young people skills to navigate news media

Another CIVIX program the committee examined was NewsWise, a program CIVIX is planning to implement for the 2018 Ontario provincial elections.

NewsWise is a “news literacy program to provide school-aged Canadians an understanding of the role of journalism in a healthy democracy and the tools to find and filter information online”.<sup>249</sup> CIVIX will be collaborating with the Canadian Journalism Foundation to develop the project, with support from Google Canada. The program will be a part of the Student Vote campaign, as examined in Chapter Three, rolling out to coincide with the Ontario provincial election in 2018, and other local and provincial elections, culminating nationally with the 2019 federal election.

<sup>247</sup> CIVIX, “Student Budget Consultation”, CIVIX, Toronto, 2018. Accessed 12 May 2018 from <<http://civix.ca/student-budget-consultation>>.

<sup>248</sup> CIVIX, “Student Budget Consultation”, CIVIX, Toronto, 2018. Accessed 12 May 2018 from <<http://civix.ca/student-budget-consultation>>.

<sup>249</sup> CIVIX, “NewsWise – Democracy demands new literacy”, CIVIX, Toronto, 2018. Accessed 12 May 2018 from <<http://civix.ca/blog/newswise-democracy-demands-news-literacy>>.

### Committee's view – Student Budget Consultation

The committee learnt that CIVIX's Student Budget Consultation program is popular in Canada, with more than 10,000 students participating in the program since 2013. It provides students with an opportunity to learn about the Canadian Government's budget process, the basics of state finance and also provide feedback on current policies and programs. CIVIX told the committee that the consultation has contributed to greater awareness amongst Canadian students about the basics of public accounts and finance, and that this, in turn, has fostered a greater awareness amongst participants of the public policy issues that matter to them in state budgets.

The committee supports in principle the implementation of a similar budget consultation program for future Victorian state budgets, subject to further research and planning by the Victorian Government to determine the most appropriate model for Victoria based on evidence from CIVIX. The committee notes that the Department of Treasury and Finance and the Department of Education and Training may be best resourced to administer this program, design the survey and provide instructions and program materials to participating schools. Further, given that Vox Pop Labs hosts the survey in Canada, a third party may be needed to host the survey in Victoria; these details should be decided by the Victorian Government.

**RECOMMENDATION 23:** The committee recommends the Victorian Government explore the introduction of a student budget consultation process, based on the Canadian model administered by CIVIX. For future state budgets the results of the survey could be shared with the Department of Treasury and Finance.

As part of the committee's report into the 2014 Victorian state election, the committee noted that voting in periodic elections is a fundamental human right. Article 29 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities states that State parties shall "guarantee to persons with disabilities political rights and the opportunity to enjoy them on an equal basis with others".<sup>250</sup>

According to ABS data the prevalence of disability in Victoria has remained reasonably constant over time, increasing roughly one per cent from 2009 to 2012. In 2012 approximately 19.4 percent of the Victorian population, or approximately 1,114,000 people, experienced disability. This was slightly higher than the national rate of 18.5 percent (or 4.2 million). This is partly due to Victoria's older demography compared with other Australian states and territories.<sup>251</sup>

Of particular disabilities, it is estimated that there are approximately 90,000 Victorians who are blind or have low vision. Vision Australia expects this to rise to 138,000 by 2030.<sup>252</sup> Regarding other disabilities, of the estimated 1,114,000 Victorians with a disability, the Public Record Office suggests approximately 323,000 have a profound or severe core-activity limitation. The most common, major disability groups are:

- Mental illness, especially depression. Symptoms vary widely and can include mood changes, psychotic episodes, auditory and visual hallucinations, and delusions;

<sup>250</sup> Parliament of Victoria, Electoral Matters Committee, "Inquiry into the 2014 Victorian state election", Parliament of Victoria, May 2016, p.108.

<sup>251</sup> Parliament of Victoria, Electoral Matters Committee, "Inquiry into the 2014 Victorian state election", Parliament of Victoria, May 2016, p.108.

<sup>252</sup> Parliament of Victoria, Electoral Matters Committee, "Inquiry into the 2014 Victorian state election", Parliament of Victoria, May 2016, p.108.

- Physical disabilities, especially musculo-skeletal disorders. This includes people with spinal-cord injuries, cerebral palsy, arthritis and rheumatism; and
- Intellectual disabilities. “People with intellectual disabilities may learn slowly and have significantly below-average intelligence as measured by standard tests. The disability is generally defined as having an onset before 18 years. There are approximately 40,000 people in Victoria who have an intellectual disability, and of these, around 75 per cent have a mild degree of disability”.<sup>253</sup>

The VEC assists all Victorians with a disability to participate in elections by enrolling and voting. The VEC’s submission notes that the VEC follows a Disability Action Plan over the four-year Victorian electoral cycle with initiatives aimed at removing potential barriers to enrolling and voting for people living with a disability.<sup>254</sup> The Plan is registered with the Victorian Human Rights Commission and has six key strategies:

- improve physical access to enrolment and voting
- develop partnerships with people and peak bodies to facilitate improved access to enrolment and voting
- improve the accessibility and clarity of information on enrolment
- provide for more Victorians to have a secret, independent vote
- improve staff awareness and assistance to people living with a disability and
- improve the VEC’s capacity to employ and appropriately task people living with a disability.<sup>255</sup>

Some of the VEC’s key initiatives in relation to providing accessible voting services to Victorians with disabilities are;

#### Voting centre lookup

The VEC has offered a voting centre lookup facility on its website for several Victorian State elections and an application version for both the 2010 and 2014 Victorian State elections. According to the VEC;

“the purpose of the service was to enable voters to find their nearest early or Election Day voting centres, using either address-based or map-based information. Accessibility ratings for every voting centre were provided to help voters with mobility issues to determine the nearest accessible voting centre. Extra access information was made available for all voting centres used for the six councils that conducted attendance elections in 2016, in line with the Advisory Group feedback. Improvements for the 2018 State election include direction capability and the ability to provide alerts for particular voting centres if necessary due to unplanned closures”.<sup>256</sup>

#### Electronic voting

As part of its inquiry into electronic voting, the committee examined the kiosk-based supervised electronic voting system available for eligible Victorian electors at Victorian state elections. While the VEC remains committed to providing eligible

<sup>253</sup> Parliament of Victoria, Electoral Matters Committee, “Inquiry into the 2014 Victorian state election”, Parliament of Victoria, May 2016, p.108.

<sup>254</sup> Victorian Electoral Commission, *Submission No.12a*, p.29.

<sup>255</sup> Victorian Electoral Commission, *Submission No.12a*, p.29.

<sup>256</sup> Victorian Electoral Commission, *Submission No.12a*, p.29.

electors with a form of electronic voting for certain groups of people at Victorian state elections, the VEC changed its position on remote electronic voting in the 58th Parliament and advocated to the committee that the Parliament should legislate to provide for remote electronic voting at Victorian state elections, based on NSW's iVote system. The committee offered in principle support for remote electronic voting in its final report for certain groups of Victorian electors.<sup>257</sup> However, as noted in Chapter Two, the Victorian Government advised it would refer the development of a national approach to electronic voting to COAG.<sup>258</sup>

Despite this, during this inquiry the committee received evidence from some inquiry participants about the desirability of remote electronic voting for people with disabilities. Vision Australia, which has made submissions to the committee's inquiries into the 2014 Victorian state election and electronic voting, again called for "the VEC to be directed to develop, without delay, automated telephone and web-based voting options, in line with the Electoral Council of Australia (ECA) telephone voting standard and along the lines of the NSW iVote system enabling a voter to vote from any place, for implementation in the next Victorian election due to be held in 2018".<sup>259</sup>

### Committee's view

The committee notes Vision Australia's evidence and also notes the Victorian Government's response to the committee's report on electronic voting.

#### Carers' project

A core commitment in the VEC's Disability Action Plan is to develop a capacity building module for community guardians. The VEC's submission noted that VEC staff had "collected anecdotal evidence that some carers of people with a disability believe that the person in their care should not be voting, due to the fact that they have a disability".<sup>260</sup> Some inquiry participants also raised the issue of the voting rights of people living in assisted living facilities. In his submission, Matthew Potocnik also discussed anecdotal evidence about carers denying those in their care access to voting.<sup>261</sup>

The VEC's submission highlighted the complexities around voting, consent and rights;

"Often this belief is not based on a medical assessment of the person's capacity to make a choice, but on the carer's own beliefs about the importance of voting, politics, and voting requirements and the carer's lack of understanding of voting options available to people with disabilities. This partnership project with Carers Victoria was designed to address the gap in carers' understanding of the voting rights of people with disabilities through the provision of online and face-to-face training. A co-design approach was taken to determine the structure and content of the face-to-face sessions with carers, members of the VEC's Electoral Access Advisory Group and Inclusion Melbourne, a disability support service with an interest in

<sup>257</sup> Parliament of Victoria, Electoral Matters Committee, "Inquiry into electronic voting", Parliament of Victoria, May 2017.

<sup>258</sup> Victorian Government, Government Response to Electoral Matters Committee Report on Electronic Voting, 2 November 2017, p.1.

<sup>259</sup> Vision Australia, *Submission No.7*, p.p.4-5.

<sup>260</sup> Victorian Electoral Commission, *Submission No.12a*, p.30.

<sup>261</sup> Matthew Potocnik, *Submission No.23*, p.2.

developing best practice examples for support workers in civic participation. Face-to-face sessions were delivered across regional and metro areas, targeting areas of high informality and poor voter turnout”.<sup>262</sup>

### Disability outreach sessions

The VEC’s submission notes that the VEC works with the disability sector to deliver electoral information sessions via disability day centres, group homes, self-advocacy groups and other disability organisations. While “outreach services are offered to all disability groups, the primary focus is to work with people who have intellectual disabilities or acquired brain injuries. Session participants explore the idea of decision making about their lives, the three levels of government, how to enrol to vote and how elections work. They also have the opportunity to participate in a mock election”.<sup>263</sup>

### Voting is for Everyone

In 2009 the VEC produced the Voting is for Everyone resource for people living with disability, their families and carers. The resource

“which features a DVD and accompanying facilitation guide, was developed in partnership with Scope support workers and clients. The resource explains the process of enrolling and voting in clear, easy steps; aims to dispel the myths around disability and voting and looks at why it is important for people with a disability to vote. The resource was distributed to over 1,000 disability residential and day services across Yooralla, Scope and Department of Health and Human Services service providers in the lead up to both the 2010 and 2014 State elections. In 2010 the resource received a Scope Community Partnerships award”.<sup>264</sup>

### Easy English materials

According to the VEC’s submission, Australian Bureau of Statistics figures “show that almost half (47 percent) of all readers in Australia are only capable to Literacy Levels 1 & 2. Level 3 is considered to be the minimum for today’s literacy needs”.<sup>265</sup> Those people likely to be operating at Literacy Levels 1 & 2 include people who left school early, people from a CALD background, people with an acquired disability (after a stroke or car accident), intellectual or physical impairment (acquired or otherwise) who can still understand the concept of voting, people with dyslexia or people with mental health issues.

### Other evidence from inquiry participants – provision of information in accessible formats

One of the main themes in the evidence about voting for Victorians with disabilities was the accessibility of electoral information from political parties. These concerns were previously discussed during the committee’s inquiry into the 2014 Victorian state election; the committee received evidence for that inquiry from Vision Australia and Blind Citizens Australia, Geelong and Districts Branch, about the difficulties people with vision impairment have accessing electoral information from political parties, such as campaign materials and how-to-vote cards.

<sup>262</sup> Victorian Electoral Commission, *Submission No.12a*, p.30.

<sup>263</sup> Victorian Electoral Commission, *Submission No.12a*, p.30.

<sup>264</sup> Victorian Electoral Commission, *Submission No.12a*, p.31.

<sup>265</sup> Victorian Electoral Commission, *Submission No.12a*, p.31.

In their submission to this inquiry, Vision Australia again called for the VEC to strongly emphasise to political parties and independent candidates “that they have a social and legislative responsibility to ensure that party platform information, candidate information and ‘how to vote card’ information is made available in a range of accessible formats to people who are blind or have low vision”.<sup>266</sup>

Elections Canada also advised the committee that it provides magnifying glasses to all polling stations for federal elections. According to Elections Canada, “all the magnifying glasses have a built-in light, which must be turned on when the magnifying glass is used, and a magnification of 4X. The magnifying glasses should be placed in plain sight, where electors will be able to see they are available”.<sup>267</sup> If an elector wishes to use a magnifying glass, the Returning Officer follows a series of prompts, instructing the elector how to use the glass and return it once they have voted.

Further, the City of Ottawa Elections Office also advised the committee that a range of voting tools and services are available to electors as part of the Office’s commitment to providing accessible municipal elections. In particular, the Office offers magnifying sheets which are placed in every polling booth to enable electors who require assistance reading the ballot paper to cast their ballot. The sheets are inexpensive and are widely available in hardware and homewares stores in Canada. The Office advised that the magnifying sheets decreased ballot completion times as electors did not have to ask election officials for a magnifying device. Many electors also anecdotally told the Office that they appreciated not having to ask for a magnifying device. The Committee notes that such magnifying devices would be particularly useful, notably in some Legislative Council Regions where the point size of the ballot paper text is necessarily small given the large number of candidates; the Legislative Council ballot paper at the 2014 Victorian state election was nearly a metre in width with text in point size 10.5.

### Committee’s view – political parties and electoral information

As part of its inquiry into the 2014 Victorian state election, the committee noted that “all Victorians, regardless of their background, should be able to access electoral information. As Victoria’s electoral administrator, the committee notes the VEC has a responsibility to provide this information on its website, in accessible formats, wherever possible”.

While the VEC has previously informed the committee about the difficulties associated with placing political party information on the VEC’s website in accessible formats, the committee nevertheless recommends the VEC provide electoral information from political parties on its website, consistent with guidelines already used by the VEC for providing information in accessible formats.

**RECOMMENDATION 24:** The committee recommends the Victorian Electoral Commission ensure that information provided on its website from political parties, such as how-to-vote cards, is consistent with guidelines used by the VEC for providing information in accessible formats.

<sup>266</sup> Vision Australia, *Submission No.7*, p.2.

<sup>267</sup> Elections Canada, “Returning Officer’s Manual; Chapter 10, Polling Stations”, Elections Canada, 2018. Accessed 4 July 2018 from <<http://www.elections.ca/content.aspx?section=res&dir=pub/ecdocs/rom&document=c10&lang=e>>.



**RECOMMENDATION 25:** The committee recommends the Victorian Electoral Commission offer magnifying sheets in all Victorian voting centres for Victorian state elections. The Victorian Electoral Commission should liaise with Elections Canada and the City of Ottawa regarding the details of the magnifying devices it provides to polling stations.

### People from CALD backgrounds

In an Australian context, individuals from a CALD background are those who identify as having a specific cultural or linguistic affiliation by virtue of the place of birth, ancestry, ethnic origin, religion, preferred language, or because of their parents' identification on a similar basis. As noted by the Victorian Multicultural Commission, Victoria's population is among the fastest-growing and most diverse in Australia. At the 2011 Census, Victoria's total population was 5,354,039 persons, increasing by 8.5 percent (or 421,617 persons) from the 2006 Census. Of this number:

- 26.2 percent of Victorians “were born overseas in more than 200 countries” (an increase from 23.8 percent in 2006);
- 46.8 percent of Victorians were either born overseas or have at least one parent born overseas (an increase from 43.6 percent in 2006).
- 23.1 percent of Victorians spoke a language other than English at home (an increase from 20.4 percent in 2006).
- 67.7 percent of Victorians followed 135 faiths – compared to 68.7 percent following 130 faiths in 2006”.<sup>268</sup>

During the inquiry the committee received evidence and proposals for ways to improve electoral participation and community engagement for CALD communities from the VEC and the ECCV. The VEC's submission discussed a combination of programs and initiatives used by the VEC to engage CALD communities, including some programs, such as the implementation of the VEC's CALD Electoral Advisory Group and Democracy Ambassador program, which were reviewed by the committee during its inquiry into the 2014 Victorian state election.

The VEC's submission also discussed several CALD outreach initiatives which the committee has not reviewed as part of its work in the 58th Parliament. These are;

- CALD Outreach program; As a result of the Democracy Ambassador project, the VEC has continued “providing in-language outreach services to the community”. Since 2016, a team of (currently six) casual community educators have delivered electoral information sessions to a range of language groups. In the four months prior to the 2016 local council elections the educators, who between them speak 16 languages, delivered 74 electoral information sessions to 1,672 participants”.<sup>269</sup>
- Be Heard partnership with Leadership Victoria; In partnership with Leadership Victoria, the VEC has “developed a Be Heard community leader workshop to improve electoral participation for CALD communities”.

“The two-hour workshop aims to build community leaders' political literacy and provide participants with an understanding of democratic principles, three levels of government and how preferential elections work. The VEC's submission noted that six Be Heard workshops have been delivered to 109 participants over the past

<sup>268</sup> Parliament of Victoria, Electoral Matters Committee, “Inquiry into the 2014 Victorian state election”, Parliament of Victoria, May 2016, p.110.

<sup>269</sup> Victorian Electoral Commission, *Submission No.12a*, p.34.

two years through both Leadership Victoria and via local council networks. Many participants learned that they had inadvertently voted informally for a number of elections. It is my duty to teach my community how to vote correctly”.<sup>270</sup>

- English as Additional Language (EAL) project; as noted earlier, many Victorians do not have a strong command of English and speak a language other than English at home. In recognition of this, the VEC’s English as Additional Language pilot project involved a three-hour professional development training session to EAL teachers in July 2017. The “training aims to increase EAL teachers’ competency in teaching electoral vocabulary. The training content was based on the VEC’s Easy English Guides to Voting. A train-the-trainer model was used to assist teachers to learn about electoral processes and the associated vocabulary, incorporating delivery methods that are interactive and engaging”.<sup>271</sup> The program is currently being evaluated by the VEC for future use after the 2018 Victorian state election.

### Carers’ project and CALD communities

The committee also notes that the VEC has had some unintended success providing outreach services about voting to CALD communities through its Carers’ project, as outlined earlier. The VEC’s submission noted;

“An unexpected and unintended consequence of the project was the positive response of culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) carers groups to the project. Nearly half of the carer support groups were CALD groups, who tended to lack understanding of the electoral process (including how to assist people to vote). These groups’ positive response has been a major contributor to the positive outcome of the sessions”.<sup>272</sup>

In addition to the VEC’s evidence, the committee also received a submission from the ECCV. While the ECCV has participated in many committee inquiries, the ECCV’s submission to this inquiry called for specific support for CALD community engagement in two areas;

- ‘Hard to reach’ groups; the ECCV’s submission noted that while the VEC runs a comprehensive range of outreach programs for CALD communities, new migrants and other ethnic community groups who are considered ‘hard to reach’ in terms of electoral participation, ECCV consultations confirm “that not all people who are active in their local multicultural communities are likely to have heard about VEC’s active citizenship workshops for community leaders and other engagement programs”.<sup>273</sup> Accordingly, the ECCV recommended that the VEC continue to work with CALD peak bodies to identify community leaders beyond the Democracy Ambassador program who might be able to perform a similar function in their community, but not necessarily sit within the Ambassador framework.<sup>274</sup>
- Access to culturally appropriate information; although the committee has previously supported ECCV recommendations to improve how the VEC provides electoral information to CALD communities, the ECCV once again during this inquiry called for the VEC to continue its efforts to refine how this information is delivered. For example, the ECCV suggested that the “VEC’s ‘A Virtual

270 Victorian Electoral Commission, *Submission No.12a*, p.34.

271 Victorian Electoral Commission, *Submission No.12a*, p.34.

272 Victorian Electoral Commission, *Submission No.12a*, p.34.

273 Ethnic Communities’ Council of Victoria, *Submission No.24*, p.3.

274 Ethnic Communities’ Council of Victoria, *Submission No.24*, p.3.

Voting Experience' video could be supplemented by brief information videos in community languages that explain available voting options, particularly for people from ethnic backgrounds with oral traditions or limited literacy in their own language".<sup>275</sup> The ECCV suggested that the VEC should adopt a similar approach to Consumer Affairs Victoria.

The ECCV's submission also recognised that the internet and the VEC's website is the preferred method for many CALD communities to gather information about electoral participation and voting. Accordingly, the ECCV called for the VEC to continue refining its website to provide relevant electoral information to CALD communities in culturally appropriate ways, and in relevant community languages.<sup>276</sup>

### Committee's view – CALD communities and community engagement

This inquiry is the Electoral Matters Committee's eleventh inquiry into electoral matters since 2006. For almost all of these inquiries the committee has received evidence from the ECCV about the needs of the CALD communities in terms of electoral participation. All eleven inquiries have featured recommendations or findings from the Electoral Matters Committee directly addressing CALD electoral participation. Ensuring Victorians from CALD communities participate in Victorian elections as fully as possible is a major area of interest for the committee.

Since 2006 the committee has observed a considerable increase in the VEC's programs to assist CALD communities with electoral participation and information about voting. While this is a positive development, the committee recognises that many of Victoria's CALD stakeholders, such as the ECCV, have regularly called for close collaboration between the VEC and CALD community groups to ensure that the VEC's programs closely match community need. The committee does not suggest that this is not happening – the VEC's CALD Electoral Advisory Group is a worthy initiative and a program the committee supports. Wherever possible, the VEC should ensure the partnerships it has with CALD community organisations are channelled through the Electoral Advisory Group.

Based on the ECCV's evidence to this particular inquiry, the committee has identified a need for more specific funding of programs for what the ECCV called 'hard to reach' community groups. These groups may not be fully aware of the scope and extent of the VEC's outreach programs with community leaders, like the Democracy Ambassador program, and require additional administrative support.

Another issue arising from the proliferation of CALD outreach programs in Victoria relates to performance. At the public hearings the committee discussed the VEC's Democracy Ambassador program with the ECCV. The committee and the ECCV agreed that the VEC could improve how it allocates resources to its CALD outreach program. The committee and the VEC also agreed that the VEC could improve how it measured the success of its engagement programs based on the needs of particular Districts, given the growing diversity of Victoria's population;

**Ms TEMPLETON** — At the point where we have got election offices operating right across Victoria, they have then got information about what their local communities are and where the language barriers might be. They have the opportunity to connect with what is local in their community, and we provide them with flyers and with

<sup>275</sup> Ethnic Communities' Council of Victoria, *Submission No.24*, p.4.

<sup>276</sup> Ethnic Communities' Council of Victoria, *Submission No.24*, p.p.4-5.

information so that a lot of that grassroots thing happens in possibly the six to eight weeks before the election. It happens in quite a diverse way, depending on the electorate, because each electorate is different.<sup>277</sup>

Finally, regarding CALD communities, a clear message during this inquiry was the role of social media as a preferred communication medium for CALD communities. At the public hearings the ECCV told the committee that social media was a key strategic tool for the organisation to communicate with its audiences, pass on information about electoral participation and voting. The committee notes the similarities between the CALD communities and young people in terms of the importance of using social media to communicate information about elections.

**RECOMMENDATION 26:** The committee recommends the Victorian Electoral Commission continue to work closely with CALD community groups like the Ethnic Communities' Council of Victoria to ensure that the VEC's CALD community engagement and outreach programs are suitably coordinated with CALD community groups, avoiding overlap where possible.

**RECOMMENDATION 27:** The committee recommends the Victorian Electoral Commission develop a strategy to engage community groups who are not successfully interacting with the VEC's Democracy Ambassador Program. These 'hard to reach' groups should be a priority reference for the VEC's Education and Inclusion Unit.

**RECOMMENDATION 28:** The committee recommends the Victorian Electoral Commission continue to use social media wherever possible to communicate information about electoral participation and voting to CALD communities.

**RECOMMENDATION 29:** The committee recommends that the Victorian Electoral Commission continue to evaluate, improve and measure the Democracy Ambassador program consistent with the Victorian Auditor-General's recommendation in the 2016 performance audit of the Victorian Electoral Commission.

### Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders

According to the 2011 Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) Census of Housing and Population, there were approximately 37,991 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders in Victoria. Approximately 65 percent of Indigenous Victorians are of voting age.<sup>278</sup>

As noted in the VEC's report to Parliament on the 2014 Victorian state election, due to a staffing loss "the VEC was unable to roll out a full outreach program for the Indigenous community prior to the election".<sup>279</sup> Instead, the VEC sponsored several other community initiatives, including supporting an Indigenous football team. During the electoral cycle the VEC also runs an Indigenous Engagement Program. The group is composed of prominent Indigenous community members and the Victorian Electoral Commissioner.

<sup>277</sup> Michelle Templeton, Manager, Election Staff Capability, Victorian Electoral Commission, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 24 October 2017, p.6.

<sup>278</sup> Parliament of Victoria, Electoral Matters Committee, "Inquiry into the 2014 Victorian state election", Parliament of Victoria, May 2016, p.111.

<sup>279</sup> Parliament of Victoria, Electoral Matters Committee, "Inquiry into the 2014 Victorian state election", Parliament of Victoria, May 2016, p.111.

The VEC's submission to this inquiry also noted that the VEC launched its first Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP) in January 2017. This plan

"...was developed by the VEC's Aboriginal Communities Officer in consultation with community groups and with VEC staff input. The aim of the RAP is to build confidence and trust in the VEC's determination to address reconciliation and electoral participation barriers experienced by community. Key actions in the RAP include the development of culturally competent civic education programs, cultural learning and development opportunities for staff (as highlighted in section 4 of this submission) and building strong relationships with Aboriginal communities. Ensuring Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders are represented in the VEC's core and casual workforce is also a key priority. In addition to the VEC's existing partnership with the Korin Gamadji Institute, the VEC also offers electoral outreach services via local Koori Education Coordinators and to Aboriginal community groups across Victoria".<sup>280</sup>

**RECOMMENDATION 30:** The committee recommends that the Victorian Electoral Commission continue to work closely with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community groups to ensure engagement and outreach programs are suitably coordinated, avoiding overlap where possible.

### People experiencing homelessness

At the time of the 2014 Victorian state election, approximately 23,000 Victorians were experiencing homelessness. This statistic is derived from the 2011 ABS Census and the Council to Homeless Persons. At the time of the election, there were 1,780 electors who identified as experiencing homelessness on the electoral roll. During 2014, 356 homeless persons enrolled or updated their details on the roll.

The ABS' definition of homelessness states that when a person does not have suitable accommodation alternatives, they are considered homeless if their current living arrangement

- "Is in a dwelling that is inadequate; or
- Has no tenure, or if their initial tenure is short and not extendable; or
- Does not allow them to have control of, and access to, space for social relations".<sup>281</sup>

As noted in the committee's report on the 2014 Victorian state election, the VEC has run an outreach program called 'Homeless not Voteless' since the 2006 Victorian state election. The program was again run in 2014, with additional enrolment outreach and mobile voting sessions. The VEC's submission noted

"that 30 enrolment outreach sessions [were provided to] key agencies that provide services to people experiencing homelessness from September 2014 to 18 November 2014. During the enrolment sessions, 86 people completed enrolment forms and 68 people checked that their details were on the electoral roll. In addition, the VEC again operated specialised mobile voting services for Victorians experiencing homelessness. The VEC's mobile voting team visited 20 locations, with voting facilities set up at the most appropriate time as advised by the agency assisting the VEC. Three hundred and twenty votes were cast at mobile voting locations. During

<sup>280</sup> Victorian Electoral Commission, *Submission No.12a*, p.36.

<sup>281</sup> Parliament of Victoria, Electoral Matters Committee, "Inquiry into the 2014 Victorian state election", Parliament of Victoria, May 2016, p.104.

the electoral cycle the VEC also runs a Homelessness Advisory Group, featuring representation from homelessness organisations across Victoria. The group meets regularly to discuss key issues and steer the Homeless not Voteless program”.<sup>282</sup>

During this inquiry the committee received a submission from Launch Housing (formerly Hanover Welfare Services). Launch Housing noted that the major issue facing people experiencing homelessness in relation to electoral participation is a process issue about enrolment. Hanover Welfare Services conducted a brief census just after the November 2006 Victorian state election to explore if Hanover’s clients were eligible to vote at the election. The survey found that the majority of eligible clients (60 percent) did not vote in the November 2006 Victorian State election. The reason for not voting was overwhelmingly related to people not being enrolled; 61 percent of women and 63 percent of men were not enrolled to vote.<sup>283</sup>

Launch Housing’s submission noted that enrolment was a primary concern despite many people experiencing homelessness having a high degree of civic disengagement;

“The issue of enrolment is primarily a matter of process, which raises questions of the accessibility of the electoral process for marginalised adults. Other barriers to voting seem to indicate a high degree of civic disengagement and disillusionment manifested by a lack of ‘interest’ in, and lack of ‘awareness’ of the election”.<sup>284</sup>

### Committee’s view – people experiencing homelessness

During the inquiry Launch Housing welcomed the VEC’s attention on the electoral experience of people experiencing homelessness. The committee supports the VEC’s initiatives in this area and the right for all eligible Victorians, regardless of their living circumstances, to participate in elections if they are entitled to do so. The committee encourages the VEC to continue working with homelessness agencies to support the electoral participation of this community group.

**RECOMMENDATION 31:** The committee recommends the Victorian Electoral Commission’s Homelessness Electoral Advisory Group continues to support and resource appropriately the electoral participation of Victorians experiencing homelessness.

### People in prison

Currently, under Victorian law, prisoners serving a sentence of less than five years are entitled to enrol and vote. Under Commonwealth law, the cut-off point is three years. This “creates a category of prisoners – those serving between three and five years - who can vote in state but not in federal elections. The VEC also notes that there are further clarifications around whether a person is considered to be serving a sentence of imprisonment only if the person is in detention on a full-time basis. Under s76 of the *Corrections Act* (Vic) a prisoner on parole is deemed still to be under sentence”.<sup>285</sup> This means that offenders on parole serving sentences of five years or more are entitled to enrol and vote for Commonwealth purposes but not for state.

<sup>282</sup> Victorian Electoral Commission, *Submission No.12a*, p.36.

<sup>283</sup> Launch Housing, *Submission No.14*, p.3.

<sup>284</sup> Launch Housing, *Submission No.14*, p.p.3-4.

<sup>285</sup> Victorian Electoral Commission, *Submission No.12a*, p.37.

In 2010 the VEC initiated a research project into prisoners and voting. The research found that while people serving a sentence of less than five years are entitled to enrol and vote, “only one in four of them were actually enrolled. Significant attitudinal and environmental barriers were identified, indicating that access to electoral information and services for people in prison needed to be addressed”.<sup>286</sup> Since 2014, the VEC has conducted a more comprehensive program of electoral engagement for people in prison, resulting in the production of a program design document and a partnership with Corrections Victoria and internal research to better understand the barriers to voting faced by the prisoner franchise in Victoria.

Previously, the then Electoral Matters Committee in the 56<sup>th</sup> Parliament considered evidence about the prisoner franchise in Victoria as part of its inquiry into voter participation and informal voting. The then committee recommended the Victorian Government fund the VEC to provide information to persons experiencing incarceration, corrections service providers, and the Department of Justice to enhance electoral information to the prisoner franchise in Victoria.

### 6.3 Community engagement with parliamentary processes

The committee’s interest in electoral participation has extended during this inquiry to include how parliaments, and particularly the Parliament of Victoria, provide information about the work of parliaments and civics education to the Victorian community. As noted in Chapter Two, parliaments globally are investigating new forms of public communication and engagement, with the “modern legislature outward focused, taking active steps to connect with the public...Around the world new participatory activities are emerging in and around legislatures, ranging from open days, information centres and community cabinets through to experiments with e-petitions and social media”.<sup>287</sup> The committee again notes Hendriks and Kay’s conclusion that parliaments “are undergoing a participatory makeover”.<sup>288</sup>

This section of the chapter reviews evidence the committee received from inquiry participants about the Parliament of Victoria’s community engagement and education programs, and community engagement and education programs in Westminster parliaments across the globe. As noted in Chapter One, during the inquiry the committee visited New Zealand in October 2016, Queensland in November 2017 and Canada in April 2018 in support of this inquiry. During these visits the committee visited the Parliament of New Zealand, the Parliament of Queensland and the Parliament of Canada to learn more about how these parliaments engage with their communities and educate people about their role and work. The committee’s investigations in Canada also included study of the Ontario Legislative Assembly’s community engagement program. Overall, the committee was impressed by a general, institutional commitment observed across Canada to stimulate interest in parliamentary and civic processes.

<sup>286</sup> Victorian Electoral Commission, *Submission No.12a*, p.37.

<sup>287</sup> Hendricks, Carolyn, Kay, Adrian, “Connecting citizens to legislative deliberations: public engagement in committees”. Paper presented at 2015 Australian Political Studies Association (ASPA) Annual Conference 27-30 September 2015 Canberra. Accessed 9 February 2018 from <[https://www.newdemocracy.com.au/docs/researchpapers/HendriksKay\\_finalAPSA.pdf](https://www.newdemocracy.com.au/docs/researchpapers/HendriksKay_finalAPSA.pdf)>, p.2.

<sup>288</sup> Hendricks, Carolyn, Kay, Adrian, “Connecting citizens to legislative deliberations: public engagement in committees”. Paper presented at 2015 Australian Political Studies Association (ASPA) Annual Conference 27-30 September 2015 Canberra. Accessed 9 February 2018 from <[https://www.newdemocracy.com.au/docs/researchpapers/HendriksKay\\_finalAPSA.pdf](https://www.newdemocracy.com.au/docs/researchpapers/HendriksKay_finalAPSA.pdf)>, p.2.

This section proceeds firstly by reviewing the Parliament of Victoria’s community engagement and education programs. It then reviews evidence from New Zealand and Canada focusing on two major areas;

- How Parliaments can foster youth involvement in parliamentary processes, leading to greater civic engagement in representative institutions; and
- How Parliaments can assist electoral authorities and electoral participation to inform the public about the conduct of elections and electoral participation.

### 6.3.1 Parliament of Victoria’s community engagement and education programs

Community engagement is a priority of all three departments of the Parliament of Victoria. Substantively, community engagement is the responsibility of the Department of Parliamentary Services (DPS). The Community Engagement and Education unit was established in 2014 and is resourced by resources from DPS, the Legislative Council and the Legislative Assembly. Education and Community Engagement staff design “programs to provide professional development for teachers and student teachers in all education sectors, as well as print and audio-visual resources produced for specific audiences and the community as a whole”.<sup>289</sup>

One of the Victorian Parliament’s six headline strategic objectives is to increase public awareness of, and opportunities for engagement with, the functioning of Parliament.

As part of this, the Parliament’s community engagement strategy has four key objectives;

- Greater knowledge of Parliament’s heritage;
- Better understanding of how Parliament works;
- Stronger interest in what Parliament is doing; and
- More opportunities for people to have their say.<sup>290</sup>

According to the Parliament of Victoria’s Strategic Plan 2015-2018, four themes underpin the Parliament’s community engagement work;

**“Inspire:** Parliament has been an important part of Victoria’s rich heritage and we want to share our story with Victorians and visitors as inspiration for current and future generations.

**Instruct:** To be an active part of our parliamentary system of government, our community needs to understand how parliament works and how to get involved.

**Inform:** We will be a reliable source of information on parliament’s work so that our community stays up to date with the issues before parliament.

**Involve:** Parliament is all about people and we will work to ensure our community is able to participate in and contribute to the work of parliament”.<sup>291</sup>

<sup>289</sup> Parliament of Victoria, Department of Parliamentary Services, *Annual Report 2016-17*, Department of Parliamentary Services, 2017, p.16.

<sup>290</sup> Parliament of Victoria, Department of Parliamentary Services, *Annual Report 2016-17*, Department of Parliamentary Services, 2017, p.16.

<sup>291</sup> Parliament of Victoria, “Strategic Plan 2015-2018”, Parliament of Victoria, p.p-3-5.



According to the Parliament of Victoria's Strategic Plan 2015-2018, the Parliament's work is broadly directed to all Victorian citizens. However, the Parliament also recognises that there are "particular target audiences that will be a focus of attention either to help parliament reach its overall community or because they are seen as vital to the future health of our democracy".<sup>292</sup> These groups are the media, young people, regional Victorians, indigenous Victorians and people who are new to Victoria.<sup>293</sup>

The Parliament also provides visitor services to guests who visit Parliament House to learn about the Parliament and Victoria's parliamentary system, including visiting delegations and visitors from other parliaments.

### Community engagement delivery – programs and services

The committee notes that the Parliament's community engagement strategy is delivered through four main categories.

- **Events:** To inspire interest in our heritage we will coordinate an annual calendar of events that will include tours, displays, exhibitions and functions. The focus of these events will be Parliament House in Melbourne but we will also connect with regional communities through online services and outreach visits.
- **Education:** Tours, role plays, seminars and a range of resource material will enable us to instruct people on how Victoria's parliamentary system works. Key audiences will be primary, secondary and tertiary students along with adult learners.
- **News and information:** A comprehensive information and media service will provide news and features to inform people about the work of parliament. We will deliver content through a variety of multimedia platforms so that our information and its presentation are up to date.
- **Community connections:** We will look at the ways in which we involve the community in our work and ensure that our processes encourage people's participation. In particular, we will look at ways in which we can engage groups in the community that currently feel disconnected from the work of parliament.<sup>294</sup>

Some of the Parliament's better known community engagement programs and events are<sup>295</sup>;

- **Tours.** Parliament runs visitor and group tours.
- **Parliament House Open Day.** Every March Parliament opens its doors to the public to allow Victorians to take a self-guided tour through one of Melbourne's best-known landmarks and the home of the Parliament of Victoria.
- **Open House Melbourne.** Each year, Parliament House takes part in the Open House Melbourne program, when people are invited to explore the outstanding houses, buildings, infrastructure and landscapes that illustrate our city's rich history, reflect how we live and work, and offer insights into our future city.

<sup>292</sup> Parliament of Victoria, "Strategic Plan 2015-2018", Parliament of Victoria, p.3.

<sup>293</sup> Parliament of Victoria, "Strategic Plan 2015-2018", Parliament of Victoria, p.3.

<sup>294</sup> Suzie Luddon, Community Engagement Projects Officer, Parliament of Victoria, *Private Correspondence*, 27 April 2018, p.p-1.3.

<sup>295</sup> Suzie Luddon, Community Engagement Projects Officer, Parliament of Victoria, *Private Correspondence*, 27 April 2018, p.p-1.3.

- Arts and Culture. Parliament House often plays host to a surprising and diverse offering of art, music and cultural events that celebrate Victoria's creativity and heritage.
- Regional Sittings. From 2001 to 2014 the Legislative Council and the Legislative Assembly met in different regional centres across Victoria. These regional sittings gave people the opportunity to see their elected representatives at work and to learn about the processes of Parliament.
- Professional Development. A program of professional development opportunities is offered at Parliament House throughout the year. *Parliament in Practice* is targeted at public servants who have a direct interest in the proceedings of parliament. The parliaments also offer courses designed for school-teachers and teachers in the adult education sector.
- Youth Parliament and Parliamentary Internship program. Held in conjunction with the YMCA, Youth Parliament is held at Parliament House and is designed to give young Victorians between the ages of 16 to 25 a chance to be heard at the highest levels of the Victorian Government on a wide range of issues relevant to young people's lives. Annually, "young people aged 16 to 25 participate in the YMCA Youth Parliament program. Twenty teams of six participants receive training in public speaking and leadership at residential camps, as they research issues that they're passionate about. From this research they develop a Bill, which they debate in Victorian Parliament over three days each July".<sup>296</sup>

In 1990 the Victorian Parliament established a partnership with leading universities in Melbourne. Following the inaugural intake in 1990 of 21 students from The University of Melbourne, the program was expanded to include students from Monash University in 1994, Victoria University in 2004 and La Trobe and Swinburne universities in 2016.<sup>297</sup> The Victorian Parliamentary "internship program has hosted over 1000 interns as an accredited semester unit of study from their university".<sup>298</sup> Students are

"tasked with compiling a research report on a topic established in consultation with their Member of Parliament. Mutually beneficial pairing is assured by taking into account research interests, areas of academic expertise, relevant political affiliation and geographical location. In testimony to the standard of research produced by interns, Members of Parliament have drawn upon internship reports during their Parliamentary debates and members' statements".<sup>299</sup>

### 6.3.2 Parliament of Victoria's education programs

The Parliament of Victoria provides a range of educational programs and resources. Most of these programs are focused on young people and school age students.

The Parliament provides tours for primary, secondary, tertiary and adult education groups. The topics covered align with curriculum requirements such as Victorian Curriculum F-10, VCE Legal Studies and Australian Politics Study Guides. It also

<sup>296</sup> YMCA Youth Services, "Youth Parliament". Accessed 12 May 2018 from <<http://www.vicyouth.ymca.org.au/programs/youth-parliament.html>>.

<sup>297</sup> Parliament of Victoria, "Parliamentary Internship Program", Parliament of Victoria, 2018. Accessed 12 May 2018 from <<https://www.parliament.vic.gov.au/about/parliamentary-internship-program>>.

<sup>298</sup> Parliament of Victoria, "Parliamentary Internship Program", Parliament of Victoria, 2018. Accessed 12 May 2018 from <<https://www.parliament.vic.gov.au/about/parliamentary-internship-program>>.

<sup>299</sup> Parliament of Victoria, "Parliamentary Internship Program", Parliament of Victoria, 2018. Accessed 12 May 2018 from <<https://www.parliament.vic.gov.au/about/parliamentary-internship-program>>.

provides role-play opportunities for students in Years 5, 6 and 7 to act out the various roles in Parliament and pass their own law. This “interactive activity takes place most usually in the Legislative Assembly chamber and on other occasions in regional centres and allows students to experience the law-making process first hand”.<sup>300</sup>

In addition, the Community Engagement and Education Unit provides educational material for students and teachers in the following areas:

- Primary and secondary Victorian Curriculum for Years 5 to 10
- VCE Legal Studies Units 1 & 3
- University and TAFE
- Adult education: EAL, VCAL, numeracy and literacy

These resources include DVDs and print resources such as publications and posters.

The Parliament also provides a range of educational materials on its website. This includes instruction programs like ‘From Westminster to Spring Street’, which describes the processes involved in making a law with accompanying interactive clips. The About Parliament pages and Overview pages also provide information about the history of Parliament, Victoria’s Westminster tradition and Victoria’s electoral system. Further information in these areas is contained within specific Factsheets published by the parliament.<sup>301</sup>

In 2017, the Community Engagement and Education Unit conducted a survey for teachers. The survey “was designed on advice from Parliament’s education advisory panel, with the aim of finding out from teachers what they want and need in terms of resources, programs and professional development. The 436 responses came from all education sectors and levels, and will help inform future education resource and program development”.<sup>302</sup>

## 6.4 Evidence from interstate and overseas parliaments about community engagement and education

As noted earlier, during the inquiry the committee travelled to New Zealand in October 2017, Queensland in November 2017 and Canada in April 2018 to gather evidence in support of the inquiry. On these visits, the committee met with community engagement officials and educators at the Parliament of New Zealand, the Parliament of Queensland, the Parliament of Canada and the Ontario Legislative Assembly. The committee learnt about programs and initiatives run by these organisations designed to foster community understanding of parliament’s work and improve public knowledge of parliament amongst key community groups, such as teachers and young people. Three themes emerged from the committee’s meetings;

- Strategies to encourage young people to develop their knowledge of the work of Parliament, civic engagement and electoral processes;

<sup>300</sup> Parliament of Victoria, “Education Zone”, Parliament of Victoria, 2018. Accessed 12 May 2018 from <<https://www.parliament.vic.gov.au/education>>.

<sup>301</sup> Parliament of Victoria, “Education Zone”, Parliament of Victoria, 2018. Accessed 12 May 2018 from <<https://www.parliament.vic.gov.au/education>>.

<sup>302</sup> Parliament of Victoria, “Education Zone”, Parliament of Victoria, 2018. Accessed 12 May 2018 from <<https://www.parliament.vic.gov.au/education>>.

- Providing resources about parliamentary democracy and elections to teachers and educators under the auspices of a parliament’s education work, and providing professional development for teachers related to parliament and elections; and
- Having the parliament take a more active role in providing information about elections, enrolment and voting.

### 6.4.1 Strategies to encourage young people to develop their knowledge of the work of Parliament, civic engagement and electoral processes

As noted in Chapter Three, findings from the Australian Election Study over successive survey years demonstrate that many young people are distrustful of politicians and formal political institutions like Parliaments. As noted earlier, the Parliament of Victoria’s Community Engagement Strategy acknowledges that young people are “among those most disengaged from the formal political process, with a significant number not even enrolling to vote, so special effort will be made to try and connect parliament with youth”.<sup>303</sup> In Canada, the committee learnt that a similar approach to youth engagement with parliaments informs a range of strategic initiatives for Canadian youth. Samara, a charity the committee met with in Toronto, told the committee the relationship between “politicians and youth needs to be strengthened to bring young people into formal politics and to ensure that decision-makers hear their unique perspectives”.<sup>304</sup>

#### Canada

Several organisations the committee met with in Canada, including parliaments, discussed programs and strategies currently being used in Canada to involve young people in parliamentary processes and civic decision making.

#### Parliaments to provide training to members of Parliament on how to interact with youth councils and advisory boards

Youth councils are designed to engage youth in community decision-making. Youth councils exist on local, state, provincial, regional, national, and international levels among governments, non-governmental organisations (NGO), schools, and other entities. The committee notes that youth councils are common throughout North America and particularly Canada; in Canada, constituency youth councils are generally organised by the local office of an elected representative, and provide a non-partisan forum for local youth (both under 18 and over) to meet with their elected leaders and discuss political issues. Further, in Canada, there has also been considerable recent interest in youth councils following Prime Minister Justin Trudeau’s decision to establish the Prime Minister’s Youth Advisory Board in 2016. The Board has up to 30 members aged 16 to 24 who advise the Prime Minister on the economy, education and other issues affecting youth.<sup>305</sup>

<sup>303</sup> Parliament of Victoria, Department of Parliamentary Services, *Annual Report 2016-17*, Department of Parliamentary Services, 2017, p.16.

<sup>304</sup> Samara Canada, “Message Not Delivered: The Myth of Apathetic Youth and the Importance of Contact in Political Participation”, Samara Canada, 2017. Accessed 12 May 2018 from <<http://www.samaracanada.com/research/active-citizenship/message-not-delivered>>.

<sup>305</sup> Government of Canada, “Prime Minister’s Youth Board”, Government of Canada. Accessed 12 May 2018 from <<https://www.canada.ca/en/campaign/prime-ministers-youth-council.html>>.

During its meeting with Samara the committee discussed Samara’s work around youth councils in Canada. Samara released a report in 2017 providing advice to elected representatives on how to run and organise a youth council. Broadly, Samara noted that there is no single “correct” way to organise a youth council, and as there was “tremendous diversity among the [organisations] that Samara spoke with, this advice focuses on important principles to uphold and questions to ask”.<sup>306</sup>

In addition, Samara’s research also provides a guide to members of Parliament on how to conduct community consultation with young people. Samara’s report offers a suite of key principles for elected representatives to follow. During discussions with Samara, the committee and Samara also agreed that Parliaments could play a role in providing information about how to organise and run youth consultations for members of Parliament, and particularly for newer members of Parliament.

### **Committee’s view – youth councils and Parliaments to provide information about how to run and organise, and consult with young people**

The committee notes that members of Parliament in Victoria are given little, if any, formal training either through the Parliament or by political parties on how to run consultative forums for young people. Samara’s research into youth councils in Canada and how to organise and run successful youth consultations demonstrates that elected representatives are interested in seeking opinions from young people and involving youth in decision making processes.

The committee believes this type of training would be welcomed by many members of the Victorian Parliament. The committee also notes, based on evidence from Samara, that Parliaments are uniquely placed to deliver training and information about youth councils to members of Parliament as part of their community engagement activities. Initiating a project like this in the Victorian Parliament would have significant benefits for the Parliament’s outreach programs, and more importantly, connect more young people with Parliament directly. This training should also cover the many different types of representative organisations, peak bodies and councils that young people use for organisation.

**RECOMMENDATION 32:** The committee recommends the Parliament of Victoria initiate optional training for members of Parliament through the Community Engagement and Education Unit on how to organise and conduct a youth council.

#### **Parliamentary Student Guides program, Parliament of Canada**

The Parliament of Victoria’s Tours and Customer Service Unit provides community engagement programs, particularly tours and programs for school students. When Parliament is sitting, the tour guides provide support to the Assembly and Council Chambers. The units employs full-time staff for these roles.

During its visit and meetings with the Parliament of Canada, the committee met with Benoit Morin, Director, Public Engagement Programs. Mr Morin outlined the Library of Parliament’s Parliamentary Student Guides program. The program involves students from universities applying to be tour guides for Parliament House. According to the Library of Parliament’s website, tour guides, “in English and French, welcome

<sup>306</sup> Samara Canada, “A guide to local youth councils”, Samara Canada, 2017. Accessed 12 May 2018 from <[https://issuu.com/samaracanada/docs/a\\_guide\\_to\\_local\\_youth\\_councils\\_by\\_](https://issuu.com/samaracanada/docs/a_guide_to_local_youth_councils_by_)>.

visitors to Parliament and lead guided tours of Centre Block, which houses Canada’s Senate, House of Commons, and Library of Parliament, and of restored historic rooms in East Block”.<sup>307</sup>

The committee learnt that the summer Parliamentary Guide program runs from early May to the beginning of September. Guides work 35 hours a week for a competitive hourly wage, and take part in a two-week training program in late April. A winter program also runs but for a shorter time of 30 hours a week. Parliamentary guides receive paid travel to and from Ottawa.

Applicants must be:

- Canadian citizens or permanent residents;
- Full-time university students;
- Bilingual in English and French; and
- Passionate about Canada’s history and democracy.<sup>308</sup>

Candidates will be assessed according to the following criteria at subsequent steps in the selection process:

- “Knowledge of the Canadian legislative process and the history of Parliament;
- Superior oral communication and interpersonal skills;
- Professionalism and judgement;
- Creativity, adaptability, confidence, and a capacity to engage;
- Initiative, focus, and teamwork;
- Ability to converse clearly, coherently, and accurately, and to convey and understand a message easily in their second language at a superior level, as assessed by the House of Commons Language Assessment Centre”.<sup>309</sup>

Mr Morin told the committee that the program is well-supported. He also advised that the Parliament Student Guide alumni had grown substantially over the years to include people in a diverse range of professional occupations and backgrounds, and that some members of the Parliament of Canada were former student guides.

### **Committee’s view – Parliament of Canada’s Student Guide program**

The committee is impressed with the Library of Canada’s Parliamentary Student Guide program. It is successful because it connects young people to the Parliament of Canada in a meaningful way, provides work opportunity for young people and also demonstrates, in the committee’s view, a vitality for information sharing.

In principle, the committee would like to see a similar program operate at the Parliament of Victoria, with student tour guides from universities complementing, not replacing, existing staff at the Tours and Customer Service Unit. Nevertheless, the committee is conscious of the organisational structure of the Tours and Customer Service Unit. While the Unit is best placed to determine the administrative and

<sup>307</sup> Parliament of Canada, “Parliamentary Student Guide Program”, Parliament of Canada, 2017. Accessed 12 May 2018 from <<https://lop.parl.ca/Employment/Library/GuideProgram>>.

<sup>308</sup> Parliament of Canada, “Parliamentary Student Guide Program”, Parliament of Canada, 2017. Accessed 12 May 2018 from <<https://lop.parl.ca/Employment/Library/GuideProgram>>.

<sup>309</sup> Parliament of Canada, “Parliamentary Student Guide Program”, Parliament of Canada, 2017. Accessed 12 May 2018 from <<https://lop.parl.ca/Employment/Library/GuideProgram>>.

logistical impact of this proposal, the committee notes Mr Morin’s evidence that the Student Guides have had a number of positive effects on the institution of Parliament, and that many of the guides anecdotally report that their involvement in the program is ‘lifechanging’. The committee also sees excellent potential in the program in terms of having young people potentially conducting public tours for other young people visiting Parliament. Such a situation would, in the committee’s view, assist the Parliament to better achieve its strategic vision of fostering interest amongst young people in parliamentary processes.

**RECOMMENDATION 33:** The committee recommends the Parliament of Victoria examine the possibility of recruiting student tour guides from universities to complement the existing Parliamentary tour program.

### Student Page program, Ontario Legislative Assembly

During its meetings with the Ontario Legislative Assembly the committee examined the Assembly’s Legislative Page program.

Ontario has a long history of using legislative pages. Pages have

“been an important part of Ontario’s Parliament since Confederation. These early Pages were 10 to 14 year-old boys who carried messages, ran errands, and fetched glasses of water for Members of Provincial Parliament. The role of the Page remained the same throughout the first half of the twentieth century. In 1952, a tutor was hired to work with the Pages a few days a week. Eligibility requirements changed, so that Pages now had to be students in grades 7 or 8, and have a minimum academic average of 80 percent. They also had to have a letter of recommendation from their school principal”.<sup>310</sup>

Currently, the committee learnt that each year approximately 140 young students from across Ontario are selected to participate in the Legislative Page Program. This unique educational experience open to all Ontario students enrolled in grades 7 or 8, provides an opportunity to experience the provincial legislature in action, “and to learn about the history and traditions of the Legislative Assembly. The program is designed for outgoing, high-achieving, community-involved students who have demonstrated responsibility and leadership. Legislative Pages meet key parliamentary and political figures, and learn first-hand about Ontario’s Parliament and the legislative process. They also have the opportunity to forge new lifelong friendships with peers from all over Ontario”.<sup>311</sup>

Selected students are “excused from their school to serve their term of duty as Legislative Pages. While at the Assembly, they are under the direction of the Page Program Coordinator who is a certified Ontario teacher. Pages receive an honorarium of \$15.00 per day during their term of duty”.<sup>312</sup>

The committee notes that there are several Page programs across Canada, including a Senate of Canada and House of Commons Page program, the Quebec National Assembly Internship for Students and the Legislative Page program in Nova Scotia.

<sup>310</sup> Ontario Legislative Assembly, “About the Page program”, Ontario Legislative Assembly, 2017. Accessed 12 May 2018 from <<http://discoveryportal.ontla.on.ca/en/youth-programs/page-program/about-program>>.

<sup>311</sup> Ontario Legislative Assembly, “About the Page program”, Ontario Legislative Assembly, 2017. Accessed 12 May 2018 from <<http://discoveryportal.ontla.on.ca/en/youth-programs/page-program/about-program>>.

<sup>312</sup> Ontario Legislative Assembly, “About the Page program”, Ontario Legislative Assembly, 2017. Accessed 12 May 2018 from <<http://discoveryportal.ontla.on.ca/en/youth-programs/page-program/about-program>>.

Page programs are also common in the United States of America; the National Conference of State Legislatures website lists 33 US states which have some form of legislative page program for either the Senate or House of Representatives.

### Rep Day – CIVIX

Another initiative the committee examined during its meeting with CIVIX in Toronto was CIVIX’s Rep Day program. Rep Day is a civic education initiative that connects members of Parliament with high school students for a dialogue on current political issues.

As part of Rep Day, students are encouraged to participate in classroom discussion and interaction with their local elected representative. According to CIVIX, “students are increasing their knowledge of the federal government and are encouraged to discuss future issues facing Canada with family, friends and government officials. Rep Day aims to break down the stereotypes that young people have of politicians and the political process, and develop a better understanding of and a sense of trust in the people and institutions within our democracy”.<sup>313</sup>

The committee learnt that in total, 65 “MPs will have or are scheduled to take part in 85 Rep Day visits in their electoral districts”. The Conservatives, NDP, Liberals and Green Party are all represented.<sup>314</sup>

### Committee’s view – Rep Day

The committee learnt that CIVIX’s Rep Day program is one of CIVIX’s most successful programs and is now an important regular feature of Canada’s Democracy Week. Given the committee’s recommendation for the Parliament to offer training to members of Parliament on how to conduct, run and consult with youth councils, the committee also believes there is scope for the Parliament of Victoria to facilitate a similar program to CIVIX’s Rep Day. While the committee understands that many MPs informally organise consultative forums for young people in their District or Region, there is considerable value in formalising these arrangements as part of the Parliament of Victoria’s community engagement strategy.

**RECOMMENDATION 34:** The committee recommends the Presiding Officers of the Parliament of Victoria establish a Representative Day forum for Members of Parliament where Members voluntarily visit Victorian schools. The Parliament’s Community Engagement and Education Unit should provide coordinating assistance for this event.

## 6.4.2

### Providing resources about parliamentary democracy, civics and elections to teachers and educators under the auspices of parliament’s education work, and providing professional development for teachers related to elections

As noted earlier, the Parliament of Victoria currently provides a range of education material and resources to Victorian students, teachers and schools. During its meetings with the Parliament of Canada the committee examined the Parliament of Canada’s in person approach to providing teacher training about parliamentary activities.

<sup>313</sup> CIVIX, “Rep Day”, CIVIX, Toronto, 2018. Accessed 12 May 2018 from <<http://civix.ca/blog/rep-day>>.

<sup>314</sup> CIVIX, “Rep Day”, CIVIX, Toronto, 2018. Accessed 12 May 2018 from <<http://civix.ca/blog/rep-day>>.



## Teachers Institute, Parliament of Canada

Alongside its traditional education program, such as providing classroom resources about the Parliament of Canada and conducting public tours, Benoit Morin, Director, Public Engagement Programs, discussed the Parliament of Canada’s Teachers Institute training program.

Teachers Institute is a one-week professional training workshop run for teachers from around Canada at the Parliament of Canada. As part of the program teachers;

- “learn from political, procedural and pedagogical experts;
- discuss key issues in citizenship and parliamentary democracy;
- develop strategies for teaching Parliament, democracy, governance and citizenship; and
- take what they learn back to the classroom”.<sup>315</sup>

A significant feature of the program is the emphasis on civics, parliamentary democracy and electoral processes. Mr Morin advised the committee that the program is intended to deliver a holistic approach to teacher education, focusing not just on the Parliament of Canada’s work but Canada’s democracy more broadly, including teaching about Canada’s electoral system and the importance of voting. To this end, through the program teachers meet parliamentarians, senior parliamentary officials, officials from electoral authorities and receive a range of resources on civics and parliamentary democracy to take back to their schools.

Administratively, the program accepts applications through a competitive process annually. Any teacher is welcome to apply for the program but can only attend once. Teachers also receive reimbursement for accommodation, travel and some meals. As a result of this, Mr Morin advised the committee that the total, annual cost of the program is around CAD \$250,000.<sup>316</sup>

In terms of evaluation, Mr Morin told the committee that the program is highly successful. Anecdotally, many teachers say that the program is the best professional development opportunity they have ever taken part in. On the Teachers Institute website, the committee notes several impressive reviews of the program from teachers who have taken part in the program. One teacher said;

“Programs of this nature offer an outstanding opportunity to witness the processes first-hand, but also to gain so much perspective on and understanding of fellow Canadians. I feel so privileged to have had this opportunity, and will make great use of the gift of knowledge and understanding I have received”.<sup>317</sup>

## Committee’s view – Teachers Institute

The committee was impressed by the Parliament of Canada’s Teachers Institute program, the obvious enthusiasm of parliamentary staff for the program and the overall success of the program in motivating teachers to provide high-level and

<sup>315</sup> Parliament of Canada, Library of Parliament, “Teachers Institute”, Parliament of Canada, 2017. Accessed 12 May 2018 from <<https://lop.parl.ca/About/Parliament/Education/teachers-institute-e.html>>.

<sup>316</sup> Parliament of Canada, Library of Parliament, “Teachers Institute”, Parliament of Canada, 2017. Accessed 12 May 2018 from <<https://lop.parl.ca/About/Parliament/Education/teachers-institute-e.html>>.

<sup>317</sup> Parliament of Canada, Library of Parliament, “Teachers Institute”, Parliament of Canada, 2017. Accessed 12 May 2018 from <<https://lop.parl.ca/About/Parliament/Education/teachers-institute-e.html>>.

relevant information about the Parliament of Canada to their students. The program's focus on providing information about Canada's parliamentary democracy, in addition to the functions and work of the Parliament of Canada, is another notable example, as seen throughout this chapter, of Canada's institutional approach to providing holistic information about civics and elections in Canada.

While the committee would like to see a program like this run by the Parliament of Victoria, the committee notes the cost figures provided by Mr Morin suggest it may be cost prohibitive for the Parliament of Victoria. Nevertheless, the committee recommends the Presiding Officers investigate ways in which the Parliament can run similar, if shorter, events for Victorian school teachers. Any training should adopt Canada's holistic approach to civics and election education. Effort should also be given to ensuring any program involves teachers from a wide range of backgrounds, including rural and regional Victoria and teachers who work with students from the priority communities noted in the Parliament of Victoria's Strategic Plan 2015-2018.

**RECOMMENDATION 35:** The committee recommends the Presiding Officers of the Parliament of Victoria investigate the feasibility of establishing a teacher training program for interested teachers involving teacher attendance at Parliament House. The program should adopt Canada's holistic response to civics and elections education and focus not just on the Parliament of Victoria's work, but Victoria's parliamentary democracy. Any program should prioritise attendance by interested teachers from rural and regional Victoria and teachers from priority communities as per the Parliament of Victoria's Strategic Plan 2015-2018.

### 6.4.3 Having the parliament take a more active role in providing information about elections, enrolment and voting

#### Voter registration month, Elections Ontario

Elections Ontario and Elections Canada advised the committee about voter registration month in Ontario.

According to Elections Ontario's website, March 2018 was "recognised by the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as Provincial Voter Registration Month".<sup>318</sup> According to Elections Ontario

"through a province-wide advertising campaign and series of campus visits and community events, Elections Ontario worked hard to encourage Ontarians to confirm, update or add their information to the voters list using e-registration. Voters who are registered will receive a voter information card in the mail, which will include important information about where, when and how to vote in the general election on June 7 2018".<sup>319</sup>

Elections Ontario also used Provincial Voter Registration Month as an "opportunity to inform 16 and 17 year olds that they can register to become future voters online using e-registration". Information from the Ontario Register of Future Voters is automatically transferred to the voters list when a person turns 18.<sup>320</sup>

<sup>318</sup> Elections Ontario, "Provincial Voter Registration Month", Elections Ontario, Toronto, 2018. Accessed 12 May 2018 from <<https://www.elections.on.ca/en/resource-centre/provincial-voter-registration-month.html>>.

<sup>319</sup> Elections Ontario, "Provincial Voter Registration Month", Elections Ontario, Toronto, 2018. Accessed 12 May 2018 from <<https://www.elections.on.ca/en/resource-centre/provincial-voter-registration-month.html>>.

<sup>320</sup> Elections Ontario, "Provincial Voter Registration Month", Elections Ontario, Toronto, 2018. Accessed 12 May 2018 from <<https://www.elections.on.ca/en/resource-centre/provincial-voter-registration-month.html>>.

### Committee's view – Voter registration month

The committee notes that Victoria has an advanced voter registration system including direct enrolment, the capacity for electors to update their details online and several other initiatives documented in this report to encourage young people to enrol to vote, such as the VEC's birthday card program for 17 year olds.

During its meetings with Elections Ontario and Elections Canada the committee learnt that a key feature of Voter Registration Month is involving the Ontario Legislative Assembly and the Parliament of Canada in the program. Both parliaments provide enrolment information through their respective tours services. While Victoria's electoral registration system is of a high standard and applauded internationally, the committee believes there is scope for the Parliament of Victoria to encourage people to enrol to vote; as noted earlier, this is alluded to in the Parliament of Victoria's Strategic Plan 2015-2018 through reference to the fact that young Victorians have lower rates of electoral enrolment than other Victorians. Based on the evidence it received from Elections Ontario, the committee believes the Parliament of Victoria should make available electoral enrolment forms to visitors attending public and group tours, including school tours for secondary students. Information about the VEC's birthday card program should also be provided.

**RECOMMENDATION 36:** The committee recommends the Department of the Legislative Assembly make available to visitors electoral enrolment forms and other electoral information as part of its public tour program.

**Committee Room  
Parliament House  
18 June 2018**



# Appendix 1

## List of submissions

No.	Name	Organisation
1	Dr David Zyngier, Senior Lecturer in Curriculum Pedagogy	Monash University
2	Ange Kenos	
3	Brian Campbell and Chantelle Monks	
4	Michael Doyle	
5	Christine Thompson	
6	Stephane Perrault, Acting Chief Electoral Officer	Elections Canada
7	Walter van der Merwe, Electoral Commissioner	Electoral Commission Queensland
8	Tom Burns	
9	Dr Jessie Mitchell, Policy Manager	Youth Affairs Council Victoria
10	Dr Deborah Towns, Vice President	The League of Women Voters Victoria
11	Amanda Acutt, Advocacy Advisor	Vision Australia
12	Warwick Gately AM, Electoral Commissioner	Victorian Electoral Commission
13	Geoffrey Goode, Secretary	Proportional Representation Society of Australia Victoria – Tasmania Inc
14	Dr Andrew Hollows, Executive General Manager, Research, Policy & Service Development	Launch Housing
15	Wil Stracke, Industrial Campaigns Officer	Victorian Trades Hall Council
16	Confidential	Oz Kiwi
17	Suzanne King, Senior Communications Officer, Public Affairs	UK Electoral Commission
18	Kerry Lovering OAM, Secretary	Women's Electoral Lobby Vic
19	Voula Andritsos	
20	Samuel Rae, State Secretary	ALP Victorian Branch
21	Katherine Arndt, CEO	Victorian Local Governance Association
22	Simon Frost, State Director	Liberal Party of Australia (Victorian Division)
23	Matthew Potocnik	
24	Robert Gruhn, Policy Officer	Ethnic Communities' Council of Victoria
25	Mary Bowman, President	Kyabram Deakin Residents Ratepayers & Development Group Inc.



# Appendix 2

## Public hearings

### Monday 24 October 2017

Name	Title	Organisation
Leo Fieldgrass	Chief Executive Officer	
Dr Jessie Mitchell	Policy Manager	Youth Affairs Council Victoria
Thomas Saxton		
Christopher Klepacz		
Dr Deborah Towns	Vice President	The League of Women Voters Victoria
Sheila Byard OAM		
Amanda Acutt	Advocacy Advisor	Vision Australia
Kate Begley	Government Relations and Policy Advisor	
Dr Andrew Hollows	Executive General Manager, Research, Policy and Service Development	Launch Housing
Dr David Zyngier	Senior Lecturer in Curriculum Pedagogy	Monash University
Wil Stracke	Industrial/Campaigns Officer	Victorian Trades Hall Council
Danae Bosler	Political and Research Lead Organiser	
Eddie Micallef	Chairperson	Ethnic Communities' Council of Victoria
Robert Gruhn	Policy Officer	
Warwick Gately AM	Electoral Commissioner	
Liz Williams	Deputy Electoral Commissioner	Victorian Electoral Commission
Alex Markham	Manager, Education and Inclusion	
Michelle Templeton	Manager, Election Staff Capability	





# Appendix 3

## List of site visits

### A3.1

### Domestic site visits

A3

Date	Participant	Organisation
11 September 2017	Ro Spence, Acting Electoral Commissioner	ACT Electoral Commission, Canberra
	Andrew Giles, MP Deputy Chair	
	Scott Buchholz MP	
	Senator Chris Ketter	Commonwealth Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters, Parliament House, Canberra
	Senator David Leyonholm	
	Ben Morton MP	
	Senator Barry O'Sullivan	
Tom Rogers, Electoral Commissioner	Australian Electoral Commission	
Paul Pirani	National Electoral Education Centre	
20 November 2017	Alison Beasley, Manager	
	John Schmidt, Commissioner	
	Simon Kwok, Executive Director, Elections	
	Julie Eisenberg, Director, Communications	NSW Electoral Commission
	Emma Silvester, Manager Workforce Planning and Development, Elections	Sydney
21 November 2017	Mel Keenan, Director, Legal and Governance	
	Hon Robert Borsak MLC, Deputy Chair and other committee members	New South Wales Parliament's Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters (NSWJSCEM) Parliament House, Sydney
21 November 2017	Neil Laurie, Clerk	
	Anne Marie Groth, Team leader - Education and Communication Services	Queensland Parliament
	Professor Clive Bean, Professor of Political Science, Director of Undergraduate Studies, Creative Industries Faculty	Queensland University of Technology, Brisbane

## A3.2 New Zealand site visits

Date	Participant	Organisation
9 October 2017	Dale Ofsoke, Managing Director	Election Services, New Zealand, Auckland
	Associate Professor Jennifer Curtin	University of Auckland, Public Policy Institute, Auckland
10 October 2017	Professor Jack Vowles, School of History, Philosophy, Political Science and International Relations	Victoria University of Wellington
	Wendy McGuinness, Chief Executive	McGuinness Institute, Wellington
	Dr Claire Robinson, Pro Vice-Chancellor	College of Creative Arts, Massey University Wellington
	Alannah Mackay, First Secretary (Political)	Australian High Commission, Wellington
11 October 2017	Winton Holmes, Parliamentary Officer, Inter-Parliamentary Relations	Parliament of New Zealand, Wellington
	Tony Wallace, Manager, Parliamentary Engagement in the office of the Clerk	
	Ravi De Silva, Senior Communications Advisor	

## A3.3 Canada site visits

Date	Participant	Organisation	
9 April 2018	Dan Allen, Director of Content	CIVIX, Toronto	
	Frédérique Dombrowski, Outreach and Stakeholder Manager		
	Mike Doyle, Curriculum Development Officer		
	Jane Hilderman, Executive Director	Samara, Toronto	
	Michael Morden, Research Director		
	Kendell Anderson, Managing Director		
10 April 2018	José Ramón Martí, Communications Manager	Toronto District School Board	
	Sameen Zehra, Program and Communications Coordinator		
	Anastasia Gotus, Curriculum Leader, Social Sciences		
	John Chasty, Superintendent of Education	Jarvis Collegiate Institute, Toronto	
	Michael Harvey, Principal		
	John Au, Vice Principal		
	10 April 2018	Debi LaMantia, Director, Parliamentary Protocol and Public Relations	Legislative Assembly of Ontario
		Nina Zemko, Visitor Services Coordinator, Community Outreach	
		Deborah Danis, Assistant Chief Electoral Officer	Elections Ontario

12 April 2018	Karine Morin, Chief of Staff	Elections Canada, Ottawa
	David LeBlanc, Assistant Director, Outreach	
	Annie Desrosiers, Director, Voter Information Campaign	
	Alain Pelletier, Director, Policy and Research, Electronic Voting	
	Dani Srour, Senior Director, Operations, Recruitment and Training	
June Creelman, Special Advisor for Policy and Public Affairs		
12 April 2018	Professor Andre Blais, Director – Research Chair Professor of Political Science	Canadian Electoral Studies, University of Montreal
	H. Mark Ramsankar, President	Canadian Teachers' Federation
Cassandra Hallett, Secretary General		
Sylvain Cl��roux, Deputy Secretary General		
Dr Sherri Brown, Director of Research and Professional Learning		
Pauline Theoret, Program Officer		
Francine Fillion, Director of Communications		
12 April 2018	Natasha Smith, High Commissioner	Australian High Commission, Ottawa
	Michelle Manson, Deputy High Commissioner	
13 April 2018	Louise Bruyere, Program Officer Community Engagement Team	Parliament of Canada, Ottawa
	Sarah Hurcomb, Chief of Parliamentary Tours Program	
	Benoit Morin, Director, Public Engagement Programs	
13 April 2018	Rick O'Connor, City Clerk and Solicitor	City of Ottawa
	Heather Theoret, Protocol Advisor	
	Tyler Cox, Manager of Legislative Services	



# Appendix 4

## Electoral Matters Committee reports and publications

Report no.	Title	Date
1	Inquiry into the Conduct of the 2006 Victorian State Election and matters related thereto	June 2008
2	Report on International Investigations into Political Donations and Disclosure and Voter Participation and Informal Voting	December 2008
3	Inquiry into Political Donations and Disclosure	April 2009
4	Inquiry into Voter Participation and Informal Voting	July 2009
5	Inquiry into the Provisions of the <i>Electoral Act 2002</i> (Vic) relating to Misleading or Deceptive Political Advertising	February 2010
6	Inquiry into the Functions and Administration of Voting Centres	June 2010
7	Inquiry into the 2010 Victorian State Election and matters related thereto	May 2012
8	Inquiry into the Future of Victoria's Electoral Administration – Discussion Paper	November 2012
9	International Investigations into the Future of Victoria's Electoral Administration	August 2013
10	Inquiry into the Future of Victoria's Electoral Administration	March 2014
11	Inquiry into the Impact of Social Media on Victorian Elections and Victoria's Electoral Administration – Discussion Paper	August 2014
12	Inquiry into the Conduct of the 2014 Victorian State Election	May 2016
13	International Investigations into Electronic Voting	Nov 2016
14	Inquiry into Electronic Voting	May 2017
15	International Investigations into Civics and Electoral Participation in Victorian State Parliamentary Elections	June 2018
16	Inquiry into civics and electoral participation in Victorian State parliamentary elections	August 2018

