

### *Your Voice*

The aim of this inquiry is to make practical recommendations to increase the interest and participation of young people in democracy in Queensland.

The committee wants to hear from young people, in particular, about:

- ✿ what is needed in Queensland;
- ✿ what will work;
- ✿ what won't; and
- ✿ what you want to do or experience.

We would also like to hear from all people in Queensland who have an interest in young people, or in young people engaging in democracy.

To help you to think about, discuss and respond to matters relevant to the inquiry, we have set out below some:

- ✿ issues; and
- ✿ examples of strategies suggested or tried elsewhere.

## Voting System and Electoral Commission Queensland

### Education/Information

It is the job of the Electoral Commission Queensland (ECQ) to ensure that people enrol and vote at elections. To do this, the ECQ uses education and awareness programs (e.g. postcards, posters and school visits).



What could the ECQ do better or differently to get its message across to young people?

### New ideas

- > In 2003, Elections Canada partnered with Cable in the Classroom to develop a new voter education program for students, including a contest challenging people aged 16 to 18 to create 30-second public service announcements on video telling their peers why the democratic process and voting are important.
- > The United Kingdom Electoral Commission's 'Do Politics' aims to get young people involved in democracy. It may be accessed at: [www.dopolitics.co.uk](http://www.dopolitics.co.uk). 'Do Politics' conducts workshops and events, and provides resources and training across the UK for young people.
- > In Australia, the Youth Electoral Study (YES) found that some incentives would attract a first vote. Young people said a tax break or the use of promotional rock concerts would be the most effective incentives, but there was also some support for the notion that incentives should not be needed as voting is a responsibility that comes with citizenship.

→ Programs should be implemented in school  
 i.e. work shops  
 → Experiments  
 → Letter sent home

### Voter registration

In Australia, each person must complete an enrolment form to register to vote.



How could the ECQ make it easier for young people to enrol and become registered to vote?

### New Ideas

- > In some countries, registration is done by the government so that people are automatically registered when they reach voting age. An international report by the Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance, *Youth Voter Participation*, suggests automatic registration by the government rather than it being a duty of each person to enrol.
- > Other countries enable people to register at a polling station on election day, or on-line.
- > In Canada, Elections Canada identifies people who have turned 18 through information provided by, for example, the tax office and motor vehicle registers. The Chief Electoral Officer writes to these people to ask them to confirm that they are eligible to vote and consent to being included in the national register.



Yes info from our birth cards should be transferred over.

### Polling stations

In Queensland, polling stations are usually located in schools or halls and are open between 8am and 6pm.



How could the ECQ make it easier for young people to cast their vote?

### New ideas

- In recent Canadian elections, Elections Canada introduced more polls in locations to which young people have easy access, such as near student residences and university neighbourhoods.
- In Canada, polling stations are open for 12 hours.
- Delegations from the Australian Electoral Commission and the Victorian Electoral Commission observed electronic voting processes at elections in the USA, UK and Ireland between 2000 and 2002. The delegations considered the different options that are available, their advantages and disadvantages and how each option would suit Australia's voting systems. The delegations recommended e-voting be made available to certain classes of voters including voters in Antarctica, voters in remote locations, voters with a disability and overseas voters (see [www.aec.gov.au/content/what/voting/electronic\\_report/index.htm](http://www.aec.gov.au/content/what/voting/electronic_report/index.htm) and [www.aec.gov.au/content/what/voting/E-voting\\_report.pdf](http://www.aec.gov.au/content/what/voting/E-voting_report.pdf)).
- A recent report of the Victorian Scrutiny of Acts and Regulations Committee, *Victorian Electronic Democracy*, considered electronic voting. It recommended that Victorian elections should not be conducted remotely via information and communications technologies in the near future, but identified the following key advantages of remote voting systems:
  - easy access for travellers and disabled people;
  - providing an interface for other technologies such as screen readers, Braille computers, magnifiers or alternative data entry systems;
  - allowing for the easy and cheap distribution of ballot papers in different languages;
  - instantaneous processing; and
  - allowing voters to access a wide range of other information while considering and casting their vote.

Post office voting

### Advance voting

Currently in Queensland, if you can't vote at your nearest polling booth on the day of a state election, special arrangements can be made for you to cast your vote, such as by advance voting in person or postal voting. These options are available in only some circumstances - for example, if you: will be interstate on polling day; have a disability; or can't vote on that day because of religious beliefs. For further information, see [www.ecq.qld.gov.au](http://www.ecq.qld.gov.au).



Do you think more young people would vote if they could do so at anytime in the week leading up to an election, without having to meet any special conditions to do so?

### New ideas

- ▶ In the UK, postal voting is available to any eligible voter on request. A person may apply for postal voting for a particular election, for a certain period of time or for all future elections.
- ▶ To facilitate voting, the state government could declare the day of a state election a public holiday or schedule an election for a day other than a Saturday.
- ▶ In future, if electronic voting were to be introduced, for example, it need not be necessary to have an 'election day', with all votes cast on the same day. Voting could take place, for example, over an 'election week'.



Yes

### Close of rolls

Currently, after a state election is called, people have between 5 and 7 days to register to vote.



Do you think young people could be disadvantaged if there was no opportunity to enrol after an election is called?

### New ideas

- ▶ Prior to the 2004 federal election, the Special Minister of State, Eric Abetz proposed that
  - ▶ the electoral roll be closed to new voters on the day the election writs would be issued (usually the day the election is announced); and
  - ▶ people wishing to change their enrolment details be given three days to do so.
- This proposal did not proceed as it was not supported by the non-government parties.



14 days

### Fixed election day

In Queensland, there is no fixed election day for state elections.

A fixed election day could allow improved civics education courses, mock-elections and other strategies encouraging young people's engagement with elections to be planned in advance (see Milner). For example, a fixed election day would allow civics educators to plan and conduct their courses in parallel with an election campaign.

 Do you think improved civics education is a worthwhile reason for government to consider a change to fixed term elections?

### New ideas

- In Queensland, elections for all local government authorities are generally held every four years on the last Saturday in March.



*Not a fixed date*

### New voting system

In Queensland, a system of optional preferential voting is used. A fact sheet about 'OPV' is available from: [www.ecq.qld.gov.au](http://www.ecq.qld.gov.au).

 Do you think young people would be more likely to vote if the voting system was changed so that candidates running on certain issues of particular interest to young people were more likely to get elected and have a voice in parliament?

### New ideas

- Appendix D contains a revised version of a paper prepared for an inquiry, *Hands on Parliament*, by the Legal and Constitutional Committee of the previous Parliament. It provides information about our voting system and ways it might be changed to provide more diversity in candidates who might be elected.
- As in Queensland, the voting system in the UK makes it very difficult for candidates from minor parties to get elected. In May 2005, some 500,000 school students in the UK voted in a mock election to coincide with the general elections. The students voted for the actual candidates. The results showed that the students were attracted to parties which ran candidates on certain issues; for example, students who felt passionate about the environment voted for the Green Party. Despite failing to have a single candidate returned in the general elections, the Green Party secured 45 out of a possible 349 seats in the mock election.
- Proportional representation voting, which is used for Senate elections in Australia, provides greater opportunity for minor parties to win seats.



*Number 1 preference only*

### Voting age

In Australia, you must be 18 years old to vote. The minimum voting age in other countries ranges from 15 to 21.

The minimum ages set by the law for other activities are listed in **appendix B**.



Should the voting age be lowered to 17 or 16 years? Why or why not? If the young age is lowered, should voting at the lowered age be compulsory?

### New ideas

- ▶ In April 2004, following a project on the age of electoral majority, the United Kingdom Electoral Commission recommended that the minimum age for all levels of voting in public elections in the UK remain at 18 years for the time being. The UK Electoral Commission advised, however, that it expected to undertake a further formal review of the minimum voting age within a further five to seven years. It encouraged the government to consider initiating a wider review of the age of majority.
- ▶ In 2000, a report on changing social and legal frameworks for young Australians found that, despite some interest in getting more involved in their community and in government decision-making processes, young people were quite reluctant to claim the right and responsibility of having the vote younger than at age 18. The majority (74%) of young people involved in the research said that they were not ready or interested in getting involved in formal political processes such as voting before they were 18. Their parents agreed, with a majority (81%) suggesting that young people are not mature enough and not interested in voting before they are 18, and that young people under 18 have other pressures to confront and contend with (see Carson, Fitzgerald and Roche).
- ▶ Compulsory voting was introduced in Queensland in 1914 and by the Commonwealth in 1924. Research by Milner (published in *Civic Literacy: How Informed Citizens Make Democracy Work*, University Press of New England, Hanover, 2002) indicates that the effect of introducing compulsory voting in Australia was to bring about a 23% overall increase in voting.



*Leave as it is*

### Education

#### Education in schools

In Queensland schools, there is no subject called 'civics education' or 'citizenship education'. Primary and secondary students learn about democracy, including parliament, government and elections, in a number of different subjects. Students also experience democracy at school, for example through elections for school council members and/or school leaders.

#### Education about democracy

Additional educational opportunities relevant to democracy include:

- visits to the Queensland Parliament, or to a regional sitting of the Queensland Parliament, and educational activities provided by Parliamentary Education Services; and
- electoral education activities conducted by the Australian Electoral Commission, such as school visits.

#### For students

- 2** What worked well and what did you enjoy when you learnt about or experienced democracy in your school?  
 What more could schools do to encourage you to value democracy and prepare you so that you are well informed and confident about engaging in democracy?

#### For teachers

- 2** How does your school approach civics education and practice democracy?  
 How could students be better prepared to engage in democracy?

#### New ideas

- In previous inquiries, the Legal and Constitutional Committee and the Legal and Constitutional Committees of the 49th and 50th Parliaments have made recommendations about civics education in Queensland. Similar recommendations have been made by many other Australian bodies in recent years. A list of some of these recommendations is set out in **appendix C**.
- The Constitutional Centre of Western Australia was established to encourage people of all ages to learn about the Western Australian political system and how to actively participate in it. It offers displays on the Constitution and aspects of citizenship and political history. The Electoral Education Centre is located within the same complex, and provides interactive programs allowing people to cast a vote, discover the origins of democracy and understand how the voting system works (see [www.ccentre.wa.gov.au/index.htm](http://www.ccentre.wa.gov.au/index.htm)). Programs, presented in ways which engage young people, are also conducted for school students visiting the Centre. Teacher resource kits complement each program. Resource boxes on various topics are available to schools in remote areas. In addition, the Constitutional Centre has developed an 'Out Reach Program' which involves a network of local people in rural and remote areas of Western Australia providing programs to students in those areas. Some programs are specific to Indigenous communities.
- A Civics and Citizenship Education website (which incorporates a previous 'Discovering Democracy' website) is [www.civicsandcitizenship.edu.au](http://www.civicsandcitizenship.edu.au).
- 'Kids Voting USA' is a national non-profit, non-partisan organisation that teaches students about citizenship, civic responsibility, democracy and political participation. Together with classroom activities, students are provided with an opportunity to cast a 'Kids Voting' ballot on election day, and they vote on the same candidates and issues as adults. In 2004, 1.5 million students turned out to vote for presidential, local and state candidates. Areas with a Kids Voting USA program have showed a voting rate for registered 18 year olds which is 14% higher than for non-participating areas. See [www.kidsvotingusa.org/](http://www.kidsvotingusa.org/).
- As part of the Kids Voting USA service, 'DoubleClick Democracy' (see [www.kidsvotingusa.org/DoubleClick/intro.asp](http://www.kidsvotingusa.org/DoubleClick/intro.asp)) was developed to allow students to participate in an authentic voting experience using a web-based voting system. The online ballots replicate the candidates and issues adults vote for, and provide

students with practice ballots which have links to candidate biographies and other resources. About 35,000 students participated during the 2004 presidential elections.

- 'Teens N2 Politics' is a US-based website which offers young people an opportunity to participate in discussion forums on topics such as the economy, foreign policy, general political issues, animals and the environment. Provision is also made for young people to contribute to discussions under the banner of 'left wing chat' and 'right wing corner'. See [www.teensn2politics.com/forums/](http://www.teensn2politics.com/forums/).

*✶ NO this paper well.*

## The Political System and Politicians

### Political parties

The 2004 Young Australian of the Year, Hugh Evans, has suggested that young people feel shut out of mainstream party politics.

The former Queensland State Youth Advisory Council told the committee that the issues addressed by political parties, particularly at election time, are dominated by those relevant to older people and our ageing population.

**2** *How can political parties encourage young people's involvement in democracy?*

### New ideas

- Dr Anadna Vromen, a lecturer at the University of Sydney, researches young people and politics. She writes that, 'The one area of participation that remains low for young people, and indeed for most Australians, is membership of political parties. Rather than labelling party membership decline as apathy, we ought to see how unappealing political parties have become. And it is up to parties to involve a new generation. This might not be by way of formal membership; instead, parties might consult young people on issues relevant to their lives' (see Vromen).
- In the US, a nationwide study of youth attitudes found that young people were active in their communities but not concerned about politics. As an outcome of that study, a strategy adopted to re-connect youth to democracy is that, during election campaigns, the media offer youth-moderated candidate debates (see National Association of Secretaries of State).



*✓* Visit websites for young people

### Politicians

Many research studies in Australia and internationally reveal that young people are cynical about the behaviour of politicians.

*Q* How can politicians themselves restore the faith of young people in democracy?

### New ideas

- ▶ Dr Ariadne Vromen says that politicians only consider young people when they present a problem; that young people tend to be talked about rather than talked with; and that young people's perspectives are rarely included in public debate. Dr Vromen suggests that what is needed is direct evidence of young people's experiences and arguments based on such evidence (see Vromen).
- ▶ In the United States, Canada and the United Kingdom, where voting isn't compulsory, it has been shown that contact with political parties and candidates is an important element of 'get-out-the-vote' strategies. Following the 2001 British general election, the UK Electoral Commission identified a lack of canvassing by politicians as a likely reason for dissatisfaction (and low turnout) among first-time voters.

*Q*

### Young People and the Community

#### Being heard

While young people may be turned off politics as it currently operates, many studies and surveys have found that young people are very interested in political issues important to them. The challenge for governments is to engage with young people, and the first thing that young people say is that they want to be heard.

*Q* Have you used any of the government opportunities to voice your opinions about issues? How effective was it?

### New Ideas

- In Western Australia, the Civics and Citizenship Unit in the Department of Premier and Cabinet aims to enhance democracy in that state through civics education and the promotion of an active citizenry. The goal is a community where all Western Australians are valued as citizens, where they play a significant role in setting policy priorities and where they help shape the nature of their society (see: [www.citizenscape.wa.gov.au/](http://www.citizenscape.wa.gov.au/)).
- Dr Ariadne Vromen suggests that, 'Young people have a broad range of economic, social, and political experiences' and that we need to 'create inclusive forms of governance that recognise and build upon different ways of making communities. Those in power need to listen to young people more, and young people's diverse views and experiences need to be articulated in the media' (see Vromen).



How do you think government should involve young people in the decisions it makes? What methods work best for you: face-to-face, web based/online methods or written?

### New Ideas

- In 2003, the Commission for Children and Young People was invited to participate in a committee for the development of a sports and recreation facility for young people on Palm Island in North Queensland. The Commission underlined the importance of the committee asking young people what *they* wanted. The issue for the Commission was not so much "how do we involve children in the building of this facility" but rather "how do we get the facility the children want?"
- In 2003, in Parramatta in Sydney, a Youth Jury presented young people with practical opportunities to learn and discuss the diverse interests and concerns of a wide variety of young people across the Parramatta region. Participants learned about teamwork, negotiation skills and the powers of government. This enabled them to form realistic recommendations to support the needs of the collective youth of Parramatta.

The aim of the Youth Jury was to assist with bridging racial intolerance and cultural diversity among young people of Parramatta.

The recommendations of the Youth Jury were aimed at key government and community organisations of Parramatta.

### Taking action

Young people want to be actively involved in democracy. Voting at elections is only one way of being involved in a democratic society.



Which of the following activities have you carried out, or would you like to carry out?

| Activity                                                                                                                                  | Have done<br>(✓ or x)               | Would like to<br>do (✓ or x)        |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Volunteering                                                                                                                              | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| Initiating or participating in a local youth project                                                                                      | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| Initiating or signing a petition                                                                                                          | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| Attending a rally or protest                                                                                                              | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| Taking part in a strike                                                                                                                   | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| Being a member of a political party                                                                                                       | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| Being a member of a trade union                                                                                                           | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| Being a member of a student union                                                                                                         | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| Being a member of a non government organisation which lobbies government (e.g. The Wilderness Society, Amnesty International, Greenpeace) | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| Contacting a politician or local government councillor                                                                                    | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| Participating in a Youth Parliament                                                                                                       | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| Being involved in a Youth Council                                                                                                         | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| Being involved in an organisation which seeks to represent the views of young people (e.g. Young Australian Rural Network)                | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |

Young people say that to be engaged in democracy they need things such as:

- information;
- opportunities to actively engage in democracy;
- an idea about what can be achieved realistically;
- spaces in which to meet and discuss; and
- access to the internet, photocopiers, etc.



What assistance or encouragement do you need from government to take action about the issues you feel passionate about?

### New ideas

- Brisbane City Council has developed 'Visible Ink', a website which allows young people to have a say in the Council's programs. The website contains information about how young people can have their say, events for young people, links to

resources and a forum through which young people can express their opinions. The Council has also provided young people with areas around Brisbane where they can come together to meet and organise activities and projects of interest to them. These areas are accessible to young people and well resourced (see [www.visible-ink.org/](http://www.visible-ink.org/)).

- The Victorian Government produced a handbook for young people on how they can create change in their community. The handbook provides suggestions on how young people can get active on a project they feel passionate about, and how they can implement that project (see [www.youth.vic.gov.au/pdfs/TYPBook3.pdf](http://www.youth.vic.gov.au/pdfs/TYPBook3.pdf)).
- The Foundation for Young Australians is a non-profit organisation dedicated to developing innovative initiatives that support and empower young people aged 12 to 25. The Foundation provides seed-funding for ideas, proactively seeks co-funding to support initiatives and helps the recipients structure themselves to ensure long-term sustainability. Each year, the Foundation manages a portfolio of grants totaling about \$6 million. At least 25% of total grant funding is dedicated to initiatives specifically designed to benefit young Indigenous Australians (see [www.youngaustralians.org](http://www.youngaustralians.org)).




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*What role can families and friends play in getting young people active and involved with democracy?*

#### New ideas

- The Youth Electoral Study (YES) found that parents are regarded by young people as the most important source of information about voting. Television and newspapers are the next most important, however young people view these latter sources with some scepticism.




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*What role can non-government foundations or community organisations play in getting young people active and involved with democracy?*

#### New ideas

- The Inspire Foundation (see [www.inspire.org.au](http://www.inspire.org.au)) is a national non-profit foundation which aims to create opportunities for young Australians, principally aged between 16 and 25, to help themselves and others. The Foundation acknowledges that young people want to make a positive difference in their own

lives and in their communities. Young people are actively involved in the development and delivery of all the Foundation's initiatives. One initiative, 'ActNow', is a web-based service that will provide young people with information and support on how they can become involved in issues or causes in their community that they are passionate about.

- VibeWire Youth Services is a volunteer-based, non-profit youth media and training organisation which provides young people aged between 16 and 30 with an online forum through which they can access information on a range of topics, participate in discussions with other young people and become involved in the exchange of information with other young people (see [www.vibewire.net](http://www.vibewire.net)). Recent initiatives include 'electionTracker' (see [www.electiontracker.net/et/](http://www.electiontracker.net/et/)) which sent young people out on the campaign trail as reporters in the 2004 Federal election. These reports were utilised by six radio stations, SBS and ABC news.
- The US Ad Council is a non-profit organisation which produces, distributes and promotes public service campaigns on a range of issues. A recent campaign, 'Fight Mannequinism', focussed on improving youth civic engagement and voter participation. It involved television and radio ads aimed at getting young people involved in issues they care about, volunteering and voting (see [www.fightmannequinism.org](http://www.fightmannequinism.org)).
- 'Rock the Vote' is a non-profit organisation which aims to engage young people in the political process in the United States and draw attention to issues of concern to young people. It coordinates voter registration drives and education efforts to ensure young people exercise their right to vote. Youth culture is harnessed in the promotion of its campaigns, many of which feature high profile celebrities including musicians, actors, athletes and comedians. In the 2004 elections, 1.2 million people took advantage of the organisation's online voter registration facility, and a further 200,000 registered as apart of the Rock the Vote Bus Tour across the country (see [www.rockthevote.com](http://www.rockthevote.com)).

### *Guidelines for making a submission*

There is no set form for a submission to the committee. Submissions may be made using the inquiry response form or in the form of a letter, a substantial paper or a short document and they may include appendices. Submissions may contain facts, opinions, arguments and recommendations for action. The most useful submissions are to the point.

The committee would prefer written submissions, but will also accept submissions on audio tape. For written submissions, typed or printed text is preferable, though legible hand-written submissions are acceptable. Numbered pages and, for submissions in excess of 20 pages, a brief summary and a table of contents is also helpful.

All submissions must include the name and contact details of the person making the submission. Those making a submission on behalf of an organisation should indicate at what level the submission has been authorised (eg sub-committee, president, chair, etc.).

Public officers may make submissions as private individuals. However, if reference is made in a submission to their official position, it should also be made clear that the submission is made in a private capacity. Submissions from government departments should be authorised in accordance with normal departmental procedure.

### **Content and relevance**

A submission may cover some or all of the issues raised in the response form. It would be helpful if submissions clearly stated which issues are being addressed.

The committee's usual procedure is to publicly release and table submissions in the Legislative Assembly. Not all submissions will necessarily be published and/or tabled. The committee reserves the right to not publish or table confidential submissions, or submissions which are irrelevant, contain scurrilous or defamatory material, or are otherwise not suitable for publishing. The committee will inform you if it decides not to accept, or not to authorise the publication of, your submission.

### **Confidentiality**

The committee attempts to conduct its inquiries in the most open way possible. However, if you believe that your submission (or part of it) should not be made public, clearly write 'confidential' on each page and, in a brief covering letter, explain why your submission should be treated confidentially. The committee will then consider your request for confidentiality.

### **Unauthorised Release**

Once the committee receives a submission, it becomes committee property and should not be published without the committee's authorisation. Publication of a submission without the committee's authorisation means that that publication is not protected by parliamentary privilege and may amount to a contempt of Parliament.

### **All submissions should be sent to**

The Research Director

Legal, Constitutional and Administrative Review Committee

Parliament House, George Street

BRISBANE QLD 4000



Submissions close on Wednesday, 30 November 2005

Extensions to the closing date may be given. If you need more time to make a submission, or if you require further information, contact the committee's secretariat on:

Telephone: (07) 3406 7307

Fax: (07) 3406 7070

Email: [lcarc@parliament.qld.gov.au](mailto:lcarc@parliament.qld.gov.au)

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