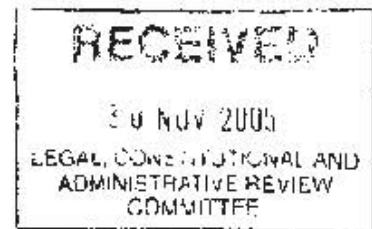


VOICES AND VOTES FEEDBACK FORUM 22 IPSWICH



Sections 1-3 – Responses from young people at the Ministerial Regional Community Forum in Ipswich, 17 October 2005).

Young people participated from Lowood State High School, Flagstone State Community College, Toogoolawah State High School, Boonah State High School, Bundamba State High School, Marsden State High School, Bremer State High School, Woodcrest Community College, Redbank Plains State High School, Rosewood State High School, Goodna Youth Service and Ipswich Youth Community Youth Service.

Discussion Topics

1. What assistance do young people need to get involved in democracy?

- What is democracy?

Definition: a representative form of government where citizens rule or have control

One comment stated the governments' idea of democracy is not ours, we don't really have a say.

Democracy is not valued because it is not discussed often enough.

- What have you learnt about democracy in school/elsewhere?

Government is for the people and young people are involved in decision making. Where there is community involvement which includes everyone's ideas it provides a joint awareness of issues impacting on society.

- Should education about democracy be a priority?

Yes people should be educated about all forms of government for competency purposes. Education around democracy should be a priority. Schools need to cover democracy and there is not enough taught on this subject. By educating young people they can be prepared for participation. This should be a part of the curriculum and currently it is not covered sufficiently.

All systems of government should be taught in schools. Political views should be allowed to be expressed more openly in the classroom

- What more could your school do to make sure that you are well informed and help you value our democracy?

Provide more packs (courses) in Years 11 and 12

Advertise youth councils more

Students need to be better prepared and government needs to demonstrate that voting is worthwhile

Young people need to be listened to

- How could young people be better prepared to engage in democracy?

Parents are influential and need to lead by example and to bridge the gap between school and university in relation to information and involvement and the voting process. In order to vote young people need to be better educated.

There is a need for more youth groups and young people to be taken more seriously. There needs to be further input into rural communities. Young people could be better prepared by education through music, movies and advertising, handouts and young peoples forums with guest speakers. It needs to be noted that not all young people have access to the internet. Need to provide tools to allow young people to make own choices.

Overall the participants saw teaching this subject as threatening for schools as this is seen to give young people too much of a voice. More resources are required in schools for young people to have an understanding and be better informed so they can get involved.

Question 1

Democracy

(what is Democracy)

- Form of government where citizens of the nation decide which political party and who rules/controls the country
- We get to influence our government
- There is more than one group of people to have their say - but not adversarial
- Learning about democracy should be linked to all forms of education and discussed as part of various subjects. Schools need to cover the issue of democracy in more detail and when it's relevant, for example in grades 10, 11 and 12 when young people are starting to think about voting and ways in which they can influence the policy agenda on issues affecting them. Currently schools do not teach enough on this issue. By educating young people you can prepare them for participation. A system should be put in place so that young people can see and understand the policies in place in order to make informed decisions
- Bridge the gap between school and university re: information and involvement
- Re: the voting process – most young people are ignorant about the role of the Upper House and (the Senate). Young people need to be better educated to vote. Don't know much about democracy - not much is taught in schools - need this to happen. Government/educators, parents need to give youth idea of what democracy means – in language they can understand.
- Have a lot of things outside of school - need 'stuff' about democracy happening at school
- Have meetings with teachers who take us to Parliament house, but not much in school
- One study in democracy (years 9/10) but nothing in upper levels of school
- Young people at school ask other people what they are doing ie who voting for and don't really know
- Ability for everyone to have a say in government.
- Young people can visit parliament house to become informed of constitutional conventions
- May want to enrol to vote but don't know how to
- Need to look at alternatives other than conventional methods to get message across, i.e. more movies centred on democracy, do not need to be boring and necessarily promoted as a political movie, but could still be promoted as an action movie but with a script that promotes democracy at the same time as being entertaining. Another way to promote democracy and citizen rights is through music, i.e. 'Green Day'.
- Need to promote and publicise practical experiences so that young people would see what happens in reality.
- Youth councils should be promoted more broadly through the education system as well as other ways.
- Opportunity to promote through organisations such as Rotary Flypen Flytes and Flyla
- Education Queensland started with council involvement. There aren't many schools that have a youth council. Youth councils can provide an opportunity for young people to be involved in issues affecting them. However, teachers need to listen to what students are saying. Students should be able to select the members that sit on

the student council. There should be a senior and primary council to ensure the issues affecting all students are listened to.

- Parents need to lead by example, and parents influence our thinking.
- Hard to form opinions without information to back it up
- Government initiatives and events involving young people can be promoted by advertising on TV; user friendly web sites etc.
- What do you think of a youth parliament? Can be innovative /realistic.
- A representative form of government
- The government's idea of democracy is not ours, we don't really have a say
- All systems of government should be taught at schools
- We don't value democracy because it is not discussed often enough
- Allow political views to be expressed more openly in the classroom

Topic 1: What assistance do young people need to get involved in democracy?

- More youth groups
- Need to know who local representatives (MPs) are
- Teachers to teach more about democracy in social Studies
- Students not taken seriously – don't ask what you think
- Rural communities - no one to come and speak to us
- Need to be provided with skills and information to be more confident to talk to people
- Need input on democracy to happen in schools hours
- Need legal graffiti rules (art)
- Young people should be encouraged to become involved in decision making processes and their Community.
- Can participate through union or political party membership
- Everyone should have an opportunity to put forward their ideas and thoughts
- Joint awareness and issues impacting on society
- Democracy is about getting people involved and connected
- Young are listened to but given lip service - no recognition of young people
- Explain role of young people in processless daunting experience
- More encouragement – recognition of input, how contribution would benefit other young people
- Be a politician
- Tell how vote will count
- How to vote card mock election
- Start process earlier year 7
- Studied democracy a little year in 10 because I want to be PM. Studied general access to government. Should educate people about all forms of government, for competency purposes
- Should be no political parties (all independents, peoples ideas change when they go into politics).
- More on government in SOSE more promotion of units on Democracy/government (perhaps an ex-curriculum activity)
- Should be included in general history of Australia government.
- Subject at school called student development - could study civics as part of personal development (life skills courses also)
- Get involved website perhaps; not well promoted and some young people do not have access to the internet.
- Young people need assistance to participate and engage with Government
- Only adults have a say
- Students don't really have a say with local MP's when visiting the school.
- Don't visit us at school
- Older PPL have belief that young people don't want to get involved

- What subjects actually discuss/study politics i.e. Year 8 SOSE Bundamba; Legal studies Ipswich SHS; Economics Bremer SHS. Needs to be a priority as a life skills subject or similar element
- Young people don't have an informed say. Young people have to have commitment to have a say on a topic
- It appears as though it is threatening for schools or teachers as knowledge or information gives young people a voice
- If young have a better understanding or are better informed they will get involved
- Government could engage with young people by attending young people's events (music); give out freebies; Young people's forum, visual/video - information pack - visuals

2. How should the government give you the information and the understanding you need to have a voice and a vote? (summary)

- What does it mean to you to have a voice and a vote?

A number of young people expressed the feeling of pride that they were required to vote and therefore had an influence in the direction that the country was going. They felt special and are worth something and they feel they have some control over the future

- How can government assist you to learn about voting and having your say?

Currently the view is that uneducated votes are made in relation to charisma of the person not on the content of the policy. Youth of today see people in parliament that they cannot relate to and do not know. Local members need to be more involved and accessible. Make promotional days fun, providing an environment BBC's

- What process works best for you? (school, pamphlets, discussion groups, internet, etc)

It was generally viewed that pamphlets are a waste; personal contacts are a lot more effective

Assistance needs to be provided through mechanisms such as the school curriculum, Centrelink, and youth councils.

It is an assumption that everyone accesses information on the internet as many young people do not have access to the internet.

Suggestion was made to have a week of learning about government and democracy and follow this up with a demonstration debate

Concerns were raised on the amount of information received by young people. Adults are worried about now, young people are worried about now and the future. Young people need to be listened too. Government needs to provide a lot more information to young people.

What does it mean to you to have a voice and a vote?

- If when you speak people listen
- People pay attention shows they care, able to put across your perspective your view (if you don't vote you don't get a say)
- If you have a fresh idea people must consider it
- Compulsory voting forces people to vote (people not always willing)
- Government has to demonstrate that voting is worthwhile
- Makes me feel special
- Have some control over the future
- Young people will vote for the person not the party.

- People make un-educated votes on charisma of the person not on the content of policy
- Youth of today see people in parliament that they cannot relate to and do not know what young people want. Need someone who can relate more to them. It is hard to vote for someone that you cannot relate to
- Involvement
- Makes me proud to have a say in the direction of the country
- Shows that young people are worth something
- All of the above
- No discussion on democracy on Internet

How can government assist you in learning about government and having your say?

- Pamphlets etc. are a waste of paper
- Discussion groups - people need to have time and interest
- Internet - need to have interest and access
- School would be the best way to find the information.
- Make it fun because it can be boring promotional day i.e. music
- No one sees information on the internet - an assumption is made that everyone has access to the internet or will visit that site.
- Government of the day promoting current activities - if the government is assisting us to learn it will be slightly biased to the government
- Personal contacts face to face, have to listen
- Person own age to educate - youth council
- Both theory and practical application should be made available
- Local members be involved
- How to access
- Parents pass down own values
- Having your say in a comfortable fun environment -- BBQ; park
- Using direct place for young people to engage
- Advertise at school - make compulsory
- Using school captain election process
- Week learning about democracy at end of week do demonstration debate
- Involve professional "work of politicians" - all levels of government.
- Through Centrelink, school curriculum, youth council
- Very important to have our point of view heard
- Need places to voice our opinions
- Education
- Through information nights for parents and students: centrelink/youth programs/PCYC
- Discussion groups
- For all this to work, we need to see change
- Adults are worried about now, we are worried about now we are worried about our future we want to be listened too
- Adults need to listen!!
- Government need to give us the information on how to legally change things
- Need to give us the information in a way that interests us i.e. music

Topic 2 - How should the government give you the information and the understanding you need to have a voice and a vote?

- Ads on TV, reaching out to schools, workplaces, youth forums (activities based) public holidays - citizenship days
- Hard to interest young people and unless government (schools and hospitals) demonstrates that they are listening to people and acting on their wishes
- Make it youth friendly - music, lively interactive presentations, fun role play
- Get the young people to think by doing the process of government
- Government has to demonstrate support for youth (public transport, government listening actively)

- Discussion groups (youth hostels /shelters) all methods to reach different target groups
- Give incentives to attend forums i.e. knowing something will change as a result of giving input
- More interaction – hear what we have to say
- Not you're too young, straight from youth back to youth
- More open discussion less set questions eg youth relating to youth
- Not advisory (QYC) for whole State but in local communities
- If you want something – lobby
- When you say something – people push you in different way – you need your own words
- People won't come of own good will – need to be invited and need an incentive
- If young people were involved in the development of ads more people would be targeted. An example of "work choice" ads was given these ads have been targeted at an older audience and did not reflect young people in the workforce
- Being given critical information would assist in the process of decision making

What ways would work

Chat rooms - don't go to websites don't know about websites, don't know about GENERATE website – need to promote it.

It means little because we tend to take it for granted

Regular forums at school

The most effective process is open discussion

2. What are your experiences of community and democratic activity?

- Do you know about websites where you can voice your opinions? Have you looked at any? Can you name any?

Websites provided included:

- www.stir.com
- www.worldvision.com
- www.onlineopinion.com
- The green left website
- Left wing websites including etan (East Timorese Action Network)

There was an awareness the websites are there but were found to be boring.
There wasn't anyone who had heard of the GENERATE website.

- What would be the best way to have your say on:
 - (a) issues you feel passionate about?
 - (b) Government plans and decisions that affect you?
- Passionate about improved sporting facilities cultural activities graffiti art not to be labelled as vandals. More drama and musical theatre
- Knowledge is power
- Seniors need to get involved with younger students
- Involvement in more forums and opportunities for those who are interested
- Student councils are a good way to have your say but there can be power plays between junior and senior school. Ideas don't get listened too
- Information about any of these issues should be well promoted and visible. Should become compulsory
- Have you used any of the government opportunities to voice your opinions about issues?

- ✚ GENERATE (website)
- ✚ Get involved (website)
- ✚ Online Petitions
- ✚ Online consultations
- ✚ Surveys
- ✚ Questionnaires
- ✚ Community forums
- ✚

General overviews that young people are cynical about government young people don't feel they are listened too. Letters to newspapers work well, petitions occasionally. Youth centres and drop in centres.

Were any of these helpful?

Question 3

www.stir.com

www.worldvision.com

Websites

Encourage more participation

Boring subject

Aware that websites are there – not interested

More competitions – (i.e. Go-Karting) more likely to participate benefit many more involvement

Youth council - get ideas, highlighting issues

www.onlineopinion.com

Protest, truth, factual information

We have not used any government sites

Open reform at schools

Comfortable non threatening environment for students to have at school

Class discussion groups

Internet site where you can voice your opinion a lot of teenagers use internet

Government should give a day for students on all important issues that affect us

Only for student so older people don't overshadow us

School hour's needs to be in school time

Note schools should have been given more time to be prepared or prepare students prior to coming to this workshop. This is important topic for young people to voice their opinion and have a say.

Topic 3: What are your experiences of community and democratic activity?

- GENERATE; The Green Left website; socialist source @gov.au 100% in control
- Feel that government doesn't listen to people between elections
- People power – i.e. Health in Queensland
- Young people are cynical about the government especially federal government.
- Petitions don't seem to work.
- Government actions speak louder than words
- Governments judged on history not on what they say they will do in the future
- Some change needs to be forced through, people fear change
- What works: petitions only work occasionally, letters to papers
- Knowledge is power
- Action – how to act when you don't feel passionate
- Internet most popular tool
- Newspapers and schools and you can reach a great deal of people flyers and leaflets workplaces

- Opinion surveys of young people through people who have a relative (need to be sure that information will be acted on)
- Youth centres, drop in centres
- Young people should be able to expect things from local representatives
- Provide options for young people to take/follow if unhappy with decision that impacts
- Don't rush young people into decisions – need more time to consider
- Peer learning process – hearing other peoples ideas
- How long process will take – being prepared before hand
- Schools, Education Queensland and Centrelink need to provide information
- Middle class people don't get support for University
- Without information there is no incentive to vote
- Lack of information on what parties stands for. Political parties need to provide information on their policies in plain English
- Want to know something about our history
- Need to promote youth councils.
- Young people engage through music
- Knowledge and information can be assisted through buddy systems between schools
- Only say is student council - power plays between junior and senior school. What juniors say is over run by seniors (Grades 11/12)
- Thought about having Junior and Senior student council in schools
- Young people are more in tune with the technology - their views/ideas are good
- Young people's ideas don't get up
- Information re; democracy/community forums etc should be well promoted and visible at school
- Interested in going to things but want support of friends
- Could have a forum at school, give topics, open ended questions, get feedback then reps to come to workshop such as this
- If something is compulsory, people at school will attend and then will often enjoy it and get involved

Question: What are you passionate about?

- Better sporting facilities
- Cultural activities
- Interested in art (graffiti) but labelled as vandals
- Drama and musical theatre (want more in school) recognition/fun/partying/music – cultural groups having a say
- Young people

Question: How can you get involved in things you're passionate about?

- School seniors to get involve with younger people (to get out there and make it happen – not just sit there)
- In public schools – just attend – not encouraged to get involved
- More cultural events – whole of community celebrating too
- Government needs to give out more grants so that things can take place
- Urban schools have better facilities than rural schools
- Young people need to get involved in more forums
- Youth in the group did not know about GENERATE website
- There are lots of left wing action groups available through the web eg ETAN (East Timorese action Network)
- Young people utilise the network at school – use for games, e-bay, history, looking at rental markets, receiving emails and sending emails
- Some people will not be interested in learning and participating in democracy. People need to be given a choice. Opportunities need to be provided for those who do have an interest
- Information on politics should be provide in grade 11 and 12 not in grade B and 9 where interest in this area has not been developed
- Best ways of letting people have their say;

- Forums only get the opinions of interested people
- E-forums will be used more in the future.
- Promote youth interactive websites school computer links TV publicity
- Items on TV if there are interesting and want to get involved need phone numbers or ways to follow up

Question: How do you engage young people once they have left school?

- Went on a visit to parliament (concerns about behaviour management of students more than what is happening)
- Society is different now "go with the flow" want to engage young people to challenge the system
- People need to be open to ideas
- All groups of young people need opportunities to get involved
- More progress talking/engaging with other schools not just won school student council

Sections 4, 5 and 6 – Response from Education Queensland employees, youth workers and parents.

Question 4

What role can family and friends play in getting young people involved with democracy?

- Provide the opportunity to be involved need to develop young people's leadership
- More discussions rather than TV
- Youth parliament needs to be broader
- Opinions indicated that young people are negative on what government does for them.
- Disengaged young people do not have role models and families that show interest in them
- Parents need to take a broader outlook and keep up to date on current trends / Family and friends role in getting young people involved / active role models talking about the process
- Give opportunity to be involved
- Lots of followers not many want to lead: need to develop young people's leadership eg training during holidays
- Discuss process (talk politics) rather than watch TV
- Youth parliament (met 4 months ago) is this the YMCA parliament? Good way but limited numbers so needs to be broader only one tool
- Do people care about democracy
- Kids take a deficit perspective (what government does not do for them)
- We take democracy for granted and have to participate - only if you register
- Disengaged kids do not have a role model (families that don't care as well)
- Parents shouldn't be so influential as to make kids vote the same way as they do
- Parents need to update themselves (techno generation)

Question 5

Do you think non-government organisations and community organisations can assist in getting young people involved with democracy?

- Certainly community organisations can assist and youth workers do model democratic process
- Young people see government set apart from them confusion between democracy and politics

Do you think NGO's and community organisation can help?

- Definitely eg Oxfam shows how we (Australia) can help overseas
- Youth workers try to model democratic process

- Kids see government as divorced from them – separate (especially federal and state) therefore not very effective in lives
- Confusion between democracy and politics (can't have one without the other)
- For kids to be involved need to model process in school eg vote for Student council
- Kids must see an outcome at a school level – success
- Student voice (able to be heard in an appropriate way)
- Key to school improvement
- Schools do now recognise student input.
- Youth parliament works when participant take process back and it filters through.
- Consultation role: depends on if their input will be listened to and if the agenda is not predetermined
- One view is that "consultation is a sham"
- Must ensure kids know consultation is open clear (re what are we consulting about)
- Pacifica students do not understand democracy
- Trend for kids to get involved with NGO's rather than political party

Question 5

How can voting be made easier?

- Do you think more young people would vote if they could do so at any time in the week leading up to an election without having to meet any special conditions?
- Do you think the voting age should be lowered? If so, to what age, and why.
- Do you think enrolment to vote (processed by government), should be automatic once you reach voting age?
- If voting made easier why limit to young people
- Different voting times
- Special conditions eg under 18
- Vote on line SMS
- If you give too much scope they may not get to it therefore best to keep it to one day. We do have postal vote as an option
- Needs to go way beyond that – if kids don't know why they are doing it (passion) then won't care about voting
- Put in curriculum. eg one day in year 12 - information day
- It is in curriculum now electoral commission does visit
- In SOSE curriculum does encourage registration
- Do not assume that young people are a homogenous apathetic group
- Needs to be emphasised more at school because kids don't have a clue
- Key word is interest - needs to be relevant
- Technology is an area of interest: maybe this is the medium to hook them
- They engage when they have to (eg work /union/Medicare levy; uni – student union)
- Lower voting age
- Categorically "No"
- Other view – Youth forum members say "yes" eg some believe they have the maturity at 16. Remember 21 was the age now 18
- Maybe option for 16-18 - could lead to "optional" voting for all
- Consensus - No
- Our social constructs do not allow display you are an adult
- Enrolment to vote: should it be automatic - yes
- If it is a requirement then just enrol them
- If it is a choice, then this leads to optional voting